

INVESTIGATING COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN THE KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

by

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“Rilala risongolala, vhatshivuwa vhari rotalifha”

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ABSTRACT

Communication practice in relation to government communication reveals a lacuna in research and literature. Heise (1985:199) lamented the lack of academic interest in government communication. Because of such scant literature, government communication as a practice is poorly understood (Pandey & Garnett, 2006:37). Given its significance, government communication is too important a challenge to ignore (Canel & Sanders, 2013). A question of how government communication should be organised and practiced in order to contribute to effectiveness is rarely addressed. For that matter, Vos (2006:257) prescribes future academic research in communication management to focus on exploring government communication practices and factors that influence them. The present study responds to such a call.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the thesis that communication management is vital for democracy. For government communication to be professional and strategic, it must be organised *excellently* and *effectively* while taking into account the advocacy nature inherent in external organisational rhetoric that could threaten the *ethics* and legitimacy of (government) communication management. It is equally essential for the *distinctive* communication environment of the public sector (the public sector distinctiveness theory) to be considered in both the theorising and the practice of government communication.

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector affects the practice of communication management in provincial government departments within the KwaZulu Natal province. In addition, the study examines the extent to which government communication can be strategic, ethical, and distinctive.

This study arrives at the following conclusions: The data confirms the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment as measured by the 13 features identified from literature. It is conclusive that these features significantly affect the practice of government communication as they influence the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of communication management in provincial

government departments. However, it was found that the negative impacts of the public sector communication environment can be considerably reduced by the extent to which communication management in the public sector is professional, strategic (excellence and effectiveness) and ethical.

The results demonstrate that government communication in KZN is relatively strategic having fulfilling the *excellence* requirement of strategic communication. However, KZN still falls short of achieving the *effectiveness* requirement of strategic communication. Hence, improvements are recommended towards the fulfilment of the 'effectiveness' principle.

In conclusion, the study presented a model for strategic government communication that takes into account the distinctive, strategic, and ethical elements. This framework demonstrates that the structure (the distinct internal environment of the public sector) influences the practice (of government communication) which in turn determines the outcome (ethical & strategic). This is notwithstanding to the fact that all four nodes consisting of (1) the external environment, (2) the internal environment, (3) the desired outcomes and (4) the organisational culture, equally influence the practice of government communication. For this reason, it is advisable for the study of government communication to take a multi-faceted theoretical approach.

Keywords: Government communication, political communication, communication management, strategic government communication, political public relations, public sector distinctiveness, external organisational rhetoric, excellence theory, organisational effectiveness, ethics and rhetorical theory.

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CHAPTER 1:INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication practice in relation to government communication reveals a lacuna in research and literature. Because of such scant literature, government communication as a practice is poorly understood (Pandey & Garnett, 2006:37). Given its significance, it is too important a challenge to ignore (Canel & Sanders, 2013). Government communication presents an inviting field for current and future research. Vos (2006:257) recommends future scholars to explore government communication practices and factors that influence them. The present study responds to such a call. The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector affects the practice of communication management by government departments within the KwaZulu Natal province. In addition, the study investigates the extent to which government communication can be strategic, ethical, and distinctive.

1.2 BACKGROUND

Communication is in theory a fundamental prerequisite for democracy and it is in practice inseparable from how government operates (Young, 2008). The act of governance involves constant exchange of information and communication between the governors and the governed (Heinze, Schneider & Ferie, 2013:370). Accordingly, the scholarship on democracy and governance finds value in communication studies. However, a crisis in democracy is often cited in reference to declining public interest in politics, heightened cynicism about politics, politicians, and government. Young (2008) postulates that the poor quality of government communication is the main catalyst behind a dwindling interest in public participation, marginal legitimacy, and a poor reputation in many governments.

Political communication theorists as grand ancestors to the field predominantly influence the study of government communication. Political communication can be defined as the study of the role of communication in political processes (Kaid, 1996:443). According to this definition, government communication is a subset discipline in the field of political

communication. The roots of government communication can be chronologically traced to its pedigree in political communication science. Government communication functions for the benefit of the citizen. It is supposed to remain balanced, concise, and non-partisan (Glenny, 2008:153). Political communication scholars have explored government communication issues from a variety of perspectives such as “rhetorical analysis of political discourse, propaganda studies, voting studies, mass media effect” and the interactions between government, press and public opinion (Canel & Sanders, 2013).

Scholars such as Kaid (1996:443) and Young (2008) lament the preoccupation of political communication as a field predominated by voter persuasion paradigms. Until recently, political communication has largely been studied and theorised from a persuasive, political campaigns and public opinion influence perspective. As a solution, a broader perspective has been advocated (Kaid 1996; Young 2008). Aligned with this recommendation, the present study proposes a multifaceted theoretical approach in the theorising of government communication.

The field of government communication is at the juncture of various methodological and disciplinary approaches (Canel & Sanders, 2012:93). The study of government communication could benefit largely from multiple theoretical perspectives and a wider assortment of research strategies. This is because the study of government communication can be traced within a variety of research traditions in political communication, public opinion, propaganda studies, media studies, and public administration. Quite recently, it has been linked to other cognate fields such as public relations, corporate communication, political marketing and strategic communication.

Canel and Sanders (2012:93) suggest various concepts from organisational communications, communication management, and corporate communication that are potentially useful approaches to the study of government communication. The following concepts are identified: symmetrical communication, mutuality, reputation, issue management, evaluations, organisational stakeholders, and publics. These concepts were foreign to the traditional political communication perspective of the study of government communication. The crucial contribution of organisational communication to the study of

government communication is essentially the portrayal of government communication as a practice configured by strategic communication and professionalism. The section that follows introduces the practice of government communication.

1.2.1 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS PRACTICE

A question of how government communication should be organised and practiced in order to contribute to *excellence* and *effectiveness* is rarely addressed (Heise, 1985:199; Killingsworth, 2009:71). Such a structural and performance dimension is indispensable in understanding the nature of government communication. A practice perspective provides the inductive lenses through which to understand and describe how government communication is actually practised within an organisational context. However, quality control, performance, and communication practices are neglected in the government communication research agenda (Vos & Westerhoudt, 2008:18).

Organisational communication literature tends to portray government communication as a simplistic, asymmetrical (one-way) flow of information, mostly within the confines of mass media (Glenny, 2008:155). Media studies portray it as pure propaganda. Regrettably, much research on strategic communication is reserved for corporate communication within the private sector. What is lacking is an acknowledgement that government communication is likewise complex, strategic, multidimensional, and professional. As a result, the complexity of government communication is under-studied and under-theorised. For instance, Graber (2003:13-14) suggests that much like the study of organisational communication, government communication studies lack a comprehensive theory with regard to the area of focus, purpose of analysis and ideological lenses. Furthermore, a broader strategic review of communication management in government is lacking, yet sorely needed. This study attempts to contribute to the first gap in literature by proposing a three-dimensional (strategic, distinctive, & ethical) theoretical framework in which government communication can be practiced and theorised. In addition, this study aims to contribute to the second gap in literature by approaching government communication as a strategic function.

The year 2000(s) brought into light the paucity of research activities in and about government communication management (for example: Glenny, 2008; Liu & Horsley, 2007, Liu, Hosley & Levenshus, 2010, 2011, 2012; Lee 2007, 2012; Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins, 2007; Young 2008). However, much of these studies concentrated on the roles and functions of government communicators (For example, Edes, 2000; Gregory, 2006). A few other studies focused on information dissemination (Gelders & Ihlen, 2009), while a few others concentrated on performance and quality of government communication (Vos, 2006; Vos & Westerhoudt, 2008). Later, additional studies introduced the question of professionalism (Sanders, Canel & Holz-Bacha, 2011) while others introduced the concepts of strategic communication and excellence in government communication (Grunic & Jaatinen, 1999; Killingsworth 2009; Likely 2013). Furthermore, a significant scholarship grew among scholars who aspired to observe the distinctiveness of government communication (Gelders, Bouckaert & Van Ruler, 2007; Liu, Hosley & Levenshus, 2010, 2011, 2012; Waymer, 2013). However, none of these studies has evaluated the practice of government communication holistically. This study attempts to do so.

Upon reviewing literature about government communication in South Africa, it was found that government communication research in South Africa centres predominantly on mediated political communication (Johnston, 2005) and political rhetoric (Audenhovem, 2003), primarily employing discourse analysis methodologies. Another interest focus is on political rhetoric during election periods, particularly political campaigns such as political posters (Fourie, 2008), print advertisement (Teer Tomaselli, 2005) and the role of political blogs (Goldfain & Van der Merwe, 2006). Much of government communication research conducted in South Africa is predisposed to a notion of government communication as a participatory development tool (for example Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010; Netshitomboni, 2007). To this end, the public administration field in South Africa has contributed robustly and immensely to this scholarship.

Notwithstanding vibrant government communication research in South Africa, there remains a dire need to understand government communication from an organisational perspective. This is because the individual government department remains responsible

for the actual transmission of government communication to the public. As such, the *practice* dimension is necessary to understand the nature of government communication in South Africa. A few noble studies in this area are discussed throughout this document.

The Task Group on Government communication, also known as the Comtask was convened in 1996, to examine the nature of communication within government, “the structure of the media and the relations of government with the media, international communications and other aspects of governmental communications” (Lor & van As, 2002:106). The produced report was entitled *Communications 2000: a vision for government communication in South Africa*. To date, this is the only comprehensive study of the practice of government communication in South Africa. Rasila and Mudau (2012:1398) put forth an argument that many of the findings of the Comtask report are still applicable in today’s government communication system in South Africa. This is not an ideal finding as it insinuates there have been insufficient developments in government communication in South Africa over the past 20 years. In a limited way, this study aims to gauge developments in the field of government communication from the Comtask era in South Africa.

A suggested approach in conducting a communication practice research is to evaluate three central features of an organisation, namely, structure, processes, and outcomes (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:5). *Structure* concerns the conditions in which an activity takes place (*i.e.* the distinctive communication environment of the public sector), *processes* are a set of ordered actions such as roles, functions and communication practices, and *outcomes* are the results or consequences of processes (such as government reputation as an outcome). This framework of analysis is adopted for this particular study.

In government communication practice research, it is essential to ask: “where and by whom work is actually done and the tools and techniques that are being used (*i.e. practice and activities*), the roles and skills required by practitioners and how these are acquired (*i.e. practitioners and their professional development*) and the ways in which practitioners and the work involved are organised (*i.e. the organisation of communication unit*)” (Van Bekkum *et al.*, 2008:85). Added here are the political and cultural elements that

contextualise the practise (*i.e. the distinctive communication environment of the public sector*). It is noteworthy that the key focus of this study is on government communication practices and the distinctiveness of such practice. Nevertheless, it is worth questioning if government communication is truly a distinctive practice. The next section briefly explores this question whilst chapter 2 further expounds on the topic.

1.2.2 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A DISTINCTIVE PRACTICE

Academic debates concerning the management of the public sector as a business are being revitalised in recent years. Aligned with this, discussions about the treatment of citizens as external stakeholders have become prevalent. This sentiment is predominantly expressed by terminologies such as ‘customer service governance’, ‘customer-responsive governance’ and ‘customer-focused governance’ amongst others. Projected prospects from this customer-focused governance is that “it offers an antidote to popular stereotypes of bureaucracy, red tape, officious administrators, long queues, and drab uniformity of services” (Alford, 2002:337). For instance, the *Batho Pele Gazette* (1997:12) reads:

“The public service is currently perceived as being characterised by, for example, inequitable distributions of public services, especially in rural areas, lack of access to services, lack of transparency and openness and consultation on the required service standards, lack of accurate and simple information on services and standards at which they are rendered, lack of responsiveness and insensitiveness towards citizens’ complaints and discourteous staff”.

Gelders, Bouckart and Van Ruler (2003:327) query the extent to which management models from the private sector, such as those mentioned by Canel and Sanders (2012:93) in section 1.2, are actually transferable to the public sector (government) and the arising consequences for public communication management. Heise (1985:200) is one of the first few scholars to evaluate the impact of corporate communication models within the government sector. He questioned “whether public relations, as developed and practiced in the private sector, ought to be the model for the public sector and, if not, what the model for the public sector should look like”.

Boyne (2002:97) and Rose (1999:66) depict two contending schools of thought in answering Heise's (1985) question. Government reformers propose the implementation of a "customer focused" style of communication from the private sector. This school of thought postulates that public organisations including government can and must import and emulate the managerial processes (communication management) from the private sector to gain from the "supposedly successful techniques" of private institutions (Boyne, 2002:97). In contrast, the critics contend and dismiss the idea as inadequate for the public sector because it devalues the notion of citizenship (Alford, 2002:337). There seems to be cynicism to the immediate adoption of such business-like-management. At the extreme of such scepticism is an emphasis that "if public and private organisations are fundamentally different, there is little point in seeking to draw lessons from management of the private sector" (Boyne, 2002:97).

Although government communication is expected to reside amidst both the public administration and the communication field, it is surprising that only scant research activity would exist within the communication sector, which is arguably predominated by corporate communication research focusing on the private sector (Glenny, 2008:154; Waymer, 2013:321).

Scholars from public administration have long begun documenting differences between the environment of the public and the private sector (for example Graham, 1994:361-375; Kaplan, 2009:197-212; Nzimakwe, 2010; Rose & Lawton, 1999:63-77). Renowned public administration theorists have delivered resounding arguments about the distinctive characteristic of public organisations (Pandey & Garnett, 2006:38). There is substantial literature pertaining to the distinctive characteristics of the public sector. At an extreme, such literature may be synthesised into a 'public sector distinctiveness theory'.

The argument of the 'public sector distinctiveness theory' is that distinctions between the public and private sectors entail important differences in organisational environments, constraints, incentives, and culture, which should be incorporated to management theory, including *communication management* theory (Perry & Rainey, 1988:182). For that reason, the espousal of private sector models is met with scepticism in public administration and

public management literatures. The most compelling work on public and private sector distinctiveness is that of Allison, 1979; Boyne, 2002; Bozeman 1987; Rainey, 2003; Ranson, 1998, Sayre, 1958 and Andersen, 2010.

The field and extant theories of communication management do not sufficiently distinguish between the public and the private sector (Liu & Levenshus, 2010:1). Communication research examining the public sector rarely indicates differential communication practices as due to the distinctive environment in which government communication takes place (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus. 2010:190). A distinction of practice, theories, and models are essential considering that the environment of the public sector contains opportunities and constraints that are dissimilar from those of the private or corporate sector (Liu & Horsley, 2007:391). Leading scholars on the distinctiveness (uniqueness) of the communication environment of the public sector are Lee (2000); Liu, Horsley and Levenshus (2007/2010); Gelders, Bouckart and Van Ruler (2003), among others.

Rose (1999:4) attests to the distinctiveness of public service administration. The increasing complexity of government policies, rules, and practices makes government communication difficult and therefore different (Killingsworth, 2009:62). For example, Theaker (2004:218) claims that working in the public sector is challenging for communication management. There are several reasons for this. One of which is that government often deals with various, never-ending stakeholders (Aertsen & Gelders, 2011:2). Liu and Horsley (2007:384) are of the opinion that unique and distinctive communication models are crucial for the communication management practised in the public sector, particularly in government.

Gelders *et al.* (2003:327) posit that the application of dominant private sector communication models and techniques is only possible if the *distinctiveness* (specific characteristics) of the public sector is acknowledged and accounted for. They emphasise that if communication theories developed in the private sector are to be applied in government, it is essential to consider their repercussions for public communication management (Gelders *et al.*, 2003:327).

There is a plethora of literature concerning the applicability of private sector models of communication management to the public sector in general and to government in particular (Boyne, 2002; Gelders, Bouckart & Van Ruler, 2007; Liu & Horsley, 2007; Liu & Levenshus 2010; Liu *et al.*, 2010; Rainey, 2003; Pandey & Garnett, 2006). Such literature provides an overview of factors, attributes, and properties that authenticate the distinctiveness of government communication. For instance, Liu, Horsley, and Levenshus (2007, 2008, 2010) synthesised 13 features from literature and research which account for the distinctiveness of the public sector. However, most of this literature simply concerns itself with mapping out features and characteristics that distinguish the communication environment of the public sector from that of the private sector. Very seldom do these studies evaluate the effects of such 'distinctiveness' to the practice of government communication. This study sought to fill this gap. To start with, the theoretical framework is introduced next.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This section introduces the theoretical framework underlying the study. The full review of the theoretical framework is advanced in chapter two (2) and chapter three (3). The thesis statement proposed in the study is that communication management is vital for democracy. For government communication to be professional and strategic, it must be organised *excellently* and *effectively* while taking into account the advocacy nature inherent in external organisational rhetoric that could threaten the *ethics* and legitimacy of (government) communication management. It is equally essential for the *distinctive* communication environment of the public sector (the public sector distinctiveness theory) to be considered in both the theorising and the practice of government communication. The theoretical framework below introduces features/elements that make government communication *strategic*, *distinctive*, and *ethical*. The detailed operationalization of these features is described in chapter 2, 3 and 4, while a visual representation is presented.

The study of government communication requires a multifaceted theoretical approach. The political communication approach counsels that in modern democracy, every organisation survives ultimately only by public consent. It is mainly by excellent, effective, and ethical

communication management that governments are able to secure this approval (reputation/legitimacy). Literature demonstrates that *excellence* and *effectiveness* are foundations to **strategic (government) communication**.

The excellence theory identifies fourteen (14) key assumptions regarding the features of an excellent communication management department (Grunig, 2007). The principle of *excellence* is discussed in chapter 3 and tabulated in table 5. The present study evaluates all fourteen 14 principles of the excellence theory in order to appraise excellence in the practice of government communication by the KZN province. Regarding the effectiveness question, the Pretoria School of Thought (PST) is chosen as a paradigm best able to explain the functions and the contributions of strategic communication management to organisational effectiveness. For this purpose, five (5) elements of effectiveness in communication management have been identified from literature. The principle of *effectiveness* is explored further in chapter four (4), focusing on strategic government communication.

Contrary to the strategic communication approach (excellence and effectiveness), the *rhetorical approach* describes an alternative view of communication management. The rhetorical approach calls into question the **ethics of communication management**. As it is, the rhetorical approach contributes two key ideas (points) considered relevant to the study of contemporary government communication. The *first point* is in effecting the high end of symmetrical communication proposed by the excellence theory. Rhetoric argues that effective symmetrical communication is only achievable by the dialogic form. However, the rhetoric approach does not assume that communication between the public and the government will naturally be impartial as projected by the excellence theory. The excellence theory takes for granted that by being structured in a certain way (the 14 principles); the resulting communication management will naturally be effective and ethical. Rhetoric argues instead that communication management must be dialogic in order to be ethical, but being ethical is not innate for organisations so they must consciously make an effort. Five (5) elements of ethical communication management are identified from literature. This study argues that the two principles of *strategic*

(effectiveness + excellence) and *ethics* (rhetoric) are equally essential in understanding the practice of government communication.

The **public sector distinctiveness theory** contends that the public and the private sectors are distinct and thus the practice and the management of such organisations will differ. It is advisable that organisation and management theories take cognisance of such distinctions. Literature identifies thirteen (13) features of distinctiveness that are outlined in chapter two (2). This study attempts to determine the extent to which these features are applicable to the South African public sector (KZN) and evaluate their impacts upon the practice of government communication.

1.4 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Historically, Heise (1985:199) lamented the lack of academic interest in government communication. However, since then, public administration scholars have risen to the challenge of providing some knowledge in government communication even though such literature often fails to explore communication in its full capacity. A question of how government communication should be organised and practiced in order to contribute to effectiveness is still poorly address. The question of why and how governments at various levels communicate or fail to do so remains academically unattended (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:2). This offers an opportunity for communication management scholars to contribute towards closing this literature and theoretical gap. Marketing scholars have taken significant steps in researching the applicability of their trade to government and the public sector, often addressing the difficulty of marketing a non-tangible product (for example Nzimakwe, 2010). Communication management is yet to join this imperative academic debate.

Whilst a variety of features contributing to a distinctive communication environment of the public sector are identified in extant literature, very few of these studies are grounded by extensive empirical research (Gelders *et al.*, 2003:327). Moreover, these studies rarely evaluate the impact of such 'distinctiveness' on the practice of government communication. These attributes must be empirically tested to determine the extent to

which they influence the function, structure, and practices of communication management in the government sector (Liu & Horsley, 2007:392). No such study has been conducted within in the South African perspective. In overall, the extent to which government communication can be distinctive, strategic, and ethical has never been evaluated. Moreover, the intersections between these three concepts have never been academically considered.

1.5 PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector affect the practice of communication management in selected government departments within the KwaZulu Natal provincial government. In addition, the study examines the extent to which government communication can be strategic, ethical, and distinctive, as well as the interrelations between these concepts.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The above problem statement yields the following research questions:

- To what extent does the distinctive communication environment of the public sector influence the practice of government communication in the KZN provincial government?
- Which conditions of the internal communication environment of the public sector renders government communication strategic and ethical?
- What themes, perspectives, constructs, and issues are essential in laying the groundwork towards the theorising of government communication?

1.7 SPECIFIC RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

As guided by the above research questions and as emanating from the theoretical framework and the literature, specific research objectives guiding this study are as follows:

Distinctive communication management

- **Objective 1:** To identify distinctive features of the public sector communication environment and to explore their impacts on government communication in provincial government departments.
- **Objective 2:** To design a framework for government communication that takes into account the strategic, ethical and distinctive elements.

Strategic communication management

- **Objective 3:** To investigate the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of communication management in provincial government departments.
- **Objective 4:** To examine the link between government communication policies, strategies and government communication practices.
- **Objective 5:** To explore the role of the GCIS in standardising and professionalising the practice of government communication at a provisional level.
- **Ethical communication management**
- **Objective 6:** To investigate whether the practice of government communication in the KZN provincial government is moving towards the dialogic or the self-advocacy rhetoric (reputation)?

1.8 RESEARCH DESIGN

At this point in South Africa, the topic of study (government communication) is not yet fully explored, yet an emergent research activity exists internationally that provides some exploratory grounding upon which this study can be based (see Gelders, Bouckart & Van Ruler 2003; Pandey & Garnett 2006; Liu *et al.*, 2007, 2008 & 2010). Hence, an exploratory study is academically insufficient, yet necessary for the context of study. A pure exploratory study runs the risk of reinventing the wheel. For that reason, an *exploratory—descriptive* study is proposed for the present study. Whilst this study is explorative, it takes the notch up towards the descriptive.

A sample of eight (8) government departments in the KZN province has been drawn from a population. The population for this study are government communicators and

government communication units within the KwaZulu Natal provincial government. There are in overall 16 provincial ministry government departments in the KwaZulu Natal province (see table 9). Triangulation informed the data collection of the study as comprised of interviews, policy document analysis, and surveys. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 government communicators working across eight KZN provincial government departments. A purposive snowball sampling was used to identify respondents. In addition to the interview, respondents were required to fill in the questionnaires (essential to quantify variables and to tackle sensitive matters). Furthermore, to achieve a rich data and for additional validity, eight communication strategic documents were analysed.

1.9 CONTEXT AND UNITS OF ANALYSIS

The study was conducted in South Africa at the KwaZulu Natal province (Pietermaritzburg). The units of analysis are provincial ministerial government departments whose primary external stakeholders are the general public. The identified government departments are usually at the forefront of service delivery protests because they are considered the custodians of basic social needs. For this reason, communication with the general public is not only essential but mandatory.

Selected government departments are:

- Office of the KZN Premier (Department of Provincial Communication),
- KZN Department of Health,
- KZN Department of Sports and Recreation,
- KZN Department of COGTA,
- KZN Department of Education,
- KZN Department of Public Works,
- KZN Department of Social Development, and
- KZN Economic and Tourism Development.

1.10 ACADEMIC VALUE AND INTENDED CONTRIBUTION OF THE PROPOSED STUDY

Communication management, according to Vos (2006:256), “means paying attention to quality and increasing the added value of communication within an organisation”. However, quality control and communication practices are neglected in the government communication research agenda (Vos & Westerhoudt, 2008:18). Such a performance dimension is indispensable in understanding the nature of government communication.

Much of government communication research conducted in South Africa is dominated by a notion of government communication as a tool of participatory development. Another research focus in South Africa is an analysis of the general role of the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS). Both themes are not near exhaustion. Nevertheless, there is a dire need to understand government communication from an organisational perspective. This is because the individual government department remains responsible for the actual transmission of government communication to the public. As such, the *practice* dimension is necessary to understand the nature of government communication in South Africa.

From an academic point of view, no studies on the practice and the distinctiveness of government communication have been conducted within the African context. This study attempts to fill this gap. The present study intends to determine if the kind of communication practiced in the government sector is as distinctive as predicted by scholars. An exploratory-descriptive study of government communication practices and factors influencing the nature of the practice (such as the distinctive communication environment of the public sector and the GCIS) should provide the much needed bases from which government communication theories and models may be developed. The nature of government communication should be described in some details by taking into account different aspects at the same time rather than specialising on just one or two elements. Once there is sufficient descriptive research (still lacking), theories can be developed.

The extent to which government communication can be distinctive, strategic, and ethical and the intersections between these three concepts have never been academically and empirically considered. This study attempts to contribute towards such an endeavour. Government practitioners may find value in understanding various quality measures developed in the study. Another valuable contribution will be the identified context in which strategic and ethical government communication is possible within a distinctive communication environment. In addition, government practitioners may find value in understanding the distinctive communication environment of the public sector and how it affects their practice. Furthermore, the influential role of the GCIS in standardising and professionalising the practice of government communication may better be comprehended. Delimitations and assumptions are discussed next.

1.11 DELIMITATIONS

The aim of this study is to investigate the nature of government communication practiced in South African government departments especially those in the KwaZulu Natal province. The proposed study excludes the politics of government, unless if such politics is directly related to communication. The study examines the distinctive communication environment of the public sector, not the distinctiveness of the public sector in general. An analysis of the general distinctiveness of the public sector may be found in Allison (1979), Boyne (2002:97), Rainey (1988), Rainey (2003) and Rose (1996:63-77).

The proposed study only considers ministry provincial government departments, not NGOs, local municipalities, parliament, political organisations, or parastatal organisations. A purposive sampling method is used to select only government departments whose primary external stakeholders are the general public (see section 1.7).

The general public (citizens) is the only stakeholder considered for this study. Consequently, only external communication is considered primarily relevant to this study. Internal communication is indeed germane to achieving an effective external communication, and for that matter, it was not entirely excluded in the study. Moreover,

there are sufficient studies aptly focused on internal (government) communication that are extensive in depth, this study does not attempt to do that.

This study is not particularly focused on the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) as a 'government communication institution in South Africa'. The focal points of the study are the communication unit within government departments. Thus, the parameter of analysis is confined to the aspects of the GCIS that concern the standardisation and professionalization of government communication at a provincial level. As such, all other politics, management, and responsibilities of the GCIS are overlooked.

1.12 ASSUMPTIONS

Assumptions are basic to all research. Leedy and Ormrod (2010:59) posit that assumptions have a bearing on the research problem, direction, and conclusions. Thus, assumptions should be "openly and unreservedly set forth" (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:59). There are several basic assumptions underlying this research project. It is assumed that:

- All government departments embody a communication unit at best or someone responsible for communication management at the very least.
- All government departments make efforts to communicate with the public (citizens) as external stakeholders without whose support they would flounder.

The proposed research is based on the public sector distinctiveness theory. Scholars who are concerned with understanding the specific nature of public organisations usually begin with an assumption of the public-private distinction thesis (Rainey, 1988:185). This research is based on the proposition and the mild acceptance that specific characteristics exist in the public sector, which make the communication environment of the public sector (government) distinctive and therefore different from the private sector's communication environment (Gelders *et al.*, 2003:327); (Liu *et al.*, 2010). This position is further explored in chapter 2. The study exposition is outlined next.

1.13 STUDY EXPOSITION

It is crucial at this juncture to provide an overview of the structure to the rest of the thesis. The remaining section of **chapter 1** defines concepts and constructs adopted for this study. **Chapter 2** presents the context and the theoretical background to the study. The chapter reviews literature concerning the distinctive communication environment of the public sector. **Chapter 3** further adds to the theoretical framework on which the study is engrained by discerning the field of government communication as a semblance of organisational and communication management. **Chapter 4** describes the ideals of strategic government communication along with its requisite principles. **Chapter 5** describes the practice of government communication from an organisational perspective. In that chapter, the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of government communication and the challenges towards the standardisation and professionalization of the practice are delineated. **Chapter 6** outlines the history of government communication and its development in South Africa. The aim behind the methodology **chapter 7** is to designate the methodology plan selected for the study. A triangulation of data collection methods and instruments from both qualitative and quantitative approaches are described. Both **Chapter 8** and **Chapter 9** present the research findings (results), while **Chapter 10** contains the discussion, conclusions, and recommendations. The conceptual model depicts the study exposition in brief and outlines the conceptual framework of the study. The following is the conceptualisation of key terms discussed in this study:

1.14 DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Table 1: Definitions used in this document

Communication Management	▶ Within the African discourse, the term public relations is more dominantly used and accepted than ‘communication management’ (Rensburg, 2007). In this study, the term, ‘public relations’ is used synonymously with ‘communication management’.
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Communication management is more of an inclusive term encompassing a variety of communication modalities such as public relations, organisational communication, business communication, corporate communication, and to a lesser extent, marketing communication.

Communication Practices

- ▶ Adopting such a definition allows for flexibility of the study to investigate additional paramount aspects of government communication that perhaps fall outside the parameters of public relations (Shelby, 1993:254)
- ▶ The sum of all the ways in which an organisation communicates with stakeholders.

Communication environment of the public sector

- ▶ According to Liu and Horsley (2007:384), the public sector creates a distinctive (unique) communication environment with constraints and opportunities that are different from the private sector.

Corporate identity

- ▶ What the organisation chooses to communicate about itself (Wood, 2002:93).

Customer-Focused Government

- ▶ A customer-focused government is one that centres communication and services on the user. It is dependent on the satisfaction of the user and is thus responsive to his/her demands as a customer.

Customers

- ▶ Citizens are customers because they too receive services from their government.

Dominant Coalitions:

- ▶ The dominant coalition is a term used to define a group of senior managers entrusted with controlling an organisation (Grunig, 1992).

**Government
Communication**

- ▶ According to Glenny (2008:153), government communication, by definition, relate to “the apolitical or non-partisan communication activities of the executive arm of government concerning policy and operatives”. This is a balanced, concise, and non-partisan communication (Gelders & Ihlen, 2009:2). Government communication and government public relations are used synonymously within the text.

**Government
Communicators**

- ▶ This term refers to government public relation practitioners who handle communication on the behalf of government departments. The term is inclusive of all various positions and names given to different speciality functions of government communication.

Excellence:

- ▶ The 14 generic principles characterising strategic, symmetrical, and effective communication management.

**External
Stakeholders**

- ▶ External stakeholders are not directly connected with the operation of the organisation, but may affect and be affected by the operations of the organisation.

**Identity
Management**

- ▶ Identifying the right image for the organisation and communicating it effectively (Wood, 2002:93).

Media Relations

- ▶ The establishment and management of relationships with the mass media that facilitate favourable and timely media coverage. This part of public relations deals with publicity and information diffusion.

Organisational communications

- ▶ Refers to all “communications managed by an organisation, especially as communication managed for the organisation by communication specialists” (Grunig, 1992:5).

Political communication

- ▶ Refers to persuasive communication designed to uphold the objectives of a political party or a politician (Gelders & Ihlen, 2009:2).

Private Sector

- ▶ Refers to the corporate sector, which is profit oriented and owned by anyone but the state.

Public Sector

- ▶ For the purpose of this study, the public sector means government.

Public relations

- ▶ Refer to “the management of communication between an organisation and its publics” (Grunig, 1992:4). Here used synonymously with communication management.

Public sector distinctiveness

- ▶ This study follows Gelders *et al.* (2007:327) loose definition of ‘uniqueness/distinctiveness’ as “special characteristics of the public sector”.

The public

- ▶ Refers to a group of people with whom the organisation communicates.

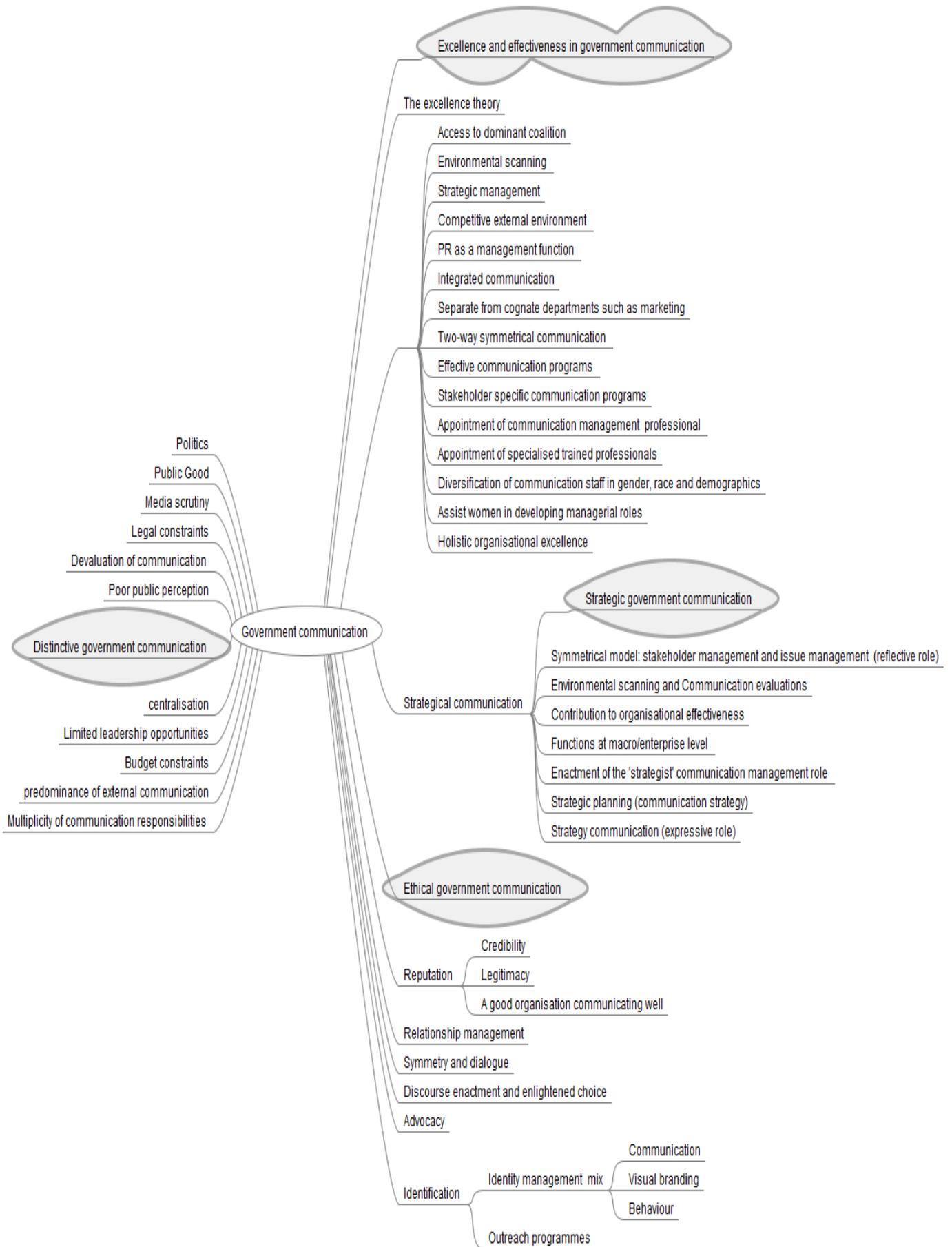
Stakeholder

- ▶ The concept of stakeholder refers to “those groups of individuals without whose support the organisation would cease to exist as well as those who aim to influence or are influenced by the organisation” (Luama-aho, 2008:447). Stakeholders can be internal or external. The term public and stakeholder will be used interchangeably

The following is a table of abbreviations used in this document.

Table 2: Abbreviations used in this document

<i>Abbreviation</i>	Meaning
ANC	African National Congress
COGTA	Cooperative Governance Traditional Affairs
COMTASK	Task Group on Government Communication
GCIS	Government Communication and Information Systems
Exco	Executive Council
HOD	Head of Department
IABC	The international association of Business Communication
LMS	Living Standard Measure
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
Manco	Management Committee
NPM	The New Public Management
NPG	The New Public Governance
PCF	Premier's Coordinating Forum
PR	Public Relations
PST	Pretoria School of Thought
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of South Africa



CHAPTER 2: THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter demarcates the context upon which the theoretical framework of the study is based. One of the central purposes of this study is to explore the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector influences the nature of communication management practiced in the South African government sector (KZN) and the degree to which such distinctiveness is perceived and experienced by government communicators. Naturally, the starting point towards this deliberation is in investigating whether government communication is indeed a 'distinctive' practice. In so doing, the scholarship surrounding the public sector distinctiveness theory is examined. The discussion will take into account both public administration and communication management literature.

The chapter describes debates concerning the contrast and/or distinctions between the public and the private sector and the impacts of such distinctiveness on communication management. Intrinsically, this chapter outlines a review of literature pertaining to the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment. To this end, features contributing to the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment are delineated. Subsequently, extant empirical research concerning the distinctiveness of government communication is outlined as an attempt to trace which features of government communication's 'distinctiveness' have been studied thus far.

This thesis argues that government communication is theoretically haunted by debates between scholars of Traditional Public Administration (public policy) and scholars of the New Public Management (government as business). Each side pulls government communication into differing perspectives, objectives, and purposes. Such competing movements in public administration seem to have a significant impact on both the practice and the theorising of government communication.

This study serves no purpose of providing a comprehensive opportunity for these two schools of thought to engage each other. Such can be found in Kaboolian (1998), who among others, offer debates between the traditional scholars of public administration (government as distinctive to business) and those of the New Public Management (government as business). This section serves merely as an introduction to the debates in each standpoint and their potential impacts on the study of government communication.

The first section discusses the genesis of the field of public administration and the reform agenda inclusive of the New Public Management Movement. The second section explores the distinctiveness philosophy and its relevance to communication management within the public sector. In addition, research conducted in government communication informed by this premise of distinctiveness is described. The impact of the New Public Management Movement on Government Communication is catalysed by the espousal of strategic communication models of excellence and effectiveness in public organisations as expounded in chapter 3 and 4.

2.2 INTRODUCTION TO PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The concept of governance has come to be acquainted with the study of public administration or public management. Khan (2008:1) describes ‘public administration’ as “the management of government affairs”. However, the meaning of the term is seldom clearly articulated (Peters & Pierre, 1998:223). Osborne and Gaebler (1992) defined governance as the business of government. Governance is thus concerned with the nature of state-society relations in the pursuit of collective interests (Pierre & Peters, 2005:6).

Public administration is a highly diverse and evolving field of scientific inquiry characterised by competing paradigmatic perspectives (Van der Walt, 2014:169). The writings of Woodrow (1887) are often cited as the founding seminal works in public administration. Since then, a lively discourse ensued on the scope, objectives, and theory of the field (Van der Walt, 2014:178). Khan (2008:10-16) provides a detailed history of public administration scholarship and its progressive scope. Such chronicle is not presented here.

The study of public administration is interdisciplinary by nature. It is interdependent and intertwined with theories and conceptions about many elements of public policy, public management, democratic values, service delivery, ethical behaviour, governmental responsibility, communication, and other social, political, and economic matters (Van der Walt, 2014:178).

Mathiasen (1999:94) describes three dominant disciplines in which public administration can be categorised. First, *microeconomics* offers mainly normative management techniques. The second is *Law and Regulations* that is guided by constitutional law, egalitarianism, public policy, public service and the public good, all working in the public interest. Third is *organisational theory* with the premise that organisations including public ones consist of customs, rules, norms, incentives, and rewards. “Organisational theorists are interested in how the culture of bureaucracy shapes and steers the behaviour of individuals and how individuals or groups of them can influence the way the organisation functions” (Mathiasen, 1999:94).

This study assumes an organisational theory outlook. It should be noted that the focus of the study is not on public administration, but on communication management with a special focus on public organisations (government). It is imperative to describe the nature and the environment of government organisations in which communication management occurs. For this reason, specific literature on public administration is summoned to set the scene for the context of study. Public administration literature is therefore delimited only to this chapter. To begin with, the public sector reform agenda is introduced next.

2.3 THE PUBLIC SECTOR REFORM AGENDA

Pierre and Peters (2005:49) put forth the notion that “governance is not a constant, but rather tends to change as needs and values change”. The traditional conceptualisation of the public sector has come under continuous strain. Over the past three decades, a strenuous struggle was advanced to reform the model of public administration from a rule-based system of accountability to one in which government runs more like a business (Peters & Pierre, 1998:223; Morgan & Cook, 2014:4). The argument is that the traditional

conception of government as a controlling agent for society is out-dated (Peters & Pierre, 1998:224). The reform debate argues for a different pattern, structure, and role of government and a different practice of governance. Such reform would alter the conceptualisation of democracy and governance in modern political systems (Peters & Pierre, 1998:225).

Some scholars such as Hood (1995:94) view the reform agenda as a paradigm shift haunting the traditional public administration mode of governance into extinction. Numerous claims of a paradigm shift are insinuated, for example, from bureaucratic to entrepreneurship, from progressive public administration to the New Public Management (NPM) movement and from NPM to the New Public Governance (Gray & Jenkins, 1995:76; Morgan & Cook, 2014:3). Whether the reform debate represents a 'paradigm shift' is an empirical question largely unanswered (Kaboolian, 1998:189). Kaboolian (1998:192) sees this reform movement as providing an extraordinary opportunity "to engage in theoretically grounded empirical work and theory building that crosses the boundaries of the disciplines that have studied the public sector". One such discipline is communication management.

The New Public Administration, New Public Management, and Reinventing Government Movement became popular catchphrases of the 1990s. Scholars are still continuously calling for the broadening of the field (Van der Walt, 2014:179). Forces for change have resulted in movements that question the capacity of government to remain the primary agent in solving society's problems (Morgan & Cook, 2014:3). First, the New Public Management (NPM) procures business models as the standard for measuring government success (Morgan & Cook, 2014:3). The second movement, the New Public Governance (NPG), highlights the importance of a collaborated approach in the provision of public services, involving a network alignment across the public, non-profit, and private sectors (Morgan & Cook, 2014:3). This study will draw from the NPM to be described next.

2.3.1 GOVERNMENT AS BUSINESS: THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT MOVEMENT

Since the 1980s, a recurrent theme in public administration scholarship has been upon the notion that ‘government can and should be run like a business’. Hartle (1985:341) once proclaimed such perspective, as he emphasised that “despite widespread and longstanding recognition that public and private management are different phenomenon, we remain fascinated with the idea that the efficiency and effectiveness of government can be improved by adopting private sector management techniques”.

The public sector faces increasing demands to run government like a business (Box, 1999:19). “Today, even elusive public-private differences are fading as the public sector is increasingly penetrated by the metaphor of the market and of running government like a business” (Box, 1999:19). Beckett (2000) reviews the common phrase, ‘government should run like a business’, which she claims has become a mantra. This mantra is associated with market economics and the new public management (NPM) reform discourse in public administration theory and practice (Beckett, 2000:186). As a result, “public administration has borrowed from business in many important areas: organisation theory, management techniques, budgeting and fiscal administration, and personnel administration” (Khan, 2008:6). Many practices from the private sector such as strategic management and total quality management are gaining popularity in public administration (Khan, 2008:9).

Scholars of organisational studies within the public sector have been playing catch-up with their private sector counterparts in their strife to integrate economic theories and concepts in the analysis of public organisations (Vasu, Stewart &Garson, 1990:365). The conviction that private administration is far more effective than public administration, resulted in the popularity of incorporating business techniques in public management (Khan, 2008:9).

The term New Public Management was coined in the late 1980s to signify the importance of ‘management’ and ‘production engineering’ in public service delivery (Page, 2005). These were practices often associated with economic doctrines. As a result, the new public management draws extensively from both organisational and management theories.

NPM strives to make service delivery more responsive and accountable to citizens by applying business management techniques focused on competition, customer satisfaction, and performance measurement (Morgan & Cook, 2014:4), in addition to business concepts such as customer service and total quality management (Lyons, Duxbury & Higgs, 2006:605).

The term NPM was coined as a generic label in order to collate similar, but certainly not universal paradigms in public management styles (Hood, 1995:94). The NPM cannot be seen as a set of concepts growing out of a formal body of theory but rather as evolving constructs from an inductive process of observing new public management practices (Mathiasen, 1999:91).

The NPM offers a new perspective about the nature of government, and the management of that government. The New Public Management generally contradicts traditional public administration (Gray & Jenkins, 1995:76). The NPM is led principally by economists, management scientists, and human resource managers and by all those who contend that the management science of private organisations should be transported to public ones in the name of improving efficiency (Gray & Jenkins, 1995:80). "Through these reforms, the public sector is gradually introducing new management tools that were initially developed for the private sector" (Desmairais & Chatillon, 2010:128).

The New Public Management is essentially a philosophy of generic management because it argues that both public and private sector management experience comparable challenges and should henceforth resolve them in similar ways. Therefore, NPM considers the public-private dichotomy as obsolete (Peters & Pierre, 1998:227). The NPM is a reform in which the public sector brings its management system closer to business, thus rendering the public sector less distinctive as a unit (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994:9). The new public management suggest best practice, abandoning the concept of federalism, and rejecting the distinctiveness agenda (Mathiasen, 1999:91). The ambition of NPM is to accommodate not only political scientists, but also organisational theories and other management specialists to the field (Gray & Jenkins, 1995:79).

Mathiasen (1999:109) summarises some of the key indicators of NPM practices in governance as follows:

1. Decentralisation of authority with governmental units and devaluation of responsibilities to lower levels of government (for example municipalities);
2. Re-examination of what government should both do and pay for, what it should pay for but do not do, and what it should neither do not pay for;
3. Downsizing the public service and the privatisation or corporatisation of activities;
4. Consideration of more cost-effective ways of service delivery, such as outsourcing, market mechanism, and user charges;
5. Customer orientation, including explicit quality standards for public services;
6. Benchmarking and measuring performance; and
7. Reform designed to simplify regulation and reduce its cost.

2.3.2 CRITIQUE OF THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT MOVEMENT

Khan (2008:15) insists that government should run like a democracy, not a business. This is a fundamental critique of the NPM. Models of organisational conduct in private sectors are founded on the value of profit augmentation (Vasu *et al.*, 1990:365). Such market-like techniques may be problematic if they override traditional values associated with the public sector and public service (Box, 1999:36). Naturally, individuals concerned with the quality of public service, social justice, and fairness in governance, transparency and equality, would find contempt in the concept of running government like a business (Box, 1999:19). Despite the public sector habitually reinforcing ethical discourse, they are still dependent on directors who exude corporate values that hence debilitate ethical contemplations (Vasu *et al.*, 1990:365).

Morgan and Cook (2014:4) highlight two major weaknesses in extrapolating private sector business principles in improving the performance of government. First, they lament a lack of a common denominator, such as profit, market share, or return on investment, which would serve as a benchmark for comparison on criteria that build legitimacy among citizens (Morgan & Cook, 2014:4). In addition, corporate concepts such as efficiency, effectiveness, and customer-focus are insufficient in the public sector. Instead, values

such as fairness, equality, protection of rights, and transparency should equally be measured since they play important roles in determining the legitimacy of public institutions. The same argument is later presented in this study that because government is a public good, concepts reinforced by corporate strategic communication (excellence and effectiveness) are insufficient without incorporating ethical egalitarian principles in communication management of the public sector.

On the adoption of market-type mechanisms, privatisation, corporatisation, competition and other economic terminologies, adversaries of New Public Management condemn such methodologies as an infringement of the moral foundation of government and as an appalling dismissal of the general welfare of the public in favour of pure profit (Mathiasen, 1999:97).

Accountability remains an unresolved issue in NPM literature. Government theories (and NPM) contend that customary democratic channels of accountability are being supplanted by several market methods of constituent control, for example 'stakeholdersim' and consumer choice (Peters & Pierre, 1998:226). The other criticism is that the proposed model of government may instead necessitate additional rather than fewer bureaucracy ensuing amplified oversight, evaluations and regulation (Page, 2005).

A literal interpretation of the 'government ought to run like a business' mantra is found on the premise that business is worthy and government is feeble (Beckett, 2000:191). In this case, business (the private sector) is considered a benchmark, a standard and an epitome of excellence, efficiency, productivity and profitability. However, there is little bound proof that business is indeed infallible (Beckett, 2000:191).

A detailed account of various critiques of the new public management movement can be found in Dunleavy & Hood (1994:10-14). They describe four categories of criticism of NPM, ranging from the *fatalist critique* (1) pointing out that no system of management, whether it be NPM can eliminate basic problems of public sector management—notably human error, poor communication, system failures, misdirected programmes, fraud or corruption, and bad intentions— these remain omnipresent. *The Individualist critique* (2)

pursues complete corporatisation of the public sector and therefore criticises any reform halting halfway through the process, as the case stands for the NPM. *Hierarchists critique* (3), on the other hand, worry about the risk of eroding traditional public service ethics as a result of NPM. Finally, *egalitarian critique* (4) is concerned with the danger of inappropriate (welfare-reducing) corporatisation that could devalue the notion of citizenship (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994:14). Perhaps the principal critique of the NPM is that the public sector environment is different to the private sector and such business-like strategies fail to correspond to such a distinct environment. This argument is explored further next.

2.4 THE PUBLIC SECTOR DISTINCTIVENESS THEORY

Most theorists emphasise the commonalities among organisations in order to develop knowledge that is applicable to all organisations. In consequence, much scholarship avoids popular distinctions such as public versus private and profit versus non-profit. Rainey (2003) illustrates how virtually all major contributions to the field of public management are conceived to apply broadly across all types of organisations. Perry and Rainey (1988) concur, “The public-private distinction has held no particular salience for scholars interested in developing a general theory of organisations”. Generally, the distinction between public and private organisations receives short shrift.

Wallace Sayre’s widely quoted aphorism: ‘public and private management are fundamentally alike in all unimportant respects’ signalled an invitation towards researching such a laden assertion. The increasing number of comparative studies published in public administration and management literature attest to the vibrant debates regarding the contrast and/or distinctions between the public and the private sector. The practical relevance of such literature and studies refer to their potential significance in understanding the proper roles of the public and private sectors, the implications of imposing public purposes on private corporations, and the transferability of management techniques and theories between the two sectors (Perry & Rainey, 1988:182).

There is an on-going academic debate concerning the distinctiveness of public and private management. “Government and business have been compared and contrasted throughout

public administration literature” (Beckett, 2000:187). Outlining such literature would involve tracing the history of public administration. Government administrations and business practices were compared early on in the works of Wilson, Goodnow, and White during the primordial orthodox era of public administration (1880-1920). Later, Hartle (1985:341) postulated that “the similarities and differences between public and private administration will never be completely defined; the issues change too frequently to permit it”. Decades later, Desmairais and Chatillon (2010:129) still inquire if the distinctiveness of public and private sectors is indeed significant.

Organisational and management theorists have contributed to the topic of public-private differences. Perry and Rainey (2001) discuss the usefulness of the public-private distinction in organisational theory. Two competing perspectives are found when studying public and private organisations. The generic perspective contains the claim that no such differences exist (Andersen, 2010). For instance, the New Public Management (NPM) movement has downplayed sectorial distinctions through its implicit suggestions that “management is management” regardless of sector (Lyons, Duxbury & Higgs, 2006:605). The contending claim is that government is distinct because it is a public good.

According to Rainey (2003:55), distinctions between the public and the private sector are sufficient to warrant special analysis. Rainey (2003:55-56) questions, “If public organisations are not distinct from other organisations, such as businesses in any important way, why do public organisations exist”? An answer to this question points to the inevitable need for public organisations and to their distinctive attributes. Since the establishment of the public administration scholarship, there has been a substantial debate on whether public management is different from private management. However, existing literature to date has come to no definitive conclusion (see Boyne 1992) (Meier & O’Toole, 2011:283). Therefore, empirical studies are still necessary to examine the degree of convergence, if any, between management in the public and private sectors (Desmairais & Chatillon, 2010:127). Recent studies in this area have focused on leadership, management roles, employee behaviour, and communication management amongst others.

Traditional public administration of a historic era was founded on the premise of a vastly distinct public sector (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994:9). The traditional public administration attempts to ensure accountability of government by imposing two basic management doctrines. One of which is to keep the public sector “sharply distinct from the private sector in terms of accountability, ethos, methods of doing business, organisational design, people, rewards and career structure” (Hood, 1995:94). The second management doctrine was to maintain buffers (separation) between the political (MEC) and the administrative management (HOD) (Hood, 1995:94).

The public-private sector distinction is used for many purposes, including developing distinct theories of public organisations. It has also been used as a moderator variable in organisational studies and as a predictor variable in evaluation studies. Perry and Rainey (1988:185) found that scholars of governance involved in constructing a theory of public institutions typically start with presumptions about the general environment of this subset of organisations.

The point of departure in this study pertains to literature on the distinctive characteristics of the public sector. The synthesis of such literature may be called *the public sector-is-different* perspective, thesis, or viewpoint, primarily rooted in traditional public administration. At an extreme, such literature may eventually coalesce into a *public sector distinctiveness* philosophy.

The public –private distinction perspective reinforces the argument that there are significant differences between public and private organisations (Andersen, 2010:137). When expounding the public-private distinction perspective, Rainey, Backoff and Levine (1976) are often cited as having presented a number of propositions describing differences in public and private organisations. They observed signs of vital contrasts between private and public organisations that should not be overlooked in administration research (Andersen, 2010:138). Differences were proposed in (1) purpose, objectives, and planning as well as in (2) selection, management, and motivation; (3) and in controlling and measuring results between the public and private sectors (Andersen, 2010:138).

The public and private sectors were often presented as two completely different worlds. For instance, the public sector is for the most part seen as stagnant having been weakened by bureaucratic constraints (Desmairais & Chatillon, 2010:128). Traditional public administration scholarship accentuates the distinctiveness of public organisations as consequences of obligated service provided to society (Andersen, 2010:138). Similarly, Cook (1998) in Andersen (2010:138) concedes that the character of public administration as a political institution should be at the centre for the conception of its distinctiveness.

Ring and Perry (1985:281) are of the opinion that if the performance of the public sector is judged against a normative model of strategic management developed in the private sector, it is likely to be found inadequate. However, judged against standards grounded in the public sector, different conclusions might be drawn. “The criteria of performance and actual assessments of accomplishments are all likely to change if alternative normative models are used” (Ring & Perry, 1985:281). Therefore, more research on strategic management processes must be undertaken within a framework that recognises the existence of separate sets of rules governing organisational conduct within the public and the private sector.

Strategic management in the public and private sector functions differently and thus generates distinctive opportunities and constraints on various practices within the two organisational sectors. According to Ring and Perry (1985:276), the context of strategic management can be defined as the societal role of the organisation. The context influences both the strategic management and the practices of an organisation. The key argument is that “basic distinctions do exist between the public and private sectors, and they are critical to understanding differences in strategic management processes” (Ring & Perry, 1985:276).

2.4.1 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF PUBLIC ORGANISATIONS

Leading public administration theorists have mounted persuasive arguments about the distinctive characteristic of public organisations (Pandey & Garnett, 2006:38). For that reason, the adoption of private sector models is viewed with scepticism in the public

administration and public management literatures (Allison, 1979; Boyne, 2002; Bozeman 1987; Rainey, 1989). The dominant view in the public administration and public management scholarship is that public and private organisations are very different. Distinctions between the two sectors involve important differences in organisational environments, constraints, incentives, and culture that seek incorporation in management theory (Perry & Rainey, 1988:182). The most compelling work on public and private sector distinctiveness is that of Allison, Bozeman, Rainey, and Sayre.

The most comprehensive and current list of assertions about distinctive *features* of public organisations are presented by Rainey (2009, 75-76). Allison (1983), Ring and Perry (1985), Boyne (2002:100), and Rainey (2003 - 2009) identify several features of the external circumstances and the internal characteristics of public organisations that proponents of the public sector distinctiveness theory propose. Such studies present taxonomies and typologies listing features, which are distinct or unique to the public sector. Some of the most widely cited external features of distinctiveness are present below:

Complexity: government operates through a network of interdependent organisations rather than through independent organisations. Moreover, public agencies face a variety of stakeholders, each of whom demands the attention of the public organisation.

Permeability: public organisations are considered 'open systems' that are easily influenced by external events. This feature is somewhat debatable.

Instability: political constraints result in frequent changes in policy, and in addition, the political cycle means that government organisations are often constantly pressured to achieve quick results. Allison (1983) adds two features associated to the instability of the public sector. The first feature is termed *time perspective*, which adheres to the fact that government managers tend to have relatively short time horizon dictated by political necessities and political calendar. The second feature called *duration* attest to the assumption that the length of service of politically appointed government managers is relatively short while private sector managers have a longer tenure (Allison, 1983). In

reference to the tenure of public officials, Ring and Perry (1985:279) also noted *time constraints* as point of distinction. In that regard, strategic management in the public sector entails the management of discontinuity. Coalitions are unstable, political executive tenure is brief; agendas change constantly (Ring & Perry, 1985:284).

Absence of competitive pressures: it is mentioned that public agencies typically have few rivals for the provision of their service. They often enjoy the dominant position in the market. Private sectors do not enjoy the monopoly enjoyed by public sectors (Khan, 2008:7).

Effectiveness: public sector has fewer incentives to cost cutting and efficiency because it lacks the direct link between the sale of output and the revenue received (Khan, 2008:9). Public managers have less available clear market indicators such as prices, profits, market share (Khan, 2008:9). “Public administrators must conduct their activities in a much more stable environment than business administrators. They are affected by politics, changing power relationships, economic swings, and volatile social issues” (Khan, 2008:9).

Bottom line: government managers rarely have a clear a bottom line, whereas the bottom line of private business managers is profit, market performance, and survival. The primary purpose of a private sector is to make profit while the public sector’s goal is to implement the policy in an efficient and effective manner (Khan, 2008:7)

Publicness: the publicness of the public sector stems from the common ownership of public organisations. The term ‘public’ in public affairs is used to denote affairs that affect everyone (Yeomans, 2009:578). The public sector is both legally and morally obliged to inform the population and the media about policy decisions and issues affecting the society in its entirety (Khan, 2008:8; Yeomans, 2009:578). For this reason, strategic management in the public sector must take into account the interests of a wide range of stakeholders (Ring & Perry, 1985:280).

Public processes: Government management and its processes tend to be exposed to public scrutiny and to be more open whilst private business management is often private and its processes internal and less exposed to public review (Allison, 1983:19).

Role of press and media: the role that the media plays is cited frequently as one of the major differences in the working environment of the public sector. The indication is that the media impede through the strategies and policies of government as it appears that policy makers are not only concerned with how the policy will work, but they are equally considerate of how it will appear in the public sphere (Ring & Perry, 1985:279). Allison (1983:19) claims that government management must contend regularly with the press and the media. The press often anticipates government decisions. Decisions of the private sector are less often reported in the media, and the press has a limited impact upon the substance and timing of such decisions.

A number of empirical studies have compared structural characteristics of public and private organisations (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000:453). The internal characteristics/features of public organisations that are viewed as distinctive refer to the following:

More bureaucratic: organisations in the public sector have more formal procedures for decision making, and are less flexible and more risk-averse than their private sector counterparts (Boyne, 2002:101). Many of the pathologies commonly associated with public bureaucracies are impersonal work rules, centralised decision making, isolation of workers and management, struggles for power, and rigidity in the face of change (Hartle, 1985:439).

More red tape: One of the central issues examined in public organisation internal structures often refer to *formalisation*, that is, the extensiveness of rules and formal procedures, their enforcement and the exertion of red tape (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000:453). Red tape is regarded as the side effect of bureaucracy in the public sector. "The existence of *red tape* implies an unnecessary and counter-productive obsession with rules rather than results and with processes instead of outcome" (Boyne, 2002:101). Rules and procedures result in unnecessary delays.

Multiple accountability structures: “public organisations and managers who operate within them have a more complex set of expectations from numerous public sector stakeholders” (Hodges, 2005: 6).

Lower managerial autonomy: Managers of public organisations have less freedom to react as they see fit to the circumstances that they face (Boyne, 2002:101; Allison, 1979:462). Public managers have the cost of hierarchy (rules and red tape) without the benefit of autonomy. “One outcome of the many rules and regulations is controlling personnel management in the public sector is a decrease in the authority and discretion of line managers and executives” (Hodges, 2005:9). However, it is believed that public sectors managers enjoy more solid job security in the rigidity of employment policies in government.

Personnel constraints: Allison (1983:19) shows that in the government sector, there are two layers or groups of managers that are at times hostile to one another: the civil servant (executive, administrators, HOD in South Africa) and the political appointees (MEC in South Africa).

Policy and goal ambiguity: as noted by Allison (1983), the management structure of government is often segregated and diffused across national, provincial and local levels. This separation of functional responsibility, according to Ring and Perry (1985:277), contributes to vagueness. In the contrary, “a direct link between strategy formulation and implementation and the active involvement of all relevant parties throughout the process is deemed to be essential to effective private sector policymaking”. This is not always the case within the public sector (Ring & Perry, 1985:277).

Product: The political product is often complicated and intangible. “An important difference with the private sector is that the quality of public performance and the quality of public communication are not only measured by effectiveness and efficiency but also by requirements such as democracy and lawfulness” (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:332). Products and services of private sectors are developed internally with the expected target market in mind. The same is less true for the public sectors whose products and services are

realised externally following the democratic process and public consultations (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:332). It is hard to imagine that private company leaders would publicly discuss their product until they are shelved as often occurs in the public sector (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:330). For this reason, strategic two-way communication is essential for the public sector to develop and amend products (services) in ways that resonate with the needs of the citizens as customers or as external stakeholders.

Hartle (1985:350) suggests that the sheer size and complexity of the federal government create managerial and leadership problems that dwarf those of every other type of organisation.

Thus far, the public sector distinctiveness thesis has been described. The theory contends that the public and the private sectors are inherently dissimilar and thus should be practiced, managed, examined, and theorised differently from each other. However, this philosophy of the public sector distinctiveness and its proponents has not been without critique. The nature of the criticism is discussed next.

2.4.2 CRITIQUE OF PUBLIC SECTOR DISTINCTIVENESS THEORY

In contrast to the public sector distinctiveness theory, is the critique that distinct characteristics of public organisations are merely myths that need to be clarified or discarded through sound research (Perry & Rainey, 2001: 180; Andersen, 2010:138). For example, some people point to the common sense observation that an organisation becomes bureaucratic, not because of it being a government, or a business, but because of it being large. “Research advocating the generic perspective claim that public and private organisations face similar constraints and challenges (Andersen, 2010:138). For them, management processes are the same in all sectors.

Because of poor organisation, structure, and consistency of studies dealing with the public-private distinction, confusion sometimes arises due to multiple definitions and uses of the terms. Perry and Rainey (1988:183) attest to numerous empirical studies that have been undertaken which suffer from lack of comparability because of diverse designs,

samples, and focal variables. Perry and Rainey (1988:185) maintain that such divergence of purposes has impeded accumulation of research findings. Another point of critique is that many of these public-private distinctions have been exploratory and therefore only loosely refer to theory or theory building. A challenge for future research is to design approaches that are conducive to integrating these traditions into a coherent theory.

With regard to future public-private distinction research, Perry and Rainey (1988:192) advise researchers to be more attentive to key subdimensions within the public-private dichotomy. It is essential for researchers to move beyond the general to the specific and focus more on the nuances of distinction in specific elements of organisation management.

In response to the specialisation call detailed above, some communication scholars have joined in on the debate regarding the public-private distinction by comparing and evaluating the communication environment of the public and the private sector as a subcategory in the public sector distinctiveness theory. The following section presents such literature concerning the distinctiveness of the communication environment of the public sector.

2.5 THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Liu and Horsley (2007) argue that existing public relations and communication models are not adequately befitting to the unique environment of the public sector in general and government in particular. The government's level of responsibility far exceeds that of the private sector. Because of the inherent differences between the public and the private sectors' operating environment, the prevailing communication models and theories do not account adequately for the public sector environment and its influences on communication practices (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010b).

Canel and Sanders (2012) summarise the special character of government communication based on the public sector distinctiveness theory discussed above. They argue that government communication should ideally denote the principle of *publicness* in that governance should be constituted on the basis of the people's direct or indirect consent. In

that way, government communication is especially directed at external audiences. The environment of the public sector is typically less open to market competition, less concerned with consumer preferences and more subject to legal and formal constraints than the private sector. Public organisations are subject to sanctions and control and significant public scrutiny. Public organisations are required to have a high degree of accountability to political and public constituents. With relations to internal structures and processes, public sector organisations tend to be more complex than their private sector counterparts. They tend to have less decision-making autonomy and flexibility (Canel & Sanders, 2012).

Gelders, Bouckaert and Van Ruler's (2007:327) research compared and analysed public relations in the private and the public sectors in an attempt to map out the differences and similarities between the two. Their findings identified four differences. First, it was found that the environment of the public sector was more turbulent and unstable consisting of complicated networks of societal actors. Government communicates about an extensive range of issues to a wide diversity of targeted publics (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:327). A study by Liu *et al.* (2010:207) confirms that government communicators serve a more information hungry and heterogeneous public. Secondly, citizens often expect to have a say in government processes much more than they do for the private corporate sectors (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:327; Killingsworth, 2009:60). The third finding was that government organisations are more bureaucratic than private ones (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:327). Adding to the above, legal and formal constraints render the freedom of information in the public sector virtually impossible (Pandey & Garnett, 2006:46).

Another equally important difference is that government public relations practitioners not only strive for efficiency, but also for democratic values (Liu & Levenshus, 2010:3). The two concepts may be conflicting if not properly balanced. Also considered by Gelders *et al.* (2007:333-334), are the roles of PR practitioners within the two sectors to which they found an unsurprising difference that:

Business communication professionals evaluate improving an adequate image of the organisation and of its leaders as more important than government communication professionals. Business communication professionals consider debating problems and their solutions less important than their colleagues from the public sector.

Liu and Horsley (2007) illustrate eight factors contributing to the distinctiveness of the public sector. The identified features are as follows: politics, public good, media scrutiny, lack of managerial support for communication, poor perception of government communication, lagging professional development and federalism. Other researchers support most of Liu and Horsley's (2007) attributes. With subsequent research, Liu and Levenshus (2008) identified additional features that emerged as outliers. The following features were added: limited leadership opportunities, internal vs external communication, limited financial resources, poor communication evaluations and multiple communication responsibilities (Liu & Levenshus, 2008; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010b). All thirteen (13) attributes are discussed next.

2.5.1 POLITICS

The first character is 'politics' which forms the essence of the public sector. Whilst other institutions are not ultimately free from politics, government is fully encompassed by politics that may stifle the freedom of public relations practitioners (Liu & Horsley, 2007:379). Government communicators are often forbidden from communicating certain issues until such issues are voted on (Killingsworth, 2009:70). Politics create a potential for conflict, miscommunication and misunderstandings (Liu *et al.*, 2010:192). Government cannot detach completely from party politics. For instance, in reference to *Imbizos*, Mabelebele (2006:109) argued that "the ANC as a political party took advantage of this existing cultural communication and governance infrastructure transmitted through word of mouth to advance its own political and governance strategies" (Mabelebele, 2006:109).

According to Canel and Sanders (2012:86), public organisational communication and in particular government communication operates in a political environment, which denotes the following:

- Political realities often lead to short-termism in strategic planning.
- Politics influences political considerations, events, and cultural structures, resources, personnel and goals.
- Heads of communication in government ministries, agencies, and departments may be appointed based on partisanship rather than professional criteria.
- Government communication often has to endorse what appear to be conflicting objectives set by political masters.

2.5.2 PUBLIC GOOD

The second characteristic pertains to the government as a 'public good'. Governments and the public sector are established to serve citizens (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:34; Liu & Horsley, 2007:379). While corporate organisations work for profit, the public sector works for the social good, which is dependent on the public perception of doing well (reputation). "You cannot just do your work, no one will know, you must be seen to be doing your work" (Jackson & Lilleker, 2004).

2.5.3 MEDIA SCRUTINY

Media scrutiny presents the third element. According to Liu and Horsley (2007:379), the public sector and their officials face a higher level of media scrutiny than their counterparts in the corporate sector. Most often, government decision-making processes are reported on by the media, making government susceptible to public and media criticism. This is not the case for the private sector. In addition, Liu *et al.* (2010:192) found that public organisations are covered more negatively than private ones.

Although both private and public institutions are held to the same standard of transparency and accountability, Gelders *et al.* (2007:331) attest to the manner in which accountability and transparency are institutionalised and enforced differently. For instance, the private sector is seldom legally coerced into disclosure of any kind, while the public sectors may be forced by law and the proverbial public interest to disclose every process of policymaking or service delivery (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:331).

2.5.4 LEGAL CONSTRAINTS

Legal constraints often limit the ability of government to communicate openly. This is the fourth character of the public sector environment. There are laws that may reduce the capacity of government communicators to function freely (Liu & Horsley, 2007:379; Liu *et al.*, 2010:191). Public organisations tend to be more bureaucratic than corporate private sectors. The budgeting, timing and planning of government communication tends to be tentative following rigid political procedures (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:331).

Pandey and Garnett (2006) conducted one of the few studies that directly measured government communication performance. They tested the effects of two distinctive attributes of the public sector (lack of goal clarity and red tape) on government communication performance. They found that red tape negatively affected the performance of internal communication (Pandey & Garnett, 2006:45).

Government communication contends with considerable complexities in terms of goals, needs, audiences, definition, and resources. “The multi-layered and organisationally diverse nature of government communication is a key factor in the complexity of understanding its needs, goals, and resources” (Canel & Sanders, 2012:86). For this reason, it is essential for government communication to operate on a multi-layered level, taking into account a very diverse group of stakeholders.

2.5.5 DEVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION

The fifth on the list is the devaluation of communication in government. Unlike the private corporate sector where the value of PR is demonstrated by financial returns, public relations in the public sector do not produce significant financial gains for the government. It is thus difficult to motivate budget spending in this regard (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:308). Killingsworth (2009:70) notes that some in the highest echelons of government management perceive communication as a waste of taxpayers’ money. Other professional difficulties emanating from a devaluation of communication in government may include, “internal bureaucratic situations that hinder professional efforts, weak job standards,

political pressure, and little career development or recognition” (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:311). Consequently, many qualified communicators leave government services for private organisations that offer better salaries and esteem (Liu & Horsley, 2007:380).

Comtask (1996) found the status of communicators to be an inhabiting factor. There is poor recognition for the need of professional government communication and information service in South Africa. Even where arrangements were made to create a post for a communications professional, this had been filled by people with other skills (Comtask report, 1996:23). In reviewing the work of GCIS over the past 10 years, the findings reflect a critical capacity shortage in content development and analytical skills. Where such capacity has been recruited, it has been a challenge to retain them, as GCIS is unable to compete with the private sector or similar organisations within the communication industry in attracting and retaining relevant skilled employees (Annual year report 2010/2011 GCIS).

2.5.6 POOR PUBLIC PERCEPTION

Poor public perception adds sixth to the list. The intention of government communication is sometimes met with cynicism as it is often infiltrated by negative connotations such as propaganda or spin (Liu & Horsley, 2007:380). Government is often criticised for a lack of transparency, falsification of information, secrecy, and spin (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:34). Government communicators report that one of the biggest challenges of their jobs is overcoming public cynicism (Liu & Levenshus, 2008:2). However, this is not a new phenomenon, Cutlip’s (1976:6) earlier work noted the extent to which the hostility to government communication keeps it in the shadows of legitimacy, which thus weakens the efficiency of its function. This is a formidable impetus to government communication. Vos (2006:252) concurs that poor public perception discredits government communication and weakens public trust.

Gelders and Ihlen’s (2009:2) study of government communication of potential policies found that the citizenry perceives all government public relations as forms of propaganda and fundamentally distrust all the communication effort. Gaber (2009:84) also lamented

the waning trust of government communication. The reason may be ascribed to the inclination of governments to put *communication* of policies and service delivery as a priority superior to the actual delivery of those services (Gaber, 2009:84).

2.5.7 POOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The seventh element is the lagging professional development of public relations in the public sector. Professionalism is necessary to elevate the public image of any field to grant public respect and autonomy to the profession (Grünig, 2000:25; Liu & Horsley, 2007:380). Professional development relates to the training, education, and experience of practitioners (Liu *et al.*, 2010:192). It refers to anything that renders practitioners more insightful and more effective in their jobs (Liu & Levenshus, 2010:4). One common metric of professionalism is through a fraternity membership to a professional organisation such as the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) (Meintjes & Niemann-Struweg, 2009:2). However, no distinct institutions exist specifically for government communicators in South Africa.

2.5.8 LIMITED LEADERSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

An additional feature added by Liu and Levenshus (2010) refers to limited leadership opportunities in government. In their findings, the majority of government communicators negatively evaluated leadership opportunities in their various departments. Without prospects of leadership, government communicators are simply relegated to technical roles (Killingsworth, 2009:71; Liu & Levenshus, 2010:4). For instance, Steyn and Green's (2001) research proved that communication managers in the Department of Housing in South Africa merely served technical roles and thus contributed very little to the management of the department.

2.5.9 CENTRALISATION

The ninth characteristic adding to the distinctiveness of the public sector is federalism. It is defined as "a system of authority constitutionally apportioned between central and regional

governments” (Liu & Horsley, 2007:380). Centralisation refers to a complex system of organisation in which the national government oversees and creates policy for programmes that are actually implemented by provincial and local governments (Liu & Levenshus, 2010:3). The concept of centralism is relevant to South Africa where ministerial government departments traditionally have one central department in Pretoria, provincial departments and many regional departments (of the same nature, e.g., Home Affairs) in various districts. Communication between provincial departments and the central department must be integrated to avoid contradictions. However, at the extreme, centralisation may paralyse the power of individual departments to communicate in a way that is befitting to a particular community.

2.5.10 INTERNAL VS EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Liu and Levenshus (2008:9) found that most public organisations, particularly in government valued external communication that internal communication. The majority of government communicators felt that “internal communication may be important to help the organisation, but external communication gets on the front page of the newspaper or on the TV station...so external communication really gets the top shelf”.

2.5.11 BUDGETING: LIMITED FINANCIAL RESOURCES

It was found from Liu and Levenshus’ (2008) qualitative interview research that government communicators consider limited financial recourses as a hindrance to the effectiveness of government communication practices. Some communicators declared that they could not go out and drive the communication objectives of the government department amidst their financial constraints. “These government communicators said they were not able to be as creative and effective as their corporate counterparts because of their meagre budgets” (Liu *et al.*, 2010c:206). Although, the survey results of 2010 highlighting dissatisfaction with communication budgets is not unique to the government sector, government communicators seem to be more dissatisfied than corporate sector communicators. Budget constraints seem significant to the practice of government communication.

2.5.12 COMMUNICATION EVALUATIONS

Liu and Levenshus (2008:9) research reported that government communicators claim that their budgets do not support formal evaluation of their communication practices. Some mentioned that they are not trained to conduct communication evaluations.

2.5.13 MULTIPLE COMMUNICATION RESPONSIBILITIES

Liu and Levenshus (2008) found that government communicators frequently wear multiple hats and are responsible for a variety of non-communication activities. “These responsibilities included employee communication, media relations, event planning, graphic design, crisis management, customer service, community relations, mail service, cable television management, speech writing, lobbying, records management, marketing, and evaluation as well as non-communication responsibilities”. Because of a variety and instability of communication roles and responsibilities, “government employees have fewer opportunities to practice communication as a strategic management function than their corporate counterparts” (Liu *et al.*, 2010c:209). Table 3 below summarises key distinctive features of the communication environment of the public sector and their likely impacts on government communication practices.

Table 3: Public sector attributes and their impacts

Environmental Attribute	Explanation	Public Sector Impact
Influences on Communicators' Daily Activities		
Centralization	Overlapping, yet independent, system of constitutional authority.	Decentralized communication approach may cause government bodies to speak with multiple, contradictory voices.
Media Scrutiny	Media act as government watchdogs, scrutinize government activities, and push for transparency (Fitch, 2004; Lee, 2008). Government media coverage declining and increasingly negative.	Makes government communicators more conservative in communication to avoid negative coverage. Some government communicators see media scrutiny as positive.
Relationships with	Even though most government	May limit acceptance and effectiveness of

Primary Publics	communication is truthful, the public and media tend to have negative perceptions about government communication.	government communication. Public cynicism seen as greatest obstacle to effective communication.
Legal Frameworks	Federal laws ban propaganda and restrict government use of public funds for publicity (Lee, 2008). Federal, state, and local access-to-information laws vary (e.g., federal Freedom of Information Act).	Misinterpretation of laws may unnecessarily limit communication activities at all government levels and hurt ability to share information with the public and media. May expand or hamper communicators' efforts.
Politics	While all organisations experience the influence of politics, external politics define government bodies.	Influences strategy selection. May hinder message distribution and creativity, increase outside interest groups' influence. Determines the level and means of information sharing.
Devaluation of Communication by Management	Historic avoidance of public communication strategies may be changing.	Obstacles created by management who do not value strategic communication may reduce the effectiveness of communication strategies and tactics.
Public Good	Unlike the private sector, the government's goal is public service rather than profits.	Government bodies are not typically influenced by market pressures when making strategic decisions.
Influences on Communicators' Professional Advancement		
Few Leadership Opportunities	Government communicators are historically relegated to a technical role, but data are mixed on their inclusion in management decision making and promotions.	A weaker voice in management decision making may impede strategic communication planning and execution.
Lacking Professional Development Opportunities	Government communicators lag behind their corporate counterparts in terms of professional associations and standards.	The lack of skill and management development may affect the effectiveness of communication efforts and partnerships.

The following section reviews extant literature and studies concerning the distinctiveness of government communication. This review may not be a comprehensive list but it identifies the most recent studies in the area and the most relevant to the present study. Most government communication literature primarily starts by point out the distinctiveness of the public sector. Such studies are discussed throughout this document. However, they are excluded in this section, as they are not specifically concerned with testing or evaluating the distinctiveness of public sector even though they have referred to it as a foundational theory, a premise, or a hypothesis.

2.6 EMPIRICAL RESEARCH ON GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION DISTINCTIVENESS

Liu and Horsley 2007's study began by identifying seven features that are distinctive about the communication environment of the public sector. The aim of Liu and Levenshus' (2008) study was to determine whether and how Liu and Horsley 2007 unique attributes directly influenced the daily activities of government communication. The subsequent (2010b) study comparatively tested the propositions of whether the proposed distinctive attributes are indeed specific only to the public sector (government) (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010:195). The study in question confirmed notable differences between the public and the private sector's communication environment. The surprising finding of the study was that some of the identified unique characteristics were in fact opportunities simplifying the task of government public relations practitioners.

Gelders and Ihlen's (2010) study on government communication of potential policies applied the gap analysis model, a framework primarily used for business service marketing to improve service quality. The above stated study identified some of the challenges likely to arise from using a business formula in the public sector (government). Recommendations were provided on how to apply business models to government communication. The gap model according to Gelders and Ihlen (2010) seems to provide a sufficient assessment of government communication. According to their conclusions, the distinctiveness of government and the public sector does not automatically limit the applicability of business models if the specific environment of the public sector is acknowledged and accurately accounted for.

Responding to Gelders *et al.*, 2007; Liu & Horsley, 2007 and Liu *et al.*, 2010 call for evidence based research on the distinction between the public sector and the private sector communication environment, Aerkens and Gelders (2011) conducted a pilot study in Belgium which confirmed the discrepancy of the manner in which communication practitioners of both sectors experience and respond to organisational rumours.

Government communicators were found to be more frequently confronted with harmful rumours than their business counterparts (Aerkens & Gelders, 2011:8). One of the major

reasons behind this occurrence is the ‘capricious political climate’ of the public sector (Aerksen & Gelders, 2011:8). This finding confirms previous research predictions (Liu & Horsley, 2007; Gelders *et al.*, 2007; Liu *et al.*, 2010). Government communicators generally exist within a complicated environment made up of a complex web of stakeholders (Liu *et al.*, 2007:377; Aerksen & Gelders, 2011:8). The identified complex environment possibly not only brings about more rumours, but also makes it harder to combat these rumours (Aerksen & Gelders, 2011:9).

Rumours in public organisations were found to be mainly about job security (Aerksen & Gelders, 2011:8-9). This finding corroborates Liu and Horsley’s (2007:380) distinctive feature of the public sector environment in which communication is devalued in government. The latter may explain the restlessness and job insecurity felt by government communicators.

Liu, Levenshus and Horsley (2012) evaluated the differences between the communication practices of US public sector communicators working for non-elected officials (HOD office) versus those employed by elected officials (MEC Office). Their findings indicated more similarities than differences on how government communicators in elected and non-elected offices disseminate messages and evaluate influences on their professional development. However, the pressure of information diffusion seemed to be perceived differently between the two groups. This is because the two groups perceive their functions differently. The primary goal of communicators working for non-elected officials is public information whereas government communicators working for elected officials have divided priorities between the promotion of their employer and public information (Liu *et al.*, 2012:235). Another key difference found was that “elected officials’ communicators are more likely than non-elected officials’ communicators to be part of the management team, indicating those non-elected officials’ communicators may have a higher need to convince public administrators that communication is a management function” (Liu *et al.*, 2012:235).

Waymer (2013) demonstrated how the distinctiveness of government communication posed challenges to dominant conceptual frameworks in which the concept of ‘relationship’ is operationalised. The research illustrated the challenges accrued by relationship

management theories that emphasise ‘closeness’ as an optimal relations measure. Closeness is not always democratic, particularly when imposed to the public by a patriarchy government. Waymer (2013) proposes that relationship management research should take into account public’ (non) desire for a close relationship as well as recognise the existence of different types of government - public relationships that are left unexplored. As a result, Waymer (2013) introduced the concept of ‘distance’ to communication management as a way of broadening the relationship management framework.

Despite indicators of the unique communication environment of the public sector, a number of scholars still challenge the distinctiveness agenda. For instance, Grunig and Jaatinen (1998:219) “theorise that the principles of public relations for government are the same as for other types of organisations, but the specific conditions to which the principles must be applied are different”. They see communication management as being more or less the same whether practised in the public or the private sector. In contrast to the public sector distinctiveness theory, Grunig (2007:33) insists, “A theory of strategic management used in government agencies should not differ from theory developed for corporations. However, the specific application of that theory will differ”. Perhaps it can be extended that the ‘*specific application*’ will differ in accordance to the context of the organisation, i.e. the internal communication environment of the public sector.

2.7 CONCLUSIONS

It suffices to conclude this chapter by encapsulating the point of discussion thus far. The public sector distinctiveness theory has been described. This theory postulates that the public and the private sectors are distinct and thus the practice and the management of such organisations will vary. It is recommended for organisational theories and management theories to take cognisance of such distinctions. Similarly, communication management must also consider such distinctions. For that purpose, this chapter identified several features relating to the distinctiveness of the communication environment of the public sector (government).

Following Perry and Rainey's (1988:192) advice for researchers to become more attentive to key sub-dimensions in the public sector distinctiveness thesis, communication scholars have joined in on the debate to investigate the point of differentiation and the impacts of such distinction on communication management within the public and the private sector. In summary, the fundamental postulation of proponents of the public sector distinctiveness theory, within the communication field, is that communication management in the public sector is distinctive. Hence, the distinctions must be considered, acknowledged, and accounted for, in practice and in theory. To this end, Liu, Horsley and Levenshus (2010a:210) advise, "More research is needed to develop a theory that explains and predicts communication practices and decision-making in government and their ultimate impact on publics".

Indeed, the distinctive communication environment of the public sector begs for more attention to be paid toward this field of study regrettably neglected by both practitioners and scholars. Clearly, there is a dire need to understand the communication environment of the public sector in order to develop communication theories and models that are specific to it. Once the *distinctive* context of communication is understood, it is then opportune to discuss the nature of communication management therein. The following chapter outlines the conceptual framework and literature on communication management in government organisations. This field is now called government communication.

CHAPTER 3: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION THEORY AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the theoretical framework grounded in this study. The thesis statement presented is that communication management is vital for democracy. For government communication to be professional and strategic, it must be organised excellently and effectively (excellence theory) while taking into account the advocacy nature inherent in external organisational rhetoric which may threaten the ethics and legitimacy of (government) communication management. It is also essential that the distinctive communication environment of the public sector (the public sector distinctiveness theory) be considered in both the theorising and the practice of government communication. This thesis statement conveys the essence of the theoretical framework that is proposed for the study.

The theoretical framework is presented in a series of two chapters. This chapter carries the second part of the theoretical framework while chapter two (2) contained the first part of the theoretical framework. This second part (chapter 3) reviews government communication from a variety of perspectives – without taking into account the public/private sector distinctiveness debate that is already discussed in the previous chapter. The first part (chapter 2) offered literature on public – private sector distinctiveness and the effects of this on communication management. The reason behind such separation is that these two parts of the theoretical framework (chapter 2 & 3) are equally imperative to the study, yet each presents government communication from a differing perspective. The two chapters are not mutually distinct. If anything, they are collaborative and this alliance is the subject of this study.

This chapter is divided into three sections that together form a coherent whole demarcating the first part of theoretical framework. **Part one (1)** of this chapter discussed the essence of communication towards the enactment of the ideals of democracy. The field of political communication is presented as the theoretical and practical foundation of

government communication. **Part two (2)** carries with it a theoretically grounded discussion about the relevance of the organisational communication management approach in the theorising of government communication along with its practices. **Part three (3)** of this theoretical chapter provides the critique of the excellence theory outlined by a group of theorists who advocate an alternative view of communication management called a rhetorical approach. The rhetorical approach calls into question the ethics of communication management. An attempt is made to apply the rhetorical approach towards the understanding of government communication. **Part four (4)** provides a review of the existing models of government communication developed thus far. Table 4 depicts four dominant traditions of government communication scholarship.

Table 4: Traditions of government communication

1. Government Communication in a political communication perspective	2. Government Communication in a participatory democratic perspective	3. Government communication in an organisational communication perspective	4. Government communication in organisational rhetorical perspective
Influenced by mass communication and information diffusion theories	Influenced by traditional public administration and democratic theories	Influenced by organisational communication and NPM movement	Influenced by persuasion, propaganda and public opinion theories
Not organisation specific	Government communication is a distinct practice in demand of its own theories and models.	Communication management is the same regardless of organisation. Any model or theory of corporate communication such as strategic management, excellence, and effectiveness are applicable to government communication.	Not organisation specific
Citizens as electorates	Citizens as constituents	Citizens as stakeholders	Citizens as dialogic partners
<p>Political communication traditions are predominately information-diffusion process based models such as</p> <p>Effect tradition – effects of government communication on voting. Uses and gratification – active consumers of government messages. Agenda setting – media and government relations. There is a call for a broader interpretation of political communication moving beyond voter persuasion paradigms.</p>	<p>It is fundamental citizens' rights to know the functions of their governments. Citizens need to understand the policies, laws, and regulations pursued.</p> <p>The purpose of government communication in a democracy is to communicate service delivery and developmental communication.</p> <p>The assumption is that government is a public good. Corporate communication concepts (excellence and effectiveness) are insufficient without incorporating ethical egalitarian principles in the communication management of the public sector.</p>	<p>Concentrate on relationship management for mutual understanding through two-way communication. Extending the scope of government communication beyond media relations to include other activities such as reputation, stakeholder, and issue management, internal communication. Introducing communication effectiveness – making government communication to contribute to better governance.</p>	<p>Rhetoric postulates that effective symmetrical communication is only achieved by the dialogic form. Organisation's ethical practices can be improved by paying attention to the external environments (public opinion).</p> <p>Rhetoric approach provides the base necessary to understand the self-presentation motives and tactics through which governments attract legitimacy and reputation. The rhetorical approach is best able to explain the technical function of communication management such as messaging, publicity, and media relations.</p>
Press agency model	Public information model	Two-way asymmetrical	Two way symmetrical
Micro level (program/operations)	Macro level (societal/ enterprise)	Meso level (departmental/ functional)	Micro program level (operations)

3.2 THE NATURE OF THEORIES

In order to understand the purpose of this theoretical framework chapter, we turn first to a summarised and brief discussion of social theories. Neuman (2000:40) defines a social theory as “a system of interconnected ideas that condenses and organises knowledge about the social world”. Theories are often appropriated without explicitly labelling them as such. They clarify why things are the way they are and how to alter those conditions. Theories are flexible and progressive. However, they contain incomplete knowledge and offer tentative answers. Theories frame how we look and think about a topic. They set the concepts, provide basic assumptions, direct researchers to the important questions, and suggest ways to make sense of the data (Neuman, 2000:60).

Most theories do not claim to be omniscient of all things. All social theories contain assumptions about social life. “Assumptions are statements about the nature of things” (Neuman, 2000:44). Theories must be tested to determine their accuracy level regarding the assumptions they make. For that reason, theories must be tested against the hard, empirical facts of ‘real’ material reality. As such, the aim of this study is to test if the organisational communications approach, the rhetoric approach, and the public sector distinctiveness approach are compatible and useful in the practice, the study, and the theorising of government communication.

Macro-level theories focus on the operation of big systems such as social institutions or societies. Theories at the micro level, observe smaller details, fixed in time and space. Micro level theories review the day-to-day of life practices. Meso level theories attempt to link the micro level and the macro level. They are often used in the description of organisational theories. This study is demarcated at a meso-level as it seeks to describe the distinctive communication environment of the public sector (organisation) and explore the nature of communication management in governments as organisations.

With regard to meta-theory, this study takes a practical theory approach to theorising. Practical theories propose a functional value in the purpose of theorising. Theories must aid in improving the world, organisation, or practice. As reflected by Littlejohn and Foss

(2009:660), “Practical theory assumes that theories should address practical problems (praxedogy) and that an essential purpose of theory is to open new possibilities of communication practices in society” (axiology). The field of communication science contains with it a wealth of theories, to these we turn next.

3.3 COMMUNICATION THEORIES

The meaning of the term communication is simple; to communicate is to impart or to convey meaning. According to Rodfielf (1965), “communication is, in the first instance, by its very nature the process of transferring a selected bit of information from an information source to a destination”. Hundreds of unrelated theories that differ in starting point, methodology and conclusions inundate the field of communication theory (Craig, 1999;135; Griffin, 2012:37). Craig expressed the difficulties of attempting to congest all communication theories into one grand theoretical overview. However, he identified seven dominant traditions or approaches into which most communication theories are grounded. Namely: (1) the socio-psychological tradition, (2) the socio-cultural tradition, (3) the semiotic tradition, (4) the rhetorical tradition, (5) the critical tradition, (6) the cybernetic tradition, and (7) the phenomenological tradition. These seven traditions may be called the ancestries of various communication theories. The socio-psychological tradition may be rated the most objective of the seven approaches (Griffin, 2012). The cybernetic tradition is also relatively objective. The phenomenological tradition on the other hand is rated the least objective of the seven traditions (Griffin, 2012). Each tradition is briefly described next.

The socio-psychological tradition sees communication as an interpersonal interaction. The socio-psychological tradition epitomises the scientific, empirical, and objective perspective in communication studies (Griffin, 2012:38). Advocates of this approach postulate that communication truth can be discovered through a systematic observation. Through cause and effects research, communication relationships and patterns may be established, controlled and predicted (Griffin, 2012:38). For such purpose, longitudinal empirical studies are best suited for the socio-psychological tradition.

The semiotic tradition is concerned with signs, symbols and meaning. Griffin (2012:38) defines semiotics as “the study of verbal and nonverbal signs that can stand for something else, and how their interpretation impacts society”. As such, the semiotic tradition discerns communication as the process of sharing meaning through signs. “Problems of communication in the semiotic tradition are primarily problems of (re)presentation and transmission of meaning, of gaps between subjectivities that can be bridged, if only imperfectly, by the use of shared systems of signs” (Craig, 1999:136-137).

Close to semiotics is the socio-cultural tradition based on the premise that society produce and reproduces culture by communication. The socio-cultural tradition sees communication as the creation and enactment of social reality. In contrast, the phenomenological tradition observes communication as the experience of self and others through dialogue. According to Griffin (2012:45), phenomenology “refers to the intentional analysis of everyday life from the standpoint of the person who is living it”. Therefore, “the phenomenological tradition places great emphasis on people’s perception and their interpretation of their own experience. For the phenomenologist, an individual’s story is more important, and more authoritative, than any research hypothesis or communication axiom” (Griffin, 2012:45).

The cybernetic tradition regards communication as the link connecting the separate parts of any system. Cybernetics is “the study of information processing, feedback, and control in communication systems” (Griffin, 2012:39). Norbert Wiener referred to cybernetics to describe the field of artificial intelligence. Theorists in the cybernetic tradition seek to answer such question as how does the system work and how could it be changed. Cybernetic explains “how all kinds of complex systems, whether living or non-living, macro or micro, are able to function, and why they often malfunction” (Craig, 1999:142). Therefore, cybernetics encourages communication theorists to look at communication process from a broader, systematic viewpoint (Craig, 1999:142).

From the “Frankfurt School”, stems the critical tradition. For critical theorists, communication is a reflective challenge of unjust discourse. The essence or end goal of critical approaches is to emancipate society from conditions that perpetuates unjust power

relations (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009:659). Communication conceived in a critical approach explains how social justice is perpetuated by ideology distortion and how justice can potentially be restored through communication practices that enable critical reflection or consciousness (Craig, 1999:147). The critical approach is often condemned for politicising science and coercing normative standard for communication based on a predetermined (piori) ideology (Craig, 1999:149).

The rhetorical tradition emerged from writings of Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero just to mention a few. Rhetoric “is the art of using all available means of persuasion, focusing upon lines of argument, organisation of ideas, language use, and delivery in public speaking” (Griffin, 2012:40-41). Rhetoric is the discovery of all available means of persuasion. According to Craig (1999:135), rhetoric is useful for “explaining why our participation in discourse, especially public discourse is important, how it occurs, and hold forth the possibility that the practice of communication can be cultivated and improved through critical study and education”. Thus, rhetoric best thinks of communication as a practice. The present study adopts both the rhetorical and the cybernetic tradition to form a cybernetic-rhetorical approach to government communication theory and research. As mentioned, this chapter is divided into three parts, each presenting government communication from a particular perspective; the first part (part 1) discusses government communication from a political communication approach. This discussion follows next.

3.4 PART ONE: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN A POLITICAL COMMUNICATION & PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRATIC APPROACH

Part one (1) explores government communication from a political communication approach. Political communication is recognised as the foundation of most studies in government communication. The field of political communication investigates the role of communication in the facilitation of democracy. In this section, government communication is defined and an argument is presented that a multifaceted theoretical approach is best able to unravel the nuances of government communication as a field of study.

3.4.1 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION FROM A PARTICIPATORY DEMOCRATIC PERSPECTIVE

Communication is in theory a fundamental prerequisite for democracy and it is in practice inseparable from how government operates. According to Young (2008), communication is a dimension of every action or decision a government takes, from the way in which policies are made, promoted and enacted, to how government is organised and relationships are built with citizens. The democratic theory emphasises the value of communication between the governors and the governed. In practice, governing involves constant exchange of information and communication about policies, ideas, and decisions between the governors and the governed (Heinze, Schneider & Ferie, 2013:370). Accordingly, the democratic theory recognises the prominence of studies in government communication.

Theoretical accounts that prescribe or suggest what ought to be (ideals) are called normative models. For an adequate comprehension of contemporary political communication, one must begin first with ideals. In classical direct democracy, citizens ruled. “In the 5th century BC., an assembly with a quorum of 6,000 Athenians met over 40 times each year, discussing, debating, and making policy on taxes, foreign alliances, and declaration of war” (Perloff, 2014:11). Citizens were expected to participate in politics (largely to the exclusion of women and slaves). Thus, rhetoric was essential in the deliberative and dialogic process within the classical democracy model.

Liberal democratic theories later came to the fore. Liberal democratic approaches emphasised that an individual should be allowed freedom of speech, press, religion, and economics (Perloff, 2014:12). It was later noted that society had become too large and impractical for all citizens to participate. This was a recognition that Athenian notion of direct democracy was cumbersome in mass society. Representative democracy was advocated, in which through an election process, all citizens would elect others to represent them in determining government policy and related matters of public affairs. In this, communication was deemed fundamental to the enactment of liberal democracy. Liberal democracy theorists advocate for a “free, competitive press, in which a thousand flowers, roses and daisies, but also weeds and underbrush – bloom” in the marketplace of ideas (Perloff, 2014:12).

In Perloff's words, deliberative democracy is now the newest intellectual kid in the democracy block (2014:13). Deliberative democracy calls for the reinvigoration of the public sphere wherein all citizens could participate for the greater social good. Deliberative democrats take issue with liberal democratic theories, particularly against the notion of a free marketplace of ideas. To this, deliberative democrats note that "voters are not mere consumers choosing among different political brands, but citizens whose thoughtful participation in politics serves as the foundation for democratic government" (Perloff, 2014:13).

Perloff (2014:15) identifies five primary characteristics of a vibrant democracy: (1) the right of all adult citizens to vote and run for office; (2) free, fair elections that involve competition between more than one political party; (3) individual liberty and freedom of expression, including for those who oppose the party in power; (4) a civil society characterised by the right to form associations, such as parties and interest groups, that attempts to shape the agenda and influence public policy; and (5) opportunities for reasoned deliberation on major national issues.

Berelson (1952:314-329) on the other hand, compiled a composite list outlining political requirements expected of electorates (citizens) in enacting democratic principles. Constituencies should exercise moral responsibility in their public choices. Political democracy requires interest and participation in public policy. The possession of information and knowledge is a requirement for public interest and participation because it arguably contributes to the wisdom of decisions making (Berelson, 1952:318). In addition, citizens are recommended to engage in public discussions, and that they judge rationally and consider the common good in the community interest.

It is fundamental citizens' rights to know the functions and performances of their governments. Citizens need to understand the policies, laws and regulations pursued and enforced by their government. In addition, they seek knowledge of programmes implemented, an awareness of international agreements, and details on government budgets (Edes, 2000:456). Transparency increases the accountability of government and

assists citizens in evaluating and forming opinions about issues pertaining to public policies that affect their lives (Fairbanks, *et al.*, 2007:24).

McNair (2011:20) maintains, “Democracy presumes an open state in which people are allowed to participate in decision-making, and are given access to the media, and other information networks through which advocacy occurs”. In democracy, citizens are supposed to be provided sufficient information and education enabling them to make rational decisions regarding their public opinion and other political activities. Representative democracy depends on voting which in turn depends on an informed electorate. “Democracy was real, in other words, only when it involved the participation of an informed, rational electorate” (McNair, 2011:16). However, this democratic ideal is not always attained.

The declining public interest in politics, heightened cynicism about politics, politicians, and government suggest that there is a crisis in democracy and its legitimacy. Consequently, citizens are retreating from political affairs. Young (2008) postulates that “the poor quality of government communication has been identified as one of many possible causes of this ‘crisis’ amid concerns that government ‘spin’ or communication that is evasive, glib or false is undermining trust between citizens and their representative”. The failure in education, that is, the failure of the media to produce rational electorate is also a contributing factor to an apathetical electorate who neither understands nor see any value in public participation. When those who have the right to vote decline to do so, democracy is clearly less than perfect (McNair, 2011:21).

The field of communication has always been cognisant of the relationship between public opinion research (communication) and democratic theory. Berelson (1952:314) made a call for a corroborated theoretical framework between the two disciplines advancing that the connection would strengthen and eliminate the deficit of each side. Such a “closer collaboration of political theorists and opinion researchers (*communication theorists*) should contribute new problems, new categories, and greater refinement and elaboration to both sides” (Berelson, 1952:314). An alliance between communication theorists and public administration theorists can be considered beneficial to democracy.

In summary, “there can be no doubt that communication, in all its forms and channels plays a major role in how democratic systems are formed, in how they govern, and how their public respond”. For this reason, political communication theory and research must therefore retain a preeminent place in communication studies (Kaid, 1996:453). Political communication theories provide the foundational theoretical grounding and tools for understanding government communication. For that matter, they predominantly influence the study of government communication, as they are the grand ancestors of the field.

3.4.2 POLITICAL COMMUNICATION

Political communication traces its pedigree to the earliest formal studies of communication, taking into account scholars such as Plato and Aristotle who were interested in communication as it affected the political and legal institutions of the day (Kaid, 1996:443). Although no universal definition of the field has been advanced to date, political communication can be defined as “the study of the role of communication in political processes and institutions associated with electoral campaigning and governing” (Swanson, 2000:190 in Canel and Sanders, 2012:87). Chaffe (1975) perhaps offers the simplest definition that “political communication is the role of communication in the political process” (Kaid, 1996:443).

The question of power and its exertion is vital for political communication scholarship (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009:757). Littlejohn and Foss (2009) refer to the power of political actors in their ability to obtain, preserve, and exercise authority in public policy. The power of the citizens on the other hand stems from knowledge and willingness to engage in political processes. Positioned amidst the power of political actors and voters, lays the power of the media to transfer political messages. Further recognised is the power of political communicators in their attempts to persuade the public by selecting persuasive messages in their interaction with both voters and the media (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009:757).

Kaid (1996:443) identifies four basic perspectives guiding most political communication research. Those are (a) rhetorical, critical, and interpretative approaches, (b) effects research, (c) agenda- setting theory, and (d) the uses and gratifications approach. Political

communication researchers within the rhetorical, critical, and interpretative approach focus primarily on the source and message aspect of the political communication process. Herein, researchers seek common themes in political messages, analyse political speeches, analyse the underlying motives of speakers, and ferret out strategies and techniques of communication devices (Kaid, 1996:443). Many various types of rhetorical studies share an interpretive philosophy. This present study is demarcated within the rhetorical interpretive approach as it seeks to analyse the organisational structures, communication practices, roles, and purposes of communication management in provincial government departments.

Political communication researchers within the effect approach are naturally preoccupied with the effects of political messages. As the political communication field became more concerned with modern communication techniques and messages carried through the mass media, issues of effects rose to the fore in seeking answers to political communication outcomes. The traditional theories mass media effect such as the limited effect model, the hypodermic needle, the bullet theory, the two-step theory, and the spiral of silence theory became useful in analysing voters' behaviour and effects on political advertising.

Agenda setting research tradition espouses the notion, based on Cohen's (1963) assertion that "the media do not tell us what to think but what to think about". To prove this theory, McCombs and Shaw (1972) presented confirmation that the agenda of issues communicated by the media became equally salient to voters (Kaid, 1996:447; McCombs, Shaw & Weaver, 1997). Likewise, Hiebert (2003) confirmed the use of public relations and propaganda in framing the Iraq war. Agenda setting, framing, and priming rejuvenated the media effect tradition and are now essential elements of political communication research (Littlejohn & Foss, 2009:757).

The uses and gratifications perspective focuses on active audiences or active voters. "Unlike the passive audience myth of early direct-effects research, uses and gratification research posits that audience members have expectations about communication they receive, resulting in gratifications that are sought and received- or avoided" (Kaid,

1996:447). For political communications, this means that different types of political messages perform different types of functions for voters. This insinuates that political communication audiences (citizens) have the capacity to engage with, and utilise political messages as they see fit.

All four political communication traditions discussed above are predominately information-diffusion process based models. Scholars such as Kaid (1996:443), Swanson and Nimmo (1990:9) and Young (2008) lament the preoccupation of political communication as studied and theorised from a political campaign or public opinion influence perspective. According to Swanson and Nimmo (1990:9), “the field’s centre or mainstream continues to be devoted to studying the strategic uses of communication to influence public knowledge, beliefs, and action on political matters and to regard the political campaign as the paradigmatic instance of the subject”. Young (2008) adds that such a predominant focus on elections distorts the purpose of political communication scholarship and the nature of its day-to-day practice. In confirmation, Heinze *et al.* (2013:371) similarly acknowledge that most of political communication literature is predominantly media-centric. In resolution, scholars call for a broader interpretation of political communication moving beyond voter persuasion paradigms.

On the brighter side, the field of political communication has grown dramatically in the past few decades. Great strides are discernible as theoretical perspectives, major areas of inquiry; research methods and techniques are maturing and diversifying (Kaid, 1996:451-2). The field of political communication has contributed immensely to the study of government communication. Political communication scholars have explored government communication issues from a variety of perspectives such as “rhetorical analysis of political discourse, propaganda studies, voting studies, mass media effect and the interplay of influence between government, press and public opinion” (Canel & Sanders, 2013). Government communication as a subset of the political communication field is discussed further below.

3.4.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

As government modes shift towards consultative, transparent, and collaborative governance, government communication is becoming a large industry in many countries. With that said, what exactly is government communication?

According to Canel and Sanders (2010), government communication refers to the aims, roles and practices of communication implemented by public relations officers in the service of a political rationale. Canel and Sanders (2013) later amended their definition to read: “*Government communication is the role, practice, aim and achievements of communication as it takes place in and on behalf of public institution(s) whose primary end is executive in the service of a political rationale, and that are constituted on the basis of the people’s indirect and direct consent and charged to enact their will*”. This second definition will take effect in this study because it takes into account both conceptual (what it is) and functional (what it does) elements of government communication.

A definition of government communication varies from author to author (Howlett, Craft & Zibrik, 2010:13). According to Howlett (2009:24), there may be no sufficient definition to the term because government communication can be thought of as a generic name for a wide variety of specific types or categories of communication in and about government (Howlett, 2009:24). Cutlip, *et al.* (1985:579) concur, “the practice of public relations in government varies widely”. Consequently, these different foci make comparative cross-assessment and generalisation about trends, patterns, and structures of government communication virtually impossible (Howlett *et al.*, 2010:14).

A clear distinction between government communication and political communication is not absolute. Gelders and Ihlen (2009) demonstrate the fluidity and the complexity of the two concepts. Government communication functions for the benefit of the citizen. It is meant to remain balanced, concise, and non-partisan (Glenny, 2008:153). According to Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985:567), the justification for government communication management is ingrained in two premises. The first premise is that a democratic government is obligated to report to its citizens, and the second premise is that effective

administration requires citizen participation and voters' support. The intertwined relationship between political and government communication is worthy of further discussion, next.

3.4.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

Contrary to government communication, political communication refers to persuasive communication designed to uphold the objectives of a political party or a politician (Gelders & Ihlen, 2009:2). This definition seems conflicting to the one presented earlier which views political communication as the study of all communication that is political. According to this current definition, political communication is inherently persuasive and partisan. Therefore, the separation of government communication from political communication is ideal. However, in reality, it is impracticable for government communication to be completely apolitical (Glenny, 2008:153). Nonetheless, efforts must be made to formalise, professionalise, and depoliticise government communication (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:15).

Canel and Sanders (2012) chronologically traced the roots of government communication from its pedigree in political communication science. They argue that “despite its key importance for 21st century politics, the study of government communication is an under-researched area of political communication studies, finding itself in a kind of theoretical no-man’s land between political communication, public relations and organisational communication research” (Canel & Sanders, 2012:86). Political communication contributed immensely to government communication scholarship. For this purpose, political communication research identifies five key standpoints and methodological perspectives through which government communication can be approached. Those are briefly outlined below:

The *chief executive communication and rhetorical studies* perspective received the most significant attention from US political communication scholars. The focus here is on presidential political rhetoric, how political rhetoric shapes political reality, and its influence on audiences - as studied through methodologies from the humanities and social sciences.

The permanent campaign, political advertising, public diplomacy, and propaganda studies perspective marked the development of strategic government communication often called the permanent campaign. The techniques of election campaigns, gathering of intelligence (marketing), audience segmentation, message promotion, and rapid rebuttals became part of the relentless campaign machinery of government (Canel & Sanders, 2012:87; Young, 2008). Communication specialists are hired to facilitate campaigning communication functions.

The *propaganda studies* perspective is the dominant tradition used to analyse the manufacturing of consent by governments through the mass media. Hiebert's (2003) paper about public relations and propaganda in framing the Iraq war is a good example of propaganda studies in government communication research. Propaganda studies essentially evaluate the relationship between government, press, and public opinion. In this wave of political communication, government campaigns "seek to win, not engage". Hence, public relations, political advertising, and social marketing become essential during times of crisis, war, and terrorism in order to win warning public support.

New media relations and effects research are popular in government communication research. Because government communication takes place in a mediated environment, it is unsurprising that government-media relations preoccupy a significant area of scholarship in political communication. Research in this area focuses on the relationship between politicians and journalists and on the conflict that arise when politicians seek control of the newsroom, while journalists seek novelty and revelations from political realities (McNair, 2011). Related to this area are studies in e-government, e-democracy, and social media democracy. Such studies reflect the development of new media technologies and their contribution to government-citizen relations and to the permanent campaign (Canel & Sanders, 2012:88).

The *structure and organisation of government communication* is a new addition to government communication scholarship. This perspective predominately explores how government organise their communication. Research within this perspective evaluates the relationship between government and its citizens. This subfield of research often concerns

itself with organisational charts, roles, functions, and decision-making processes of government communication. The examinations of government communication management, practices, and structures fall under this section of research. Hence, this study demarcates itself within this perspective of government communication research.

Much is written about government communication from a practical application standpoint. However, literature is still lacking on the theorising of government communication. For instance, Canel and Sanders (2012:89) lament the actuality that “critical analysis of baseline issues for the field or for modelling government communication to lay the foundation for comparative study going beyond the mainly descriptive has yet to be carried out”. This present study proposes a multifaceted theoretical approach in the theorising of government communication. This proposal is substantiated in the following section.

3.5 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN A MULTIFACETED THEORETICAL APPROACH

The study of government communication requires a multifaceted theoretical approach because it is positioned at the crossroads of research traditions in political communication, public opinion and other cognate fields such as public relations, corporate communication, political marketing, and strategic communication (Canel and Sanders, 2013).

Political communication literature provides two indispensable theoretical standpoints from which government communication research can be approached. First, is an “emphasis on the exploration of and sensitivity to institutional and social contexts” (communication context) and second is the normative concern of how communication can better serve democratic processes. These contributions are essential to the theorising of government communication. The limitation with the political communication framework, however, is with regard to its failure to challenge the intellectual pessimism that “government communication is seen simply as a way to gain votes” (Canel & Sanders, 2013).

Rensburg (2007) along with Canel and Sanders (2012:89) suggest that political communication scholarship could establish a vintage point for academic innovation by

exploring work carried out by cognate fields of organisational communication and public relations. Communication management and organisational communication scholars can offer a fresh conceptual approach to issues concerning government communication (Rensburg, 2007). However, there is very little research examining government communication or communication management in the public sector from an organisational communication perspective (Canel & Sanders, 2012; Canel & Sanders, 2013; Likely 2013; Liu, *et al.*, 2012).

Canel and Sanders, (2012) identify three themes where public relations and organisational communication management may contribute invaluablely to the understanding and the improvement of government communication research and practices: The first area identified is *symmetrical relationships* and mutuality which is seen as essential for understanding government inter-relationships with a complex network of stakeholders. The second area is on appraising the principle of *professionalisation* in government communication. Scholarship in communication management entails many benchmarks in which effectiveness, professionalisation and communication practices are measured and evaluated (Canel & Sanders, 2012). The third area of contribution is with reference to the concept of *reputation* in government. Concepts such as corporate identity, branding, and reputation have emerged as essential to government communication and have proved invaluable to the perceived success of government as a whole. To encapsulate, the organisational communication management theoretical perspective therefore introduces into political communication the notion of *relationship management, professionalisation and reputation management* (Canel & Sanders, 2013).

The application of the organisational communication management theoretical framework into the study of government communication implies that: first, the scope of government communication should go beyond media relations to include other activities such as reputation, stakeholder, and issue management. Secondly, relationship management requires a strategic communication approach. Thirdly, the effectiveness question becomes relevant in appraising the contributions of government communication to the achievement of organisational goals - how does government communication make government effective? An analysis of government communication from a strategic approach implies

effectiveness on the exploration of the extent to which government communication contributes to shared decision-making process with the public or citizens thereby upholding the principle of representative democracy (Canel & Sanders, 2013). The concept of *effectiveness* in communication management is dealt with in chapter 4.

In summary, part one of this chapter discussed the essence of communication in the enactment of the ideals of democracy. For this purpose, the field of political communication was explored as a theoretical foundation of government communication. In this, the rhetorical, critical, and interpretative approach was elected the foundation of the present study. This approach is primarily concerned with the source and message aspect of political communication. Hence, the approach is considered relevant and appropriate to the analyses of organisational structures, communication practices, roles, and purposes of government communication in provincial government departments.

This study presents the argument that a multifaceted theoretical approach is best able to holistically evaluate and explain the nature of government communication. Within this holistic approach, the study is further delimited to the *(organisational) communication management approach*. Part two (2) presents a theoretically grounded discussion concerning the relevance of the (organisational) communication management approach towards the study and the theorising of government communication. This approach is henceforth referred to as communication management.

3.6 PART TWO: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN AN ORGANISATIONAL COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT APPROACH

Part 2 of the chapter explores government communication from a management communication approach. This is within the organisational communication framework. Organisational communication is “the study of the flow and impact of messages with a network of interactional relationships” (Vasu *et al.*, 1990:145). In any organisation, communication is critical to effective management ((Vasu *et al.*, 1990:144). “Of all the problems that beset organisations and bedevil administrators, few are more pervasive and continuous than those which involve communication” (Higsaw & Bowen, 1965:5). Within

organisations, communication is the foundation of control and coordination (Vasu *et al.*, 1990:156). It determines the structure, scope, and extensiveness of organisations. Therefore, effective communication is a prime factor in achieving organisational effectiveness (Vasu *et al.*, 1990:145). However, in public administration and public management, communication as a phenomenon is not well-understood (Vasu, Stewart & Garson, 1990:145).

The premise is that government departments are in fact organisations that must orchestrate and manage communication with their stakeholders. This section defines the concept of communication management, identifies levels of communication management, and introduces the function of communication management in the public sector. Within the stakeholder management concept, citizens are identified as external stakeholders. In addition, Part 2 discusses the excellence theory and its contribution to the study of government communication.

3.6.1 PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Edward Bernays (1955:3) defines public relations as an “attempt, by information, persuasion, and adjustment, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement, or institution”. Bernays connotes public relations as a practice predominated by persuasion and the manufacturing of consent. Grunig (1992:23) on the other hand defines public relations as “the management of communication between an organisation and its publics”. This definition reconceptualises public relations as a strategic management function. Accordingly, Hutton (1999:208) defines public relations as the process of “managing strategic relationships” which also denotes public relations as a management function (Hutton 1999:208).

Another definition provided by Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2009:4) is that public relations is a management function that maintains an organisation’s relationships with society in a way that most effectively achieves organisational goals. One comprehensive definition offered by the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA) inscribes that “public relations is the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain

mutual understanding between the organisation and its various publics, both internal and external” (Rensburg & Cant, 2003:36).

Within the African discourse, the term public relations is more used and accepted than ‘communication management’ (Rensburg, 2007). Seitel (1984:4) once said, “The field (of public relations) is still plagued by misrepresentations of what it’s all about. More often than not, the public’s perception is that public relations is aimed *at* and not *for* them; that they are the object of public relations, not the beneficiaries” (Seitel, 1984:4). The term public relations has been under siege, it’s been challenged from both inside and outside the profession - with many preferring a change of terminology in order to avert negative connotations. Public relations is now reincarnated into various euphemism terminologies such as: corporate communication, public information, public affairs, communication management and many more (Gregory, 2009:20). As public relations has evolved from ‘the public be fooled’, to ‘the public be damned’, to ‘the public be manipulated’, to ‘the public be informed’ (Seitel, 1984), and now, to the ‘public be accommodated’; the term communication management has come to be preferred in order to reflect the maturity of the profession, both theoretically and practically.

Communication management is more of an inclusive term encompassing a variety of communication modalities such as public relations, organisational communication, business communication, corporate communication, and to a lesser extent, marketing communication (Shelby, 1993:254). Adopting such a definition allows the flexibility of the study to investigate additional aspects of government communication that are paramount but perhaps fall outside the parameters of public relations. However, in this study, the term, ‘public relations’ is used synonymously with ‘communication management’ because some scholars still refer to public relations as to reflect the heritage from which communication management was founded. Hence, although the term public relations, communication management, and government communication are used interchangeably in this document, an understanding of the nuances among these definitions and their uses is still recommended. The following section introduces the function of communication management in the context of the public sector (in government).

3.6.2 COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Public relations is based on the proposition that in modern democracy, every organisation survives ultimately only by public consent (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:308). Heightened media scrutiny, increasing citizen's intolerance to unethical conduct and rising power of advocacy movements have increased the pressure for governments to respond to the relentless cry for transparency (Edes, 2000:456; Fairbanks, Plowman & Rawlins, 2007:24). Furthermore, as citizens become more accustomed to accessing unlimited and uncensored information from the internet, they come to expect the same kind of transparency from their government (Edes, 2000:456).

Stromback and Kiousis (2011:8) offered a definition of political public relations which they conceptualise as “the management process by which an organisation or individual actor for political purposes, through purposeful communication and action, seeks to influence and to establish, build, and maintain beneficial relationships and reputations with its key publics to help support its mission and achieve its goals” (Canel & Sanders, 2013).

As in any organisation, government public relations, here referred to as government communication, is viewed as a management function that defines objectives and philosophies whilst assisting organisations to adapt to their environment and its constituencies (Theaker, 2004:218). Still like corporate public relations, government communication must be rendered to all relevant internal and external stakeholders (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:36). It is through public relations that government explains the services rendered and how to access and utilise them (Theaker, 2004:219).

Communication management (public relations) is fundamental to government, especially since the success and stability of democratic governments are ultimately determined by continuous public approval (Fairbanks, *et al.*, 2007:24). Through public relations, governments are able to secure this approval. Government communicators must develop, execute, and evaluate programmes that promote mutual understanding between the government and its publics (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:308). Hence, citizens are critical stakeholders for government.

3.6.3 STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

Stakeholders consist of any group that affects and is affected by the operations, policies and proceedings of the organisation, and whose support is needed by the organisation (Luoma-aho, 2008:447). Through stakeholder management, organisations can recognise, analyse, and examine the interests and concerns of groups who may influence and are relatively influenced by the organisation (Mainardes, Alves & Raposo, 2011:230). Stakeholders can be internal or external. External stakeholders are not directly associated with the internal operation of the organisation, but may affect and be affected by the functions of the organisation. The present study centres on citizens as external stakeholders of government departments. This position is not withstanding of the acknowledgement that government has many other equally important external stakeholders.

According to Grunig (1992:22), “Organisations, like people must communicate with others because they do not exist alone in the world”. Organisations need communication management and public relations because they have relationships with publics. Communication management is about reinforcing mutual understanding. Organisations that communicate well with their publics know what to expect from those publics (Grunig, 1992:22). Mass communication implies that communication professionals assist organisations to communicate well with a larger heterogeneous and unidentified mass, often referred to as the general public. The concept of the general public however is a misnomer because according to Grunig, “a general public actually is contradictory because publics *only* arise around shared problems or concerns. Therefore, a public always is specific and cannot be general”.

Steyn (2004) also makes the distinction between ‘stakeholders and ‘publics’. Following Grunig’s ‘theory of the public’, Steyn (2004) points out that individuals and groups only become organisational stakeholders when they are affected and could affect the organisation. At the stakeholders’ level, they are largely passive. They become *aware* publics as they recognise how affected they are by the organisation’s activities. They only become *active* publics when they seek out resolutions to potential issues affecting them.

Although the theoretical distinctions have been noted between the concept of stakeholders and publics, for simplicity reasons, the two concepts will be used interchangeably. For government communication, citizens as external stakeholders are the key recipients of public relations' messages. The notion of citizens as external stakeholders is discussed next.

3.6.4 CITIZENS AS EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

At the heart of government communication debates and theories is usually an interest in citizens, that is “the extent to which citizens are included or excluded, listened to or ignored, informed or misinformed” (Young, 2008). It is noteworthy that “citizens are a cacophonous combination of the politically engaged and opinionated, along with the indifferent and woefully ignorant” (Perloff, 2014:34). The concept of stakeholder management is rather new in public sector dialogue (Luoma-aho, 2008:447). The concept of the public is relevant for government communication because citizens in a democracy are expected, and most increasingly do participate and communicate back to government. According to Grunig (2007), the concept of the public captures the application of symmetric communication between the government department and its various publics.

Communication management is concerned with the construction of relationships between organisations and their publics. Within the stakeholder management parameter, the public is not seen as an impartial and passive spectator of an organisation's communication. Although, this approach is not yet evidently present in political communication scholarship, communication management is gradually contributing to the understanding of symmetrical relationships and mutuality between the government and its many stakeholders, especially the citizens (Canel & Sanders, 2012:90).

The symmetrical perspective places an implicit value on relationship management going beyond the achievement of organisational goals. The goal here is mutual understanding, mutual benefit, win-win, and mixed motivated communication. Grunig's symmetrical/excellent model of communication management and ethical public relations may prove useful in improving government communication. Within this new perspective,

the understanding of the public is fundamentally altered and “government communication is conceived as the cultivation of long-term relationships oriented to mutual understanding” (Canel & Sanders, 2012:90).

Government communication practitioners have begun borrowing segmentation techniques from marketing research, such as demographics, psychographics, geo-graphics, and VALS (value and life-styles) in order to segment citizens into specific groups of publics. It is essential for government communicators to note that organisations may “create their own markets by covering up a population into the segments most likely to consume their products and services. Publics in contrast, organise around problems and seek out organisations that create these problems” (Grunig, 2007:28). Thus, government communication should be aiming at communicating with citizens as both markets and publics. For this to be possible, government communication must be proactive in seeking out ‘markets’ and reactive in attending to the initiatives of the ‘publics’. Communication management in itself is categorised into various areas of organisational activities. Such demarcations are discussed next.

3.6.5 LEVELS OF COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Grunig (2007:23) marks a distinction between three layers of public relations abstraction, namely, the micro, meso and macro levels of abstraction. In order to contribute to organisational effectiveness, communication management has to be practiced at the macro (strategic/societal/environment) level (*the strategist role*); the meso (functional/divisional) level (*the manager role*); and the micro (implementation/operation) level (*the technician role*) (de Beer, Steyn and Rensburg, 2013:208).

The micro level refers to the planning and evaluation of individual public relations programmes. The meso level refers to how public relations departments are organised and managed. The macro level refers to explanations regarding the connection between communication management and organisational effectiveness. Included in the macro level of analysis is the critical evaluation of the role of public relations in society. This particular research investigating communication management practices of government departments

in KwaZulu Natal therefore evaluates government communication at a meso level of abstraction. The research analyses how communication units within government departments are organised, managed and how they operate. For that reason, this research does not investigate the operations of individual communication programmes of each communication unit (micro) and most certainly falls short of evaluating the impacts of government communication into the overall democratic culture of the South African society (macro). However, the study is also concerned with the impacts of government communication on the effectiveness of the government department (macro). Each level of abstraction is explored further in the section that follows.

3.6.5.1 The micro (programme) level

The micro level of analysis is much more popular in public relations research and in government communication scholarship because it deals with the greatest concern of public relations and government communication. Primarily, practitioners and theorists alike are more concerned with evaluating the success of communication programmes and campaigns (impact and effectiveness research). For that reason, the two areas of effect research that have attracted public relations theorists concern “the effects of the media and the effects of persuasive messages on attitudes and behaviours” (Grunig, 2007:25). Grunig (2007:25) claims that “most of the research studying the effects of individual messages, campaigns, or the mass media still cling on the idea that communication must persuade (change attitudes and behaviours) in order to be effective”. Research on the micro level of government communication helps conceptualise the planning and evaluation of government communication programmes, messages and campaigns.

3.6.5.2 The meso (departmental) level

It is impossible to study public relations at a meso level and yet neglect the models of public relations and a thorough discussion of public relations’ roles. With regard to models of public relations, the two-way symmetrical model is considered the most effective of all four models. The two-way symmetrical can be used alone or in conjunction with the two-way asymmetrical model. The press agency model and the public information model conceptualise of public relations as a monologue (Grunig, 2007:40). The press agency

model describes public relations as solely engaged in attracting favourable publicity for an organisation or a government department in this case.

Like the press agency, the public information model too is a one-way flow of communication. The public information model values public relations purely for the purpose of information diffusion. Herein, the practitioners (government communicators) work as 'journalists-in-residence'. These are "public relations practitioners who act as journalists to disseminate relatively truthful information through the mass media and controlled media such as newsletters, brochures, and direct mail" (Grunig, 2007:41). Both the press-agency and the public information models are not based on research and strategic planning. Public information practitioners are generally technicians than managers as they seldom provide strategic counsel to top management (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998:219). The press agency and the public information model are asymmetrical models, meaning they attempt to change the perceptions and behaviours of the external environment and key stakeholders without changing those of the organisation itself. Grunig, (2007:41) is of the opinion that asymmetrical communication make(s) the organisation look good either through promotional type (press agency) or by disseminating only favourable information (public information).

3.6.5.3 The macro (organisational) level

The organisational level is concerned with "understanding of and respect given to, communications processes and audience feedback by the organisation and its staff" (Tench & Yeomans, 2009:150). On the macro level, some scholars have adopted the power-control perspective to explain that communication departments without power do not and cannot practice strategic communication management. Lack of power therefore seems to explain why few public relations programmes are excellent (Grunig, 2007:46). This brings into question the issue of excellence and effectiveness in communication management. How is government communication to be structured, managed, and practiced for it to contribute to excellence and effectiveness? The principle of excellence is discussed in the next section while the principle of effectiveness is explored in chapter 4.

3.7 THE EXCELLENCE AND EFFECTIVENESS THEORY IN COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Strategic communication is strongly linked to the issue of effectiveness and excellence in public relations and communication management. No discussion or research concerning communication practices is complete without a review of standards or benchmarks regarding excellence and effectiveness in the practice therein. The International Association of Business Communication (IABC) commissioned a study to discern the essence of communication management. The IABC study was originally concerned with what is called the ‘effectiveness question’ regarding “*how, why and to what extent does communication contribute to the achievement of organisational objectives*”?

It was realised during the research project that most organisations do not manage communication strategically and that most communication departments were not contributing to organisational effectiveness. Therefore, the excellence question was added into the equation. The excellence question was concerned with investigating: *how must public relations be practiced and how must the communication function be organised for it to contribute the most to organisational effectiveness?* The IABC study resulted in a theory of excellence and effectiveness in public relations. The theory has been called by different names such as the excellence theory, the symmetrical/asymmetrical theory, or the public relations effectiveness theory among others.

Grunig (1992:16) defines excellent public relations departments as those that are managed strategically in order to maximise the contribution of communication management to organisational effectiveness. The excellence theory contends that excellence and effectiveness in communication management are achieved only by organisations that are symmetrical rather than those that are asymmetrical in their relations with the public. A symmetrical worldview conceive “public relations as a non-zero-sum game in which competing organisations or groups can both gain if they play the game right”, perhaps even fairly (Grunig, 2002:9). The symmetrical approach recommends that public relations should be practiced to serve the public interest, to develop mutual understanding between organisations and their publics, and to contribute to informed debate about issues in society. Consequently, symmetrical public relations is considered

more ethical and more socially responsible than the asymmetrical one which presupposes that organisations can achieve powerful self-interest effects with communication.

The public relations excellence theory attempts to describe, explain, and predict the nature of effective organisational communication, types of excellence public relations departments, and the contribution that excellent communication makes towards the success of the organisation.

With regard to the IABC excellence project, a set of independent variables (characteristics of public relations) including a set of dependent variables (indicative of organisational effectiveness) are logically identified and empirically related to each other. These independent and dependent variables are described in table 5 (Grunig, 2007:37). Table 5 describes all the characteristics of the public relations excellence theory. Within the table, the meso-level is identified inclusive of the micro-level characteristics regarding individual communication programmes within the department. Incorporated in the table is the relationship between communication management and strategic management, and the conditions of excellent communication that contributes to organisational effectiveness (macro). Each of these variables is discussed next. However, for ease of narration and depiction of relations between variables, the numbering of the discussion will not necessarily correlate with the numbering in the table

Table 5: Principles of the excellence theory

<i>Characteristics of Excellent Public Relations Programs</i>	
i.	Program level
1.	Managed strategically
ii.	Departmental Level
2.	A single or integrated public relations department
3.	Separate function from marketing
4.	Direct reporting relationship to senior management
5.	Two-way symmetrical model
6.	Senior public relations person in the managerial role
7.	Potential for excellent public relations, as indicated by:
-	Knowledge of symmetrical model
-	Knowledge of managerial role

-
- Academic training in public relations
 - Professionalism
 - 8. Equal opportunity for men and women in public relations
 - iii. Organisational Level**
 - 9. Worldview for public relations in the organisation reflects the two-way symmetrical model
 - 10. Public relations director has power in or with the dominant coalition
 - 11. Participative rather than authoritarian organisational culture
 - 12. Symmetrical system of internal communication
 - 13. Organic rather than mechanical organisational structure
 - 14. Turbulent, complex environment with pressure from activist groups
-

Source: Grunig, 1992:28

The excellence theory typology identifies fourteen (14) key assumptions regarding the features of an excellent communication management department: Strategic management is the interlink that integrates excellence and effectiveness in communication management (1). “Excellent public relations departments contribute to decisions made by the dominant coalition of senior management by providing information to that coalition about the environment of the organisation, about the organisation itself, and about the relationship between the organisation and the environment. Empowerment or access to the dominant coalition can be measured by (a) being part of the dominant coalition or (b) having a direct reporting line to senior management (Likely, 2013) (2). That means, excellent communication departments engage in environmental scanning (3). The assumption is that organisations with high environmental turbulences are more likely to engage more in environmental scanning which often leads to excellent communication management practices (4).

Public relations must be a management function if it is to contribute excellently to organisational effectiveness (5). For this to be possible, excellent communication department must have access to the dominant coalition (6). Excellent public relations departments should therefore be structured in an open-system located in an organisational structure with ease access to the managerial subsystem and must integrate all public relations functions in a single department (7). However, excellent public relations departments will be separate from other functions such as marketing departments whereas less excellent ones will be subliminal to marketing. When such sublimation happens, public relations is usually relegated to technical roles (8). Excellent public

relations departments model more of their communication programmes to reflect the two-way symmetrical than the other three (two-way asymmetrical, public information and press-agentry) (9).

Excellent communication departments strategically manage public relations at the programme level by developing programmes to communicate with internal and external publics in a manner that averts threats and maximise opportunities (10). For this purpose, excellent public relations departments choose and plan communication systems that minimise conflict and maximise cooperation between an organisation and its strategic public (11).

Excellent communication departments will employ professionals who have specialised body of knowledge in the field (12). This assumes the role of education in the professionalization of communication management. The excellence theory purports that knowledge to enact the management function role is a strong determinant of excellence in communication management (Clemons, 2009). In addition, diversity is essential for excellent communication management. Likely (2013) defines diversity as “the inclusion of both men and women in all roles, as well as practitioners of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds”. Such excellent departments will have women in communication management roles and also implement mechanisms to assist more women in assuming management roles (13). Most importantly, excellent public relations does not exist in isolation, it is a characteristic of an excellent organisation (14). For this reason, “the characteristics of excellence in the organisation as a whole provide the condition that make excellent public relation possible” (Grunig, 1992:19).

On the macro level of public relations and communication management research, some scholars have adopted the power-control perspective where they argue that “organisations behave as they do because the people with the most power- the dominant coalition choose to do so” (Grunig, 2007:46). The power-control issue is essential in understanding communication management within organisations in general, particularly bureaucratic ones like government departments (Grunig, 2007:46). According to this perspective,

communication management cannot be effective unless the most senior communication manager retains power to affect organisational decisions either formally or informally.

Communication departments without power do not and cannot practice strategic communication management. “Lack of power therefore seems to explain why few public relations programmes are excellent” (Grunig, 2007:46). The power-control theory clarifies why organisations practice public relations in the way that they do. The power-control theory is concerned with how the dominant coalitions choose to enact the communication management function based upon their understanding, ideology, and worldview concerning the proper function of communication within an organisation (Grunig, 1992:23).

Proponents of the excellence and effectiveness theory generally uphold the *idealistic social role* towards communication management, which sees public relations a mechanism by which organisations and publics interact in a pluralistic system to manage their interdependence and conflict (Grunig, 1992:9). The excellence theory also reinforces a *critical social role* based on the premise that public relations scholars and practitioners can and should criticise public relations for poor ethics, negative social consequences, ineffectiveness, and they should suggest changes to resolve those shortcomings (Grunig, 2002:10). The following section reviews the incorporation of the excellence theory in government communication practice and research.

3.7.1 EXCELLENCE IN STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The excellence theory has been replicated and applied to many studies of corporate communication in the private sector. There are a small number of studies that have applied the excellence theory in the government communication sector (for example Grunig & Jaatine, 1999; Killingsworth, 2009; Likely 2013). However, in overall, research in this area has been lacking. When examining the difference in excellence by types of organisations, Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, (2002:86) in Clemons (2009:7) and in Likely (2013:70) found that:

The senior public relations person in government agencies is more likely to report being in a technician or media relations role than in other types of organisations – especially in comparison to corporations. However, he or she is about average for the managerial role, participation in strategic management, and being in the dominant coalition. Such a combination of roles suggests that the historical public information or public affairs definition lives on in government – of disseminating information to the general population directly or through the media. At the same time, the data suggest that the government agencies are moving towards a more managerial and strategic role...government agencies seem to be moving towards a strategic, managerial and symmetrical role, but they are not quite there yet.

Likely (2013:70) evaluated if the excellence theory is applicable to contemporary practices of government communication. In this, five generic principles were tested in order to determine whether government communication in the Canadian Federal Government has moved positively *‘towards a strategic, managerial and symmetrical tone* (Likely, 2013:70). The study focused on five of Grunig’s principles evaluating whether the communication department has/is: (1) access to the dominant coalition, (2) separation from other functions, (3) integration into one function, (4) considered a management function, (5) diversity is embodied in all roles. Likely’s (2013) study demonstrated the applicability of the excellence theory as a measure of strategic communication management. In all five counts, the sampled Canadian government departments portrayed a move towards strategic communication management in obligation to the identified excellence principles.

Killingsworth’s (2009) research was from the communicators perspective conducted through small-scale interviews of a single local government department in Western Canada. This study also explored the values and practice of excellent communication management based on the principles of excellent theory. The research evaluates three elements: starting with how and to what extent do the executive managers and politicians value communication. Killingsworth (2009:62) found that the perception and value of communication varies according on the individual and his experiences and expertise in communications as a profession. Communication managers were not part of the dominate coalition and lacked representation in the day-to-day management of the department (Killingsworth, 2009:71). Killingsworth (2009:71) argues, “Communications is respected at a technical level, but many of the executive and managers do not see communication as having any possible influence on the decision making or strategy level of the organisation”.

The second question related to how must public relations be practiced and organised for it to contribute to effectiveness. In this, Killingsworth (2009) noted a significant shift towards a two-way form of communication with the adoption of call centres and social media. The third question was on how and to what extent government uses evaluation research to demonstrate the benefit of effective performance? To this question, Killingsworth (2009) found that the department used a number of methods to measure satisfaction around communication tools and tactics and nothing on evaluating the contribution of communication to the effectiveness of the government and governance (organisational effectiveness).

Valentini's (2013) study of excellence in government communication aimed to examine whether public communication officers in Italy are involved in the strategic management of the public sector, and whether they manage their information and communication programmes strategically based on the excellence theory. Through a survey research, Valentini (2013) tested three elements of the excellence theory: (1) the empowerment of the communication management unit as measured by having a direct reporting line to the dominant coalition, (2) the existence of a two-way symmetrical model and (3) knowledge potential for managerial role. Valentini's (2013) findings revealed that most public communication officers in the Italy do not contribute to the strategic management of public sector and only limitedly managed communication strategically. A direct relationship between communication unit and the dominant coalition was acknowledged but most respondents still identified with technical roles and therefore contributed operationally rather than strategically. The finding confirmed that not only one public relation model is document in the Italian public sector, rather indicating that government communicators employed only certain aspects of each model where required (Valentini, 2013:109).

In terms of public relations models, Grunig and Jaatinen (1998:219) concluded that government departments were more likely to practice the public information model than other types of organisations. It was found that government organisations are more likely to practice one-way, information based communication because of a pluralistic view of government (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998; Valentini, 2013:97). This means that within the government sector, government communication is seen as a technical function essential

only to disseminate information and to handle media (Clemons, 2009:1). In consequence, the relegation of government communication into a technical function hinders government's ability to pursue mutually beneficial relationships with its citizens based on openness, trust and transparency (Clemons, 2009:1).

As governments improve along to proceeding levels of communication management, they are likely to advance to the two-way symmetrical model that serves the interests of both the department and its key stakeholders (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998:219). The two-way symmetrical is based on research. This makes the model less self-serving than the other three models since it is based on negotiation, compromise and mutual understanding. Moreover, in countries where government is based on a societal corporatist view, governments are most likely to practice strategic, two-way communication. This resonates with the principles of strategic government communication deliberated upon in chapter four.

The excellence theory has not been without criticism. For example, Roper (2005) criticised the symmetrical tradition contending that it was nothing more than a strategy to maintain hegemonic power relations. Roper (2005) alerted to the surreptitious self-interest inherent in the symmetrical approach wherein Grunig and White (1992:39) acknowledged that “the symmetrical model actually serves the self-interest of the organisation better than an asymmetrical model because organisations get more of what they want when they give up some of what they want”. Against this background, the symmetrical model and its “compromises in the long term favour the corporations much more than their critical stakeholders in civil society and can serve to dilute the negotiating power of those stakeholders. Negotiations of this nature are rarely, if ever, truly collaborative. Nor are they based on democratic principles of open debate regarding the public good... Can we legitimately call this ‘ethical’ public relations”?

Heath (1992) joined Crable and Vibbert (1998) Person (1989), Vasques (1996), and Coombs (1999) in the critique of the excellence theory. Instead, they proposed a rhetorically based approach to communication management. The centre of the critique is that the excellence theory is not a complete theory, it is preoccupied by processes, and it

is one amongst many equally worthy perspectives of communication management (Likely, 2013:74). Critics have argued that the excellence theory is “an idealistic model which misrepresents the reality of communication process in reality, where vested interest dictate the nature of PR practice and rarely encourage truly balanced communication process” (Tench & Yeomans, 2009:150). One need not look deeply to reveal a public relation model that features organisations as seeking to control the conditions of their future via symbolic action (Heath, 2011). The weakness of many contending theorists is that they did not provide systematic research to substantiate their premise.

In summary, part two (2) carries with it a theoretically grounded discussion on the relevance of the organisational communication management approach to better understanding and theorising on and about the nature of government communication along with its practices. Currently, the term ‘communication management’ is more used and accepted than the historic ‘public relations’. This term is preferred because it is able to reflect the holistic maturity of the profession, both theoretically and practically. In this study, the term, ‘public relations’ is used synonymously with ‘communication management’ for reasons already discussed. However, the nuances between these two terminologies are noted and recommended.

At the heart of government communication debates and theories is usually an interest in citizens with reference to the extent in which citizens are included or excluded, listened to or ignored, informed or misinformed. The citizens are critical stakeholders for government. For this reason, the present study centres on citizens as external stakeholders of government departments. This position is not withstanding the acknowledgement that government does have many other equally important external stakeholders.

Grunig (2007:23) marks a distinction between three layers of communication management: the micro (programme level), meso (departmental level) and macro (organisational) levels of abstraction. As this study investigates communication management practices of government departments in the KZN province, it therefore evaluates government communication at a meso (departmental) level.

In modern democracy, every organisation survives ultimately only by public consent. It is mainly through excellent and effective communication management that governments are able to secure this approval. With that said, what makes government communication excellent and effective? The excellence theory identifies 14 key assumptions regarding the features of an excellent and effective communication management department. These elements were discussed and tabulated in table 5. With criticism of the excellence theory acknowledged; the present study applies and evaluates all fourteen features presented as elements of the excellence theory.

Part three (3) of this theoretical chapter describes the critique of the excellence theory by a group of theorists who present an alternative view to communication management called a rhetorical approach. An attempt is made to apply the rhetorical approach towards the understanding of government communication.

3.8 PART THREE: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN AN ORGANISATIONAL RHETORICAL APPROACH

This section describes an alternative view in communication management called the rhetorical approach. The rhetorical approach contributes three key ideas (points) considered relevant to the study of contemporary government communication. The *first point* relates to the ethics of government communication in effecting the high end of symmetrical communication proposed by the excellence theory. Rhetoric postulates that effective symmetrical communication is only achieved by the dialogic form. However, unlike, rhetoric does not assume that such communication between the public and the government will naturally be equitable as projected in the excellence theory. The excellence theory takes for granted that by being structured in a certain way (the 14 principles); the resulting communication management will naturally be effective and ethical. Rhetoric argues instead that communication management has to be dialogic in order to be ethical, but being ethical is not innate for organisations so they must consciously make the effort.

The *second point* of contribution is that the rhetoric approach provides the base necessary to understand the self-presentation motives and tactics through which organisations and governments attract legitimacy and reputation. Corporate reputation is dependent on an appropriate communication system and on how an organisation identifies itself (rhetoric). As such, corporate reputation is a construct that is particularly appropriate for measuring the effectiveness of an organisation's communication system (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:38). Although this study does not measure reputation, it does evaluate the communication efforts employed by government in an attempt to manage reputation. The desire for reputation and advocacy often brings into question the issue of ethics in government communication.

The *third point* of contribution is on dissecting the practice of government communication. Because the excellence theory is entrenched in organisational theory, it is best able to dissect and explain government communication as a strategic management function. The rhetorical approach on the other hand, is best able to explain the technical function of communication management such as messaging, publicity, and media relations. Rhetoric thus contributes to the practice of government communication. The next section discusses ethics in communication management and the stance of the rhetorical theory in the emancipation of ethics in government communication.

3.8.1 ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Ethical considerations are divided into two schools of thought: the cognitivism and the non-cognitivism. Cognitivism holds that actions can be good or bad, moral and amoral, right and wrong. In contrast, the non-cognitivism states that ethics are subjective, context based or situational. Bowen (2012) describes three ethical approaches relevant to government communication. Namely: materialism, utilitarianism (consequentialism) and deontology (non-consequentialist). Materialism is non-cognitivist while the other two take cognitivist standpoints on the ethical debate.

Consequentialism or utilitarianism assumes that organisations evaluate the potential consequences for decisions in order to determine what is ethical. In utilitarianism,

decisions are predicted by their consequences in which the best decisions will maximise good outcomes and minimise bad outcomes (Bowen, 2012:165). Bowen (2012) considers utilitarianism best for government communication since the framework of 'the greatest good for the greatest number of people' resonates with the ideals of the public interest, which is the responsibility of government communication. Government communication should after all be conducted in accordance with the public interest (Bowen, 2012:165). For utilitarianism to be possible, sophisticated research is essential to determine and accurately predict intended and unintended consequences of organisational decisions and strategies on concerned publics.

Deontology is un-consequentialist because it is based on a duty to uphold moral principle. Deontology is a duty-based ethic that focuses on obligation, principles, and rights (Gregory, 2009:278). Rationality and objectivity are essential to deontological ethics because decisions should not be infiltrated by selfishness, bias, or fear of retribution. Objectivity allows government communicators to consider the meritorious viewpoints of various stakeholders or publics involved. In addition, autonomy and authority are equally vital for deontological ethics. Autonomy refers to independence of decision-making whereas authority refers to a voice and the ability to be heard within an organisation. Intension is also a key principle in deontology. Deontological theory holds that "only decisions made from a basis of goodwill or pure moral intention are ethical" (Bowen, 2012:170-173).

Materialism ethics presume that organisations seek to satisfy their needs first in a competitive arena. It is common for organisations, either government or corporate to make self-interested decisions (Bowen, 2012:164). Materialism is based on competitive positioning. Although there are many moral flows to materialism, it is an approach most dominant in practice. "Materialism turns out to be more descriptive of what happens in actual practice than a normative paradigm that is helpful in determining the ethical" (Bowen, 2012:165).

In public relations, the non-cognitivist school of thought is expounded by rhetorical theorists such as Burke (1969), Heath (2004), Pearson (1989) and others. Rhetorical theorists

assert that “truth emerge from a process of dialogue, negotiation and debate where individuals eventually agree on a particular moral truth”. In this case, the process by which the debate is conducted determines whether it is ethical or not (Gregory, 2009:276). For this reason, great emphasis is placed on ethical dialogue in order to maintain integrity and validity. The following sections describe materialism ethics in communication management through the rhetorical approach lenses.

3.8.2 DEFINITIONS AND HISTORY

“The rhetor (communicator) creates persuasion by building personal credibility (ethos), appealing to the emotions of the audience (pathos), or by making and supporting reasonable arguments (logos)” (Hoffman & Ford, 2010:26).

The conventional notion of rhetoric is argumentation and persuasion stemming from the ancient Greek sophist, such as Aristotle, then Roman with Cicero (Mackey, 2005:2). The study of rhetoric can be traced to fifth century BC Athenian sophists who were well travelled, charismatic teachers offering intensive training in persuasive public speaking. “The writing and speaking skills of the sophists were in demand because of the emergence of democracy which required enfranchised men to participate in government and legal affairs” (Mackey, 2005:5). Nevertheless, rhetoric declined as an academic subject around the mid nineteenth century and only resuscitating in the mid-20th century.

Aristotle, a student of Plato, penned the greatest single work on rhetoric called the *Rhetoric* consisting of three books. Book I dealt with the speaker, while book II considered the audience and book III focused on the message (De Wet, 2010:29). Following this analogy, this study only focus on book 1 (speaker) as it seeks to analyse the communication efforts of government departments. Aristotle was especially concerned with political rhetoric. He believed that the essential element in any rhetorical discourse is proof while all else is accessory. For Aristotle, *ethos* was an artistic proof consisting of the credibility derived from the communicator’s expectedness, trustworthiness, and goodwill (reputation). The other form of proof is *pathos*, which entails psychological appeals to the emotions, needs, and values of audiences. Contemporary examples of pathos are political

advertising, corporate social responsibility, and propaganda (De Wet, 2010:32). The last is *logos*, which are meant to appeal to the intellect or rationality of the recipients. In short, *logos* are concerned with the message, *ethos* with the organisation and *pathos* with the audience (De Wet, 2010:32; Griffin, 2012:293; Hoffman & Ford, 2010:26).

Given its historic heritage, rhetoric is considered the queen of communication studies. It is also known as the study of what is persuasive (De Wet, 2010:27). Over the years, Heath and others have been advocating for drawing judiciously on the rhetorical heritage as a guiding foundation for communication management (Palenchar, 2011:570). Heath (2011:419) alluded to the rich heritage that rhetoric offers, both as a positive guide and as a critical adjudicator of strategic options. One of the reasons for advocating a rhetorical approach to organisational communication management says Edward (2011:536) is to open an avenue through which communication between the organisation and its publics can be articulated in ethical terms and rationalised in terms of organisational interests.

3.8.3 CONTEMPORARY RHETORIC

In contemporary times, the rhetor is likely the spokesperson along with other communication professionals within an organisation. The rationale of rhetoric is still the same as that of Aristotle's era. Spicer (2007:192) spoke of Sproule's (1998) concept of the *new management rhetoric* in which the public sphere of rhetoric has been captured by institutions. This defines a shift from traditional rhetoric that focused on individual speakers to new persuasions and propagandas employed by big institutionalised organisations and big governments that rely on the media to reach their strategic public and the mass audience.

Mackey (2005:3) spoke of a '*rhetorical turn*' in the field of communication management, citing Robert Heath as the pioneer and driver of a '*rhetorical turn*' in communication management. Heath (2001:31) claims that the rhetorical theory can meet epistemological, axiological, and ontological requirements for the advancement of public relations. Mackey (2005:4) concurs that "contemporary academic theories of rhetoric offer the possible attainment of a clearer picture of what public relations is and what its effect on society and

individuals are”, adding that a rhetorical turn offers the possibility of a powerful critique of the ethics in communication management.

Mackey (2005:3) argues that the application of a rhetorical approach in communication management should be a progressive move, which aligns communication management with contemporary studies of rhetoric. Classical rhetoric is the intellectual starting point for much of what goes on in the communication management field today. Mackey (2005:11) posits that communication management processes in its entirety, from research to planning, resource allocation, execution among its publics and evaluation can be viewed as part of a rhetorical process (Mackey, 2005:11). For this reason, organisational rhetoric has become an independent area of study. The study organisational rhetoric is both the oldest and the newest area of communication (Hoffman & Ford, 2010:8).

3.8.4 EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONAL RHETORIC

A distinction can be made between internal and external organisational rhetoric. Internal rhetoric is concerned with how organisational rhetoric can help make each organisation a good place to work (Heath, 2011). Organisational rhetoric has now captured the interest of many scholars. For example, two (2) publications emerged in the *Management Communication Quarterly* journal, the 2008 eight issue focused on internal organisational rhetoric and the 2011 issue focused on external organisational rhetoric. In application, the *Public Relation Review* (2013) explored the intersection between, rhetoric, public relations, and democracy.

According to Hoffman and Ford (2010:7), “organisational rhetoric is the strategic use of symbols by organisations to influence the thoughts, feelings, and behaviours of audiences important to the operation of the organisation”. Therefore, external rhetoric is essential to understanding, evaluating, and improving organisations’ participation in the socio-political discourse in the communities where they operate. Studies in rhetoric explore how organisations engage constructively and destructively in the discourse, that defines their legitimacy (Heath, 2011:415). The end goal of external rhetoric is reputation and legitimacy. Rhetoric is a “new way of understanding organisations”.

Heath (2011) suggests that communication management and its attendant organisational rhetoric is meant to serve two purposes: first, to improve an organisation's ethical practices by paying attention to external perception (public opinion), and secondly, to improve an organisation's self-interest communication by responding appropriately to that public opinion (Boyd & Waymer, 2011). This means that first and foremost, external organisational rhetoric serves its own interest, "but did so in ways sensitive to a changing and complex environment where the organisation's interests could only be achieved by advancing those of others" (Palenchar, 2011:571). The next sections provide the principles or purposes of external organisational rhetoric, starting with the notion of rhetoric as a tool for establishing and maintaining organisational credibility, reputation and legitimacy. This discussion is next.

3.8.5 CREDIBILITY, REPUTATION, AND LEGITIMACY

The first purpose or principle of external organisational rhetoric is the establishment and maintenance of credibility, reputation, and legitimacy. Organisations' characters (ethos) count in rhetoric (Griffin, 2012:293). Therefore, organisations are encouraged to adopt integrity in their practice and policies. On the notion of 'the good organisation communicates well', Heath (2001) counsels that each organisation should strive to be moral and to communicate to satisfy the interests of key publics. It was Aristotle's belief that persuasion is espoused by the speaker's personal character that depicts his credibility. Aristotle believed, like many rhetoricians, that bad character is dissuasive (Heath, 2001:39). Therefore, we must investigate what it means and what it takes to be a 'good organisation communicating well' (Heath, 2007:42).

Public relations can assist organisations' "narrative enactment" (Heath, 2011:247). Explicating on his rhetorical enactment theory, Heath (2007:58) postulates that all of what an organisation does and says can be meaningful and therefore helpful or harmful to the relationships that the organisation needs to accomplish in its mission and vision. The '*good organisation communicating well*' analogy emphasises the character of the organisation as the basis for and the result of its communication management (Heath, 2007:58). Heath's

(2007:49) definition hold that advocacy is characterised by “the content and process of the discourse used by the good person (reputation) speaking well”.

The concept of legitimacy is directly linked to that of reputation. Organisational legitimacy is an organisation’s right to exist and function. It is based on compliance with the minimum standards of typical organisations in its class (Highhouse *et al.*, 2009:1487). Legitimacy is based on the actions of the organisation and responsible communication about them. As such, legitimacy is clearly the focus of communication management. It is established, maintained, challenged, and defended through dialogues between the organisation and its various publics (Metzler, 2001: 322). Scholarship has shown a connection between communication and legitimacy in the boundary-spanning role of public relations, in crisis management and in image creation (Metzler, 2001:322). Legitimacy requires that organisations remain responsive to the public.

3.8.5.1 Reputation management as organisational advocacy

“Reputation refers to a holistic and vivid impression held by a particular group towards a corporation, partly as a result of information processing carried out by the group’s members and partly by the aggregated communication of the corporation in question concerning its nature, i.e. the fabricated and projected picture of itself” (Alvesson, 1990 in Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:44).

External organisational communication is fundamentally concerned about reputation. The concept of reputation is therefore essential to understanding how government and publics evaluate performance. Concepts such as corporate identity and corporate reputation have emerged as essential to government communication (Canel & Sanders, 2012:90). Organisational success depends on how they are viewed by key stakeholders. According to Canel and Sanders (2012:90), two concepts are vital to defining reputation. The first concept is *identity*, which is defined “as consisting in what an organisation present of itself in terms of behaviour, communication, and symbolism as well as visual, non-material aspects of the institution”. The second concept is *image*, which is understood as “the mental structure of the organisation that publics form as the result of the processing of information related to the organisation” (Canel & Sanders, 2012:90).

Highhouse, Brooks & Gregarus (2009:35) view organisational reputation as a temporally stable evaluative judgment about an organisation that is shared by multiple constituencies. But the question arises if reputation can be managed and how much control organisations and governments exert over their reputation. Some researchers see reputation as something that cannot and should not be managed, mainly because reputation is a direct consequence of behaviour. This sentiment espouses a notion that corporate reputation is a social construct. It is construed that the dynamics of governing reputation are not in the prerogative of the organisation, but that of the publics (Van Riel and Fombrun, 2007:46).

On the contrary, others see value in the management of reputation as something controllable (Hutton, Goodman, Alexander & Genest, 2001). This school of thought espouses the notion of reputation as a management construct. From this perspective, reputation is a product of an organisation's attentiveness towards environmental, social justice, and ethical concerns (Highhouse, Brooks & Gregarus, 2009:1482). Highhouse *et al.* (2009:1483) posit that corporations and governments, like people, are concerned with self-presentation and organisational impression (rhetoric advocacy). For example, Da Silva and Batista (2007) demonstrated the potentialities of customer relationship management (CRM) in building government reputations. What was found was that governments are attempting at reversing the negative reputation of bureaucracy and insensitivity by investing more resources on customer relationship management (CRM). However, research on organisational impression management conducted at the organisational level is currently very limited – more so where government is concerned. The statistics are even worse for reputation studies in government. Identification is one concept closely linked to identity management, reputation management, and legitimacy. To this concept, we turn next.

3.8.6 IDENTIFICATION

Identification is the second principle of external organisational rhetoric following 'credibility, reputation, and legitimacy' discussed above. Scholars such as Burke (1937/1984) and Cheney (1983) emphasised the value of identification as a persuasion power (Hoffman & Ford, 2010:35). They posit that when the public identify with the organisation, they are

likely to behave in ways beneficial to it. As for Burke (1969), rhetoric is a form of courtship – or perhaps courtship is a form of rhetoric. Thus, publicity and promotion can easily be seen as organisational forms of courtship based on appeals to identification (Heath, 2011:420).

Organisations facilitate identification by communicating its values, goals, and information (identity management). In that way, identification arises as a communicative and cooperative response. Therefore, identification is compensatory to division (Cheney, 1983:145). Cheney (1983:143-158) discerns three types of identification strategies. Starting with the common ground technique where the rhetor overtly equates himself with the publics. The second strategy of identification through antithesis is a call to unifying against a common enemy. In the third identification strategy, the assumed “we”, surmises the pronoun “we” as signalling unity. Following this study, Cheney added a fourth strategy in reference to the use of unifying symbols such as branding (Hoffman & Ford, 2010:35). As such, brand loyalty can be a sign of identification among external stakeholders.

Identification is a form of coalition formation, an attempt by rhetors to forge conceptual association with the persuadees (Cheney, 1983:144). Thus, identification can be used as a strategy of resuscitating legitimacy and strengthening a weak reputation through communication of shared values (Metzler, 2001:342). Identification is influenced by both internal and external communication management (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:76). Rhetoric emphasise the role of dialectic, many voices engaged in dialogue (Heath, 2001:39). Such type of dialectical discourse inherently calls for identification. Therefore, identification is also a foundation of relationship management that is explored next.

3.8.7 RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

Relationship management is the third principle of external organisational rhetoric. As communication management theory and research move towards a two-way relational communication model, many scholars and practitioners are increasingly adopting the terms dialogue or dialogic in reference to ethical and effective communication management philosophies. The end goal of relationship management is ethics, morality,

and social capital (credibility, reputation, and legitimacy). According to Kent and Taylor (2002:22), “dialogue involves an effort to recognise the value of the other – to see him/her as an end and not merely as a means to achieving a desire goal”.

This dialogic perspective is very similar to Grunig’s (2006:156) appropriation of the term coorientation. “The symmetrical model and its parent, the coorientational model, proposed that individuals, organisations, and publics should use communication to adjust their ideas and behaviour to those of others than try to control how others think” (Grunig, 2006:156). Kent and Taylor (2002) proposed five principles in the enactment of a dialogic communication management theory: (1) mutuality, which is the recognition of organisation-public relationships. (2) Propinquity involves the temporality and spontaneity of interactions with publics. (3) Empathy entails the supportiveness and confirmation of public interest goals. (4) Risk involves the willingness to interact with individuals and publics on their own terms. (5) Finally but not least, commitment reflects the extent to which an organisation gives itself over to dialogue, interpretation, and understanding in its interactions with publics (Kent & Taylor, 2002:23-25).

There are now proposals for two-way or dialogic approaches to be incorporated to external organisational rhetoric that prioritises discourse based on principle of: openness, spontaneity, inquiry, advocacy, reflection, and the potential for involvement by more than two parties or publics (a multiplicity of voices) (Boyd & Waymer, 2011:480). This ideal of a high-end enactment of symmetrical communication is explored next.

3.8.8 SYMMETRY AND DIALOGUE

On the relationship between advocacy and symmetry, Heath (2007:42) argues that advocacy is not inherently contradictory to symmetry. Rhetorical symmetry assumes that advocates are equal until their ideas are tested in the public sphere. It is only through dialogue that superior ideas defeat bad ones (Heath, 2001:35). Rhetoric presumes that all parties are symmetrical in terms of the right to speak. This however does not suggest that all points are equal in rhetoric potency. “Through dialogue, participants co-create or co-

define meaning by the rhetorical process of statement and counterstatements. One side wins because its arguments are more compelling” (Heath, 2001:35).

3.8.9 DISCOURSE ENACTMENT AND ENLIGHTENED CHOICE

The underlying normative paradigm of external rhetoric is dialogue. This is the fourth principle of external organisational rhetoric, while the facilitation of enlightened choice is the fifth principle. Dialogue begins by acknowledging the merit of other’s ideas rather than presuming others have no worthy ideas. It is assumed that discourse fosters enlightened choice, and that relationships result from and lead to social capital (Heath, 2011:416). Complex organisations have become modern rhetors engaged in discourse with their publics. For this to be possible, organisations engage in discourse to co-create reality with external publics needed to align interest rather than suffer disabling friction. “Such relationships are forged strategically through communication structures and in discourse arenas: public policy issue debates, integrated marketing communication, corporate communication, crisis response, issues management, and risk management” (Heath, 2011:417).

Heath (2011:20) argues that “rhetoric is relevant to any context in which humans are compelled to make enlightened choice”- such as citizens are expected in democratic societies. However, can rhetorical discourse advance as well as frustrate choice? Heath (2011:421) offers Nichols’ (1963) response that the combination of persuasive and dialectic discourse can and should lead to enlightened choices. Such understanding sets a firm, ethical and socially responsible view of rhetoric and organisational communication.

The underlying paradigm of external organisation rhetoric is about multiple voices engaged in battles within the public sphere. The public sphere is conceived of a marketplace of ideas, preferences, choices, and influence (Heath, 2011:420). The landscape is one of battle for advantage, whether it is that of one organisation, government, an industry, a group, an interest, or even society. Rhetoric is thus made from fragments of dialectic, rhetoric is not independent of others but gains its meaning, relevance, and resolution by how it agrees, disagrees, or otherwise responds to other rhetoric (Burkey, 1969:207). The premise is that, “as competitive and collaborative rhetors interact – and in an ideal

rhetorical world, balance each other out – the process allows for the pursuit of common goals”. Burkey, (1951:203) puts the concept of dialectic (the cooperative use of competition) more bluntly:

“A rhetorician, I take it, is like one voice in a dialogue. Put several such voices together, with each voicing its own special assertion, let them act upon one another in cooperative competition, and you get a dialectic that, properly developed, can lead to views transcending the limitation of each”.

The great concern is whether each dialogue of many persuasive voices proactively and constructively worked for some collective good or merely for the advancement of one interest, perhaps even at the loss of another’s interest? This worry is epitomising of Plato’s anxiety on the likelihood of which the cleverer rather than the more reflective and well-grounded voice can win the rhetorical battle (Heath, 2011:422). The concept of dialectic is dependent on enlighten choices being made by the public as guided by dialectical tensions of multiple contending voices counter-correcting each other.

It should be noted however that not everyone agrees whether a dialogic communication model is possible let alone practical (Kent & Taylor, 2002:24). Dialogue is not a panacea. Dialogue cannot make an organisation behave morally or force organisations to respond to publics. Organisations themselves must first be willing to make dialogic commitments to publics. Dialogue can also be appropriated for both moral and immoral ends particularly where self-interest sublimates the dialogic process into propaganda, manipulation, or exclusions.

3.8.10 RHETORIC AS ADVOCACY

“It is widely understood that any individual, organisation, or institution that seek public support must hire, professional communicators to advocate in the court of public opinion as it hires lawyers to advocate in the court of law” (Saitel, 1984:6).

Should public relations professionals assume the role of advocates, consensus builders, or both? This question contributes to the ongoing debate about the appropriate role of communication management in government. Spicer (1997:182) contends that “the

distinction between advocacy and consensus building, like the distinction between the asymmetrical and symmetrical models, are indicative of competing ways in which an organisation communicates". In the exception of Grunig (1992), many scholars rarely distinguish between communication management as advocacy (persuasion) and communication management as straight communication (Heath, 2007:45). Advocacy and consensus building are seen as dichotomous or polarised. The argument being that communication in an advocacy frame is inherently monogamous whereas communications from a collaborative frame is one of dialogue and participation. According to Spicer (1997:186), these distinctions are useful in that they allow us to evaluate the foundation of different types of communication management in different organisations.

The rhetorical tradition has always recognised advocacy as a tool or tactic of communication management. Advocacy public relations is a way of responding to corporate or government critics who challenge management policies and actions. Advocacy in communication management occurs when public relations practitioners attempt to meet the needs or desires of their organisation to the exclusion of the needs or desires of the other side (asymmetrical communication) (Reber, 2005:1 in Heath, 2007:45). Conversely, in consensus building frame, communication effectiveness is judged by the degree to which participants or citizens are able, willing to and encouraged to participate in the communication process (Spicer, 1997:220). Consensus building (boundary spanning/symmetrical communication) is naturally counter the self-centred external communication that characterise many organisations and governments.

Heath (2001:32) cautions, "Organisations that attempt to use rhetoric to control and manipulate the opinions of key stakeholders and stake-seekers suffer public exposure of their tactics as well as the flaws in the content they espouse". Advocacy public relations can proclaim ideas an organisation believes to be best about itself. However, the claims demand authentication and proof in order to increase the probability to which those claims are accepted. Advocacy is bound to fail in the end if it merely advances the cause and interest of one side (Heath, 2007:59). The concept and the impacts of self-interest advocacy in communication management are discussed in depth over the next sections.

3.8.11 SELF-INTEREST (ADVOCACY)

Edwards (2011:531) acknowledges that rhetorical theory is in itself a reminder that all communication, and particularly organisational communication, is partisan – and naturally, government communication will be partisan. External organisational rhetoric is reflective of organisational advocacy. Barney and Black (1994) opine that organisations should not worry about presenting anything but their own side. This proposition is based on the assumption that public discourse takes place in an adversarial system where every actor pursue only self-interest, and the ‘other side’ can take a rhetorical stand if so choses (Boyd & Waymer, 2011:479).

Boyd and Waymer (2011) proposed a one-sided ethical approach to external organisational rhetoric. They add, “that the traditional corrective saying, ‘organisations should pay more attention to ethics has not worked” (Boyd & Waymer, 2011:482). They hence suggest that “professional communicators use their powers of persuasion to argue that; in fact, an ethical standard – not just legal standard or an adversarial perspective – is consistent with organisational self-interest” (Boyd & Waymer, 2011:483). Until professional organisational speakers assert themselves more as organisational consciences, the continued domination of organisational self-interest will continue and the privileging of self-interest in the management of external communication may persist to the detriment of the other interests involved.

The challenge arises when bias and self-interest distort communication. It should be accepted that communication is distorted from a rhetorical ideal. Rhetorical scholars would argue that if organisations control their instinct to serve their own self-interest their communication moves closer to efficiency and rhetorical success because audiences are interested in truth and will therefore judge such rhetoric more favourably (Edwards, 2011:532). Paradoxically, a rhetorical view also reminds scholars that communication is inherently about meaning-generation. This perspective casts a different light on self-interest because cocreation of meaning requires recognition of both one’s own and others self-interest (Edwards, 2011:532).

Scholars of organisational rhetoric claim that communication fortified by self-interest is bound for failure wherein its persuasive power is lost. Rhetorical approaches to external communication assume that self-interest is optional and generally negative, and reducing or eliminating it leads to better and more persuasive communication (Edwards, 2011:533). Edwards contends that “simultaneous recognition that rhetoric is partisan creates an analytical conundrum”. If rhetoric is partisan, then organisational communication must be driven by self-interest rather than the public good. Without bias, rhetorical enactment would not exist. The process of co-creation of meaning (dialectics) requires recognition of self-interest and the interests of others to take place. Edwards (2011:534) reasons: “understanding self-interest as a contextual factor that influences rhetoric, rather than an immutable barrier to effective rhetoric, opens the door to a more balanced role for self-interest in the co-creation of meaning”.

3.8.12 NEGATIVE CONNOTATIONS OF RHETORIC ADVOCACY

Reflections on the good or evils of rhetoric are not new (Heath, 2007:42). Rhetoric can be used unethically, thus, it is judged by the quality of the process and its outcomes (Heath, 2001:38). Rhetoric is a two-edge sword fraught with peril as well as good prospect. Rhetorical theories neglect to theorise their use of rhetorical concepts. As a result, management theorists often see rhetoric as manipulation and control. “The term rhetoric arouses pejorative connotations such as viciousness, manipulateness, pandering, and mere” (Heath, 2001:31). This assessment of rhetoric as manipulative spin doctoring remains today. However, Heath maintains that such prejudice remain with those ignorant of the theory of rhetoric. In essence, Heath (2001:32) counsels...

“Rhetoric can manipulate until other voices uncover this manipulation and turn minds against it. Rhetoric can pander by telling people what they want to hear. On the other hand, it can challenge pandering and forewarn persons to watch for that manipulative technique. For this reason, rhetoric never is mere”.

3.8.13 SOPHISTIC RHETORIC

Aristotle was critical of sophists, hence infused the term sophist with negative connotations (Mackey, 2005:4). Sophistic concentrated on the role of the communicator rather than the message or recipients. Plato was highly critical of sophistic rhetoric that was only concerned with how, when and what is the best form of expression (De Wet, 2010:27). Sophistic rhetoric is by nature monolithic as recipients are not dynamically involved with the communication. What is of concern is the technical skill through which the communicator manipulates passive recipients. “A rhetoric that is designed to enhance reputation, and to mislead in order to win assent at the expense of truth, is rejected as sophistic” (De Wet, 2010:34).

3.8.14 IS ADVOCACY INHERENTLY BAD?

“Advocacy can achieve understanding, agreement, reinforcement, and motivation. The opposite is also true: advocacy can bring about misunderstanding, failure to understand, disagreement, diminished belief and demotivation” (Heath, 2007:53).

In his research of the Australian public sector, Glenny (2008:116) brought into question the morality of persuasion and advocacy in government communication. Varying and contentious responses from practitioners evidenced the political density of this question. Others see advocacy as a political stance and an essential element of their responsibility as cheerleaders of government while others see government communication as neutral information diffusion or dialogue at best. Hutton (1999) demonstrated how such orientations strongly influence communication practices. This sparks concerns about the professionalization of government communication. The argument heralded is that the professionalization of government communicators is dangerous in the hands of a manipulative-government that masters the art of advocacy persuasion in the form of propaganda (spin) (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:20).

The question arises if advocacy is essentially partisanship, which begs a follow-up question of whose party it represents. Advocacy as a concept is characterised by negative connotations implying propaganda, manipulation, win-lose conflict. To others, advocacy

signifies one-way asymmetrical communication. In its worst form, advocacy can be limited to bellicose monologue (Heath, 2007:42). This kind of advocacy communication management is used to defend against and deflect criticism rather than to respond proactively and positively to differing opinions (Heath, 2007:43). If advocacy listens, the aim is only to counter-argue and refute rather than to appreciate debate. This is the foundation of a media versus government feud because the aim of advocacy communication is to protect, not engage.

Not all advocacy communication is appalling, argues Heath (2007:43), advocacy can be a virtuous management and communication philosophy in good organisations. This sort of advocacy is comfortable with counterarguments and debates in the public sphere. At best, advocacy can produce informed decision-making because only the best idea and argument survives in the open public sphere. In concluding the advocacy versus collaboration debate, Spicer (1997:186) advises that it should not be implied, however, that one frame is necessarily better than the other is. Both frames exist and are useful to public relations practitioners in governments and other organisations. “We should be thinking of advocacy and collaboration, rather than advocacy versus collaboration” (Spicer, 1997:186).

3.8.15 ADVOCACY AS COMPETITION

The rhetorical tradition makes the point that advocacy do not exist in a vacuum, it emerges amongst the contradiction of various ideas and arguments in the public sphere. Advocacy then grows from an examination of arguments and counterarguments. So, advocacy occurs in public where citizens can, “by hearing the sides of an issue, learn and weigh facts, consider evaluations, judge character (credibility), and weigh the expediency of policy” (Heath, 2007:49).

Rhetoric is only as good as there abounds competition on opinions, ideas, and arguments. Heise (1985:203) assumes rhetoric is only ethical in the competitive environment of the private sector where a multitude of companies advocate for their products through their PR departments. “Competition exists between organisations in the private sector, a factor

which serves to countervail some of the less than objective, less than balanced information put out by the advocacy- oriented PR practitioners” (Heise,1983:204). The same cannot be said of government.

In **summary**, part three (3) of the theoretical framework provided various strategies used to communicate positively with the public. External organisational rhetoric in the form of advocacy, identity management, identification, relationship management, and dialectic discourse are valuable strategies for government to communicate with the publics for constructing a favourable reputation. These strategies also provide the bases to which ethical debates about communication management are deliberated. In addition, these concepts are the most contention in government communication literature as few expect government communication to be rhetorical and persuasive while others see it as inherently rhetorical and persuasive (Glenny, 2008:116).

The present study is concerned with the concept of impression management/identity management (through external organisational communication). The exclusive focus on identity management rather than reputation is because identity management is within the controls of the organisation, while reputation is within the prerogative of stakeholders. Stakeholders themselves have to be consulted in order to gauge the reputation of government departments or any other organisation for that matter. The self-presentation of governments identities is carefully constructed which sanctions the concepts of rhetoric and advocacy relevant to the study of government communication.

3.9 RHETORIC, DEMOCRACY AND PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

This section serves as a summary to part three (3) of the theoretical framework. Heath, Waymer and Palenchar (2013) explored the nexus between public relations, rhetoric and democracy. “They posed the question, “what role, if any should rhetorical public relations play in democracy and the democratic process. In answering this question, conflicting dimensions of public relations were illustrated. For example, iconic practitioners such as Ivy Ledbetter Lee sought the value of public relations as contributing to the public interest

and thus to democracy by upholding journalistic principles of information provision, objectivity and transparency. In contrast, equally iconic practitioners such as Edward Bernays (1955) celebrated the manufacturing of public opinion through the engineering of consent. Bernays conceived public relations experts as being able to shape (crystallise or engineer) public opinion in the interest of the client organisation (government). Hence, a discrepancy exist between scholars who view public relations as manipulation, and those who view it as the dissemination of information, resolution of conflict, or promotion of understanding (Grunig, 1992).

Heath *et al.* (2013:272) advanced a rhetorical approach to communication management in which they view public relations as capable of participating in constructive dialogue by which the public is compelled to make enlightened choices. Rhetoric has been the rationale for reasoned discourse and therefore inherent to democracy. “Because rhetorical theory arises out of disputes and differences of opinion, it offers guidelines on how people can negotiate those differences through collaborative decision-making. It informs, creates divisions, and bridges divisions. It advocates, convinces, and motivates” (Heath *et al.*, 2013:273).

For democracy requires an informed public, public relations fulfils that need by providing information to the media and directly to the public from which rational and informed judgements can be based. Waymer (2013) sees a strong link between democracy and public relations. This is because, public relations, as an instrument of various stakeholders and community agents, conceivably can voice and shed light on difficult even dark issues, help make democracy possible, strengthen an already established democracy, or help sustain (or defend) a current democracy (Waymer, 2013:323). According to Heath *et al.* (2013) public relations must be understood as a steward of democracy. “In this vein, a steward of democracy cares for democracy as well as those “publics” entrusted to her care. A steward of democracy would use her power and influence to allow and even facilitate collective decision-making” (Heath *et al.*, 2013:278).

Government communication is however oxymoronic because whilst public relations “should play the literal and metaphorical role of referee in democratic societies, it is also a

participant in the dialogue or the rhetorical game (Waymer, 2013:323). In his research, Mabelebele (2006) exemplifies this argument. On the brighter side, Mabelebele's research proposes an interesting model of government communication based the collaboration between the rhetorical approach and participatory democracy.

Mabelebele (2006) introduced *imbizos* (gatherings) as a (rhetorical) model of communication and governance. The concept of *imbizo* and Ubuntu are true to the African continent. *Imbizos* can be described as a rhetorical platform used by indigenous communities to resolve community issues and build community cohesion. For example, "it is common practice for a chief, headman, or any other community leader to convene a community meeting with a view to discussing issues of common concern and interest (Mabelebele, 2006:104).

The ANC government appropriated *imbizos* as a model of communication and governance - bringing government closer to the people. The concept of *imbizo* is premised on another indigenous African concept of Ubuntu – invoking the spirit of compassion and empathy. "As members of a particular community interact with government on policy implementation and how best to improve their lives, government begins to feel for the suffering communities trapped in conditions of abject poverty". As such, *imbizos* portray government as caring and concerned about the views and the development of the layman. Mabelebele saw *imbizos* as a manifestation of participatory democracy. The concept of *imbizo* is to improve service delivery in communities affected by poverty and underdevelopment by truly listening to the issues of the community and discussing possible solutions. *Imbizos* also provide a platform for identity management, corporate branding, and reputation. An advantage of a strong corporate identity is that it enhances tolerance, support and goodwill for a government department (Bezuidenhout & Van Heerden, 2003:5).

On the negative side, Mabelebele (2006:111) argued that "*imbizos* was appropriated by government to achieve party political objectives beyond service delivery and government imperatives". In terms of participatory democracy, the enactment of *imbizo* by the ANC government failed because "in the realm of decision-making, genuine participation by the masses has been stunted, as power is still more concentrated in the centre... whereby the

participation of ordinary citizens is narrowed down purely to matters of implementation. No sufficient space has been created for ordinary citizens to participate in the formulation of policy and programmes of government” (Mabelebele, 2006:121-122). In this case, the self-interest of the organisation (the ANC government), compounded with advocacy rhetoric, infiltrated and debilitated the possible social good to be achieved by the practice of *imbizo*'s as a rhetorical model of government communication. The following section outlines additional relevant extant models of government communication.

3.10 PART FOUR: EXTANT MODELS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Likely (2013:72) argues, “A distinct model for government communication, particularly one that is comparative across countries at various political levels (national, region, province; and or municipal/local) has not been developed and tested”. Models of government communication tend to thread between those emphasising distinctiveness of communication management in the public sector (for example Heise, 1985; Gelders, Bouckaert & Van Ruler, 2007; Liu, Hosley & Levenshus, 2010, 2011, 2012) against those who perceive government communication management as equivalent to any other sector (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999).

Hiebert (1981) provided one of the few government communication models called the government communication process model. This model identifies four basic information strategies that governments use to enhance their image: withholding information, releasing information, staging special events, and persuading the public. The model incorporates both internal and external communication. However, Liu and Horsley (2007) have criticised the model for insufficiently incorporating the distinctiveness of the public sector such as the effect of politics and centralization on government communication. Moreover, the model only allows for one-way asymmetrical communication and it is more of a typology than a theoretical framework.

After Hiebert, Heise (1985:200) was one of the first few scholars to evaluate the impact of the corporate public relations models within the government sector. He questioned

“whether public relations, as developed and practiced in the private sector, ought to be the model for the public sector and, if not, what the model for the public sector should look like”. To this effect, Heise (1985:209) proposed an alternative communication model – the *public communication model* whose tenets assumes the following:

- Government communicators will make public all legally releasable information both positive and negative.
- Government communicators would investigate alternative form of communication to reach specialised publics far from the domain of the mass media.
- Government communicators would strive to facilitate accurate, systematic, and timely feedback.
- Legitimacy and credibility of government comes following the depoliticization of government communication.
- Public relations will be recognised as a management function.

The synthesis model of public sector crisis communication developed by Horsley and Barker (2002) focuses specifically on crisis communication. For that reason, its relevance is minimal to the holistic approach of communication management advocated here. The government communication decision wheel incorporates the distinctive communication environment of the public sector upon which this study is focused. However, a noted limitation of the model is that it can only be applied to democratic countries based on federalism principle such as the United States (Liu & Horsley, 2007:391). In addition, government decision wheel model is unreasonably complicated as it describes the intersections between four coexisting microenvironments. Moreover, such identified environments are inapplicable to this specific study focusing on the practice of communication management in provincial government departments.

3.11 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter outlined the theoretical framework grounded in this study. The thesis entrenched in this study is that communication management is vital for democracy. For government communication to be professional and strategic, it must be organised

excellently and efficiently while taking into account the advocacy nature inherent in external organisational rhetoric, which may threaten the ethics and legitimacy of communication management. It is also essential that the distinctive communication environment of the public sector (the public sector distinctiveness theory) be considered in both the theorising and the practice of government communication. Chapter 2 presented the premise of the New Public Management (NPM) movement advancing that government should adopt private sector management techniques such as strategic management, evaluations, customer responsiveness, excellence indicators, and management by objective amongst others. The implication of this argument to government communication is explored in chapter 4 (strategic government communication) next.

CHAPTER 4: STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Following the New Public Management (NPM) movement, this chapter discusses the philosophy of strategic communication as reflected in the 'corporate' communication management literature and the applicability of its principles to strategic government communication. The chapter begins by describing the field of strategic management and its contribution to strategic communication. The Pretoria School of Thought (PST) is chosen as a paradigm best able to explain the functions and contributions of strategic communication to organisational effectiveness. The remainder of the chapter discusses the strategic communication management principle along with key features and requirements necessary for its enactment: understanding the environment, boundary-spanning, distinction between strategy communication and communication strategy, organising the communication department and strategy formulation. The chapter concludes by describing the nature of communication evaluations in government organisations.

4.2 STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

Grunig (2007:29) claims that as an academic field, strategic management is as young as public relations. Nonetheless, both practices have been oblivious to each other until recently when they merged to contribute understanding to 'strategic public relations' also known as 'strategic communication management'. Higgins (1979:563) in Grunig and Repper (1992:119) defines strategic management as "the process of managing the pursuit of the accomplishment of organisational mission coincident with managing the relationship of the organisation to its environment". Strategic management can also be described as "a continuous process of thinking through the current mission of the organisation, thinking through the current environment conditions, and then combining these elements by setting forth a guide for tomorrow's decisions and results" (Greene *et al.*, in Steyn 2004).

4.2.1 STRATEGY IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Strategy is a word once unheard of in government. The term ‘strategy’, like the term ‘manage’, is ridden by negative connotations insinuating control and manipulation. For Grunig and Repper (1992:123), the term ‘manage’ connotes logic of thinking ahead or planning rather than inferring manipulation and control. Few practitioners understand the meaning of ‘strategy’. When the word ‘strategy’ is used, it is often “bandied around like a mantra”. Steyn (2004) described a few elements of strategy: strategy is about thinking, it is the logic behind the actions. Strategy requires choices because ‘strategy’ must indicate an organisations position regarding its future and decisions to be taken in the future. Grunig and Repper (1998:123) define strategy as an approach, design, scheme, or system.

4.2.2 STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AS A THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

The concept of strategic communication is a hotly contested issue in both management and communication literature (Paul, 2012). “Strategic public relations is a loosely defined concept that recently has become popular among public relations practitioners” (Grunig, 2007:29). As a result, scholars have started developing theories for strategic public relations or strategic communication management.

The discourse of strategic communication management according to Grunig (2007:29) consists of loose references to the idea that “public relations should be planned, managed by objectives, evaluated, and connected in some way to organisational objectives”. Following this definition, it becomes deducible that strategic government communication refers to ‘managed’ government communication as opposed to government communication that is reactive and tactical. Strategic government communication is directed by communication managers, not communication technicians largely subservient to politicians who dictate how government communication should be practiced.

Grunig and Repper (1992:121) claim that communication management is customarily relegated “to the functional level, where it has been assigned responsibilities for implementing organisational objectives but not for helping develop them”. Grunig

(2007:32) adds that in most cases, communication is relegated to implementation tasks and not given the responsibility for helping scan the environment and subsequently formulating organisational objectives. Similarly, in reviewing strategic literature, Moss and Warnaby (1998:352) confirmed that communication was seldom featured in strategic literature, and where communication was mentioned at all, the discussion was primarily tactically oriented. The role of communication was described predominately as of assisting with the implementation and control stages of the strategic processes. In that regard, Moss and Warnaby (1998) set out to explore why communication had been relegated to tactical roles within the strategy and management literature.

Steyn (2004) noted that whilst the concept of strategy is not foreign to management theory, it is less established in communication management theory and the public relations body of knowledge. Steyn (2004) points out that “there is mention of a strategic role for the corporate communication practitioner, but few explanations or descriptions of what corporate communication strategy means in a strategic organisational context”. Ideally, communication management should be an integral part of strategic management, providing input to the planning department and senior managers about stakeholders in the environment (Grunig & Repper, 1992:121).

4.3 THE PRETORIA SCHOOL OF THOUGHT ON STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

When it comes to strategic communication, this study adopts the proposition offered by the Pretoria School of Thought. The Pretoria School of Thought (PST) is a paradigm that conceptualises communication management in the strategic context of the organisation. The PST paradigm differentiates between communication management and strategic communication management. The premise is that communication management functions in the meso level within the prerogative of a communication ‘manager’ role, while strategic communication management functions within the macro (societal/enterprise) level within the prerogative of a communication ‘strategist’ role. This leads to “the redefinition of the historic ‘manager’ as a role played at the middle management (meso/functional) level,

focusing on development of corporate communication strategy linked to enterprise strategy (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:304).

An important pillar of the Pretoria School of Thought is the emphasis on the contribution of strategic communication to the organisational strategy and overall management. “This contribution can be summarised as making inputs to the enterprise strategy at top management level (the role of the strategist); developing corporate communication strategy at the middle management level (the role of the manager) and developing operational strategy at the implementation level (the role of the technician). For strategic communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness, it has to function in the macro societal level, that is, within the enterprise strategic management level. The enterprise strategy answers the question relating to what the organisation *should* be doing. Therefore, the enterprise strategy acts as a framework within which other, more specific strategies operate. According to the Pretoria School of Thought, the contribution of strategic communication to organisational effectiveness is possible when the strategic communication management function accomplishes the following tasks (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:310):

- Advice top management of societal values so that organisational strategies may be adjusted accordingly;
- Make top managers aware of the importance of accommodating public opinion;
- Act as an early warning system in issue management; ensure dialogue with key stakeholders; act as advocates for stakeholders by explaining their position to top management;
- In addition, influence top management decisions; and explain such decisions to key stakeholders.

Literature in strategic management until recently had been preoccupied with discussions pertaining to the ‘formulation and implementation of strategy’. It is only recently that the two related concepts of ‘mission’ and ‘environment’ have been added to both strategic management and strategic communication (Grunig, 2007:30).

4.4 THE ENVIRONMENT IN STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION

The environment is a key concept in both strategic management and strategic communication. Steyn (2004) argues that there is lack of agreement in defining the concept of the 'environment' and that various authors conceptualise it differently. The concept of the environment was defined by Pearce and Robinson (1982:62) "as the sum total of all conditions and forces that affect the strategic options of a business but that are typically beyond its ability to control" (Grunig, 2007:32).

More than any other factor, the external environment affects the organisational strategy. "Organisations create their own environment by paying attention to some information from out there while ignoring other information" (Steyn & Puth, 2000:59). Thus, when developing a communication strategy, there are different categories of the external environment that must be taken into account. First is the remote environment (macro, societal environment). The macro environment affects the organisation indirectly by influencing its long-term decisions and strategies. "Organisations are presented with opportunities, threats and constraints, but rarely does a single organisation exert any meaningful reciprocal influence in the macro environment". The remote environment consists of social factors, economic factors, political factors, technological factors and ecological factors. Second is the industry environment, which shapes competition in the industry. The industry environment comprises of issues affecting the particular industry. Third is the operating environment, also called the task environment. In accomplishing its mission, an organisation works in its task environment (Steyn & Puth, 2000:58). The task environment comprises of sectors and stakeholders with direct transactional relationships with the organisation and influences the day-to-day running of the company such as customers, suppliers, creditors, competitors, and etcetera. Fourth, the functional environment (internal environment) – refers to areas of specialisation within the organisation such as human resource, finance etcetera.

To better distinguish between the task environment and the societal environment, one must understand that in accomplishing its missions, an organisation functions within its task environment and that the societal environment may divert its attention from the task

environment. Grunig (2007:22) reiterates this point to which he argues that organisations and government departments have missions and goals. However, they want to choose their own mission and goals. Because various publics have stakes in organisations, they also attempt to influence organisational missions and goals.

Scholars of strategic management remain silent about two issues regarding the environment. There is little discussion about who in the organisation should observe the environment. In addition, the process to be used in environmental scanning remains unexplored. Grunig and Repper (1992:123) believe that in the application of the excellent theory, communication management is able to fill in this gap, both in theory and in practice. In return, “theories of strategic management will help fill the void in public relations theories regarding how public relations can contribute to organisational effectiveness” (Grunig & Repper, 1992:123).

Strategic management literature often conceptualised the environment as a constraint to organisational missions. Conversely, communication management scholars attempt to rebut this misconception in order to reconceptualise the organisational environment as a source of competitive advantage. Strategic communication scholars argue instead that the environment is not static but open to negotiations, persuasion, accommodation, and alterations. For that matter, “it is in the strategic interest of the organisation to change their behaviour when they provoke oppositions from the environment as well as to try and change the behaviour of the environmental stakeholders” (Grunig & Repper, 1992:123). The function of the communication unit *is boundary spanning* between an organisation and its environment.

4.4.1 BOUNDARY SPANNING

Boundary spanning is one of the most important mechanisms by which information is imported into organisations. The concept of boundary spanning is an important understanding the role of communication in interpreting the environment. Boundary spanning is an ‘outside-in’ approach. Boundary spanners are people within the organisation who interact with the organisation’s external environment. They are important

in strategic decision making because of their ability to recognise and deal with trends or changes in the external environment (Steyn & Puth, 2000:60). Departments or divisions that engage in boundary-spanning roles will gain influence over strategic decisions making within the organisation. As environmental scanners, they make important decisions when they select which information to present to decision-makers and which to withhold. However, “it seems that messengers are still blamed (although not killed) for unwelcome messages, regardless of their value to the decision-making process” (Steyn & Puth, 2000:61).

There are two classes of boundary-spanning functions: the first concerns information processing. This is called the mirror function. The mirror function (reflective task) is in effect when boundary spanning is appropriated as a medium for acquiring and interpreting timely, current, and soft information (Steyn & Puth, 2000:61). The reflective communication strategist acts as an advocate for key stakeholders by explaining their views to the dominant coalition and making management aware of the impacts the organisation has on the environment and its stakeholders. Therefore, strategic communication functions as a warning system before issues culminate into crises (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:313).

The second class of boundary spanning is called the window function (expressive task). This entails “communication messages that portray all facets of the organisation in a transparent way” (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:307). In this, boundary spanning performs representational roles such as in marketing, advertising, and advocacy external rhetoric. The Pretoria School of Thought considers the reciprocal (strategic) reflection role as optimal because it takes into account both the mirror/reflective and window/expressive functions (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:313). In this, “management is made to understand that public trust is not earned by simply changing outward communication to signify responsibility – an organisation actually has to behave accordingly” (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:313).

4.5 STRATEGY COMMUNICATION AND COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Moss and Warnaby (1998) distinguish between strategy communication and communication strategy. They argue that these two concepts are not the same although they are equally important. The first concept of *strategy communication* entails the role of communication in facilitating the strategy-making process. The latter concept of *communication strategy* comprises of the nature and focus of communication strategy itself. The two concepts are discussed next:

4.5.1 STRATEGY COMMUNICATION

Strategy communication is found mostly within the strategy process literature. Here, the role of communication in the organisation strategy-making processes is analysed (Moss & Warnaby, 1998:315). The role of communication in this regard is to communicate the organisational leaders' strategic vision to both internal and external stakeholders. Related to this role, is the function of communication in ensuring consensus in the strategy making process. The third role is to motivate internal stakeholders to align themselves with the organisational strategy (Moss & Warnaby, 1998:315). In most strategic management literature, the role of internal communication is recognised in facilitating the above-mentioned roles. In the contrary, little emphasis has been placed on the role of external communication in seeking out issues and in building relationships with strategic stakeholders. Within this dispensation of *strategy communication*, Moss and Warnaby (1998:315) is of the opinion that "communication has been treated primarily as an enabling function, facilitating the successful implementation of strategic decisions, but it is not in itself seen as a key element in the strategic decision making process".

4.5.2 COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

The tactically oriented perspective of communication as merely supporting or enabling the strategy-making processes is found mainly in management literature. In contrast, scholars in communication management have begun recommending for communication to play a broader role in the strategic management processes. Grunig and Repper (2001) argue that

the role of communication in strategic management is in defining and understanding the organisation's environment. Following Grunig and Repper (1992), Moss and Warnaby (1998) also emphasise that communication is able to play a more significant role in diagnosing the environment as a first step in the strategy making processes.

Most accentuated in communication management literature are the 'boundary-spanning' role and the environmental scanning capabilities of public relations. For example, the key element to Grunig and Repper's strategic communication model is environmental scanning and issue management. The key argument is that the communication unit must participate in the organisation's strategic processes from beginning to end. Steyn (2004:179) adds that strategic communication is maximally optimised when a practitioner functions at the top management or macro level of the organisation and assists in the formulation of enterprise strategy.

Grunig and Repper (1992) advise that communication must be managed strategically. In that regard, Moss and Warnaby (1998:375) ask the question, how can communication be managed strategically? In response, the excellence theory offers **14 principles of excellence** and effectiveness as foundations of strategic communication management. Grunig and Repper (1992:117) describe the strategic role of communication management as that of building long-term relationships with organisational stakeholders (**symmetrical communication**). Moss and Warnaby (1998:136), emphasise the fact that strategic communication entails diagnoses of the environment (**environmental scanning**) in order to make the organisation aware of stakeholders, public and issues as they evolve and the development of programmes that can help resolve such issues (**contributing to organisational effectiveness**). Steyn (2004) adds that strategic communication is based on a premise of communication management as a **management function** (Steyn, 2004). In this way, the five principles of effectiveness in communication management are delineated.

Communication has been treated primarily as an enabling function. Its role is only recognised in facilitating the successful implementation of strategic decisions but not seen as a key element in the strategic decision-making process (Moss & Warnaby, 2003:135).

Strategic communication can be regarded as a three-step process as follows: Step 1 is about gathering information in order to inform strategy. Step 2 is about enabling communication strategy formation and step 3 is about communicating strategy to internal and external stakeholders.

According to Hartman and Lenk (2001:147), “Strategic communication within an organisation is a proactive means of integrating communication with business planning”. Strategic communication must be integrated with organisational planning. The concept is based on the belief that strategic communication must contribute to an overall organisational competitiveness (efficiency) in business processes, employees’ attraction and retention, reputation, legitimacy and to the bottom line (profit). Strategic communication channels the organisation to achieve a competitive advantage through early detection and management of emerging issues and by ensuring mutual understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders. This means that communication must assist the company archive both financial and non-financial capital.

To contribute to competitiveness (effectiveness), communication must be aligned with organisational goals and objectives. Organisational goals must be a prelude to communication goals. To do that, communicators must fully understand the organisation’s goals and objectives. It is thus necessary for communication managers to be part of the dominate coalition, or at the very list, be present at the decision-making table. Through environmental scanning, communication managers should be able to influence decision making of the dominant coalition by providing intelligence regarding the socio-political and economic environment of the organisation. This information should be used to develop optimal organisational policies, goals, and objectives. “The question that puzzles most organisations, however, is what does strategic communication look like and where do we start?” (Hartman & Lenk, 2001:147). There is rarely any discussion regarding where the communications function may fit into the overall strategic management process (Moss & Warnaby, 2003:135).

4.6 THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION IN THE STRATEGY-MAKING PROCESS

There are limited recognitions of the role that the communication function should play in the strategy-making process. This means that communication is largely relegated to a technical role within the strategy literature (Moss & Warnaby, 2003:132). There is a lack of attention paid to communication issues throughout the strategy literature. Moss and Warnaby (2003:132) argue that “it is necessary to distinguish between two separate yet related perspectives – the role of communication in facilitating the strategy-making process (strategy communication) and the nature and focus of communications strategy itself (communications strategy)”.

For internal communication, one of the roles of strategy communication is in building consensus to organisational strategy and negotiating resolutions to disagreements. This relates to the role of communication in articulating a clear strategic vision, involving organisational members in the strategy-making process, and motivating stakeholders to adopt the strategy. There is a need to communicate the organisational leader’s strategic vision to both internal and external stakeholders. Effective communication systems are necessary to ensure that strategic tasks and tactics are carried out precisely. The other function of communication is in facilitating understanding and coordination between the separate hierarchical functions of the organisation such as between directories and various business units within an organisation. Another recognised role is in implementing a major cultural change (change communication). Equally important is a role of strategic communication in building a climate of mutual trust and understanding between managers, employers and key stakeholders.

In contrast to the tactical orientation of communication in strategy-making process is the function that communication should play in “a broader, more strategically significant role within organisations”. Communication management should be treated as a strategically important function, which can play a key part in helping organisations to diagnose the environment and manage exchange between stakeholders (Moss and Warnaby, 2003:136). The principle guiding the argument is that of the ‘boundary-spanning’ capability of the communication function in environmental scanning and stakeholder management.

Grunig and Repper (1992:117) define the strategic role of communication management as that of ‘building long-term relationships with an organisation’s strategic constituencies’. However, to fulfil this role, communication managers must participate in organisational strategic planning, and communication programmes must be managed strategically. Grunig and Repper (1992) see diagnosing the environment as a foundation to strategic corporate communication. Grunig and Repper’s (1992) multistage model represent perhaps the most sophisticated attempt to conceptualise strategic communication management. This model focus on the evaluation of organisational stakeholders, publics and issues resulting in the formulation of specific communications programmes as a response. The next section describes the incorporation of strategic communication to government communication.

4.7 STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Strangely, the concept of strategic communication is seldom defined. Steyn (2004) postulates that most definitions of strategic communication are either aligned to, or involved in communicating ‘corporate strategy’. She referred to two definitions to illustrate this postulation. One such definition refers to “strategic communication management as having a communication strategy that is fully aligned and integrated with business strategy” (Steyn, 2004:176). The second definition mentions that the role of communication strategy is to interpret an organisation’s vision, values, goals and intention to its audiences. Both definitions display the tactical and linear view of strategic communication.

South African government departments are abounded by job titles such as chief director, deputy director and director of communication. These positions connote the existence of strategic government communication where the communication manager is involved in strategic decision-making and performs strategic planning (Steyn & Green, 2001:2). However, this seems not to be the case in practice. Following Steyn (2000), Steyn and Green (2001) also found many instances in which communication managers were performing technical communication roles and mundane daily communicative routines than they were performing strategic managerial communication roles.

Ring and Perry (1985:281) claim that strategic management in the public sector may be extremely difficult. The argument is that the environmental context and the organisational structure of government may impede against the functional strategic management. “The constraints imposed by openness and multiple publics, coupled with contingencies of time, when compounded by policy vagueness and/or ambiguity, can frequently do create significant problems in the implementation of policy” (Ring & Perry, 1985:281).

Martinelli (2012:143) posits that when government communicators are so busy reacting to what they must do on their daily ritual practices, they often do not take time to proactively think through and plan their government communication practices. Strategic communication planning propels the communication unit forward beyond the ‘reactive’ orientation of government communication. Strategic communication can help the communication unit to become more visible and appear more valuable to top-management (Martinelli, 2012:143). However, it seems that government communicators are more comfortable working primarily within the familiar landscape of media relations and public meetings and less with more visible, strategic objectives to move units forward. Grunig (2007:22) illustrates this point:

“Most public relations practitioners are the masters of a number of techniques. They know how to secure media coverage, prepare press releases, write speeches, write, and design brochures, produce video news releases, negotiate with activists, interview community leaders, lobby representatives in congress, stage a special event, or prepare an annual report”.

Martinelli (2012:144) lamented the limited agency given to strategic government communication in that “concentrated strategic efforts seem relatively rare” in government communication. The foundation to this problem according to Grunig (2007:23) is that “most managers and administrators, and especially the general public – have little understanding of public relations – equating it with publicity, image-making, or outright deception”. It is only recently that some government units began developing annual communication strategic documents.

Grunig and Jaatinen (1998:220) previously postulated that government departments are moving towards a strategic, managerial, and symmetrical form of communication even

though they were not quite there yet. Grunig (2007:32) recently observed that government are more likely to implement strategic management than corporations do. For instance, it was found that public affairs departments were more likely to be managed strategically when they were integrated into the organisational level of strategic management (Grunig and Jaatinen, 1998:220).

Martinelli (2012) outlines three preconditions that must be in place for government communication to be strategic. First, symmetrical communication must be realised. This means that “dialogue is fostered between the unit and its constituents, both internal and external, to help the unit understand these publics concerns, wants and needs” (Martinelli, 2012: 145). The concept of symmetrical communication is relatively foreign to traditional notions of government communication, which was classified as one-way communication concerned only with information diffusion.

The second precondition of strategic government communication is that issue management must be instigated. “Issue management by its nature is a strategic planning process” (Martinelli, 2012:145). Issue management demands active environmental scanning that goes beyond simple media monitoring and content analysis. The process of issue management forces the communication unit to align the government department’s activities to stakeholder’s expectations. Martinelli (2012:145) recommends for active environmental scanning to be systematically planned, implemented, and included in the strategic communication plan.

As a third precondition, Martinelli (2012:145) makes a case for the role of modern marketing in strategic government communication. He postulates that “government communicators may want to apply marketing principles in their communications efforts to engage more citizens in new or exciting government services” (Martinelli, 2012:146). Modern marketing goes beyond the traditional four P’s of product, pricing, placement, and promotion to incorporate broader customers’ needs. This renders modern marketing more relationship-centred than the traditional one-way publicity oriented traditional concept of marketing. There has been a growing recognition in government communication of the value of modern marketing and public relations. This refers to the advancement of external

organisational advocacy in government communication. However, despite this growing recognition of the value of marketing and public relations techniques in government communication, there appears to be few strategic models that are publicly available for widespread emulation. There is surprisingly little scholarly research conducted on the areas of *strategic* government communication.

The Pretoria School of Thought (PST) expands on the European societal approach to communication management that views strategic communication from an ‘outside’ perspective, reflecting concern for broader societal issues to enhance legitimacy and public trust towards the organisation (de Beer, Steyn and Rensburg, 2013:309). Furthermore, according to The Pretoria School of Thought, for strategic communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness it must function within the macro societal level. For government communication to contribute to democracy, it should be incorporated within the macro/enterprise level of management and decision-making. Therefore, it is essential for government communication to be practiced and theorised from a societal approach.

Paul (2012) enumerates challenges and difficulties faced by government departments in their efforts at strategic communication designed to inform, influence, and persuade citizens. Writing about the department of defence in the United States, Paul (2012) mentions that the biggest challenge in government communication is that “strategic communication is often an afterthought”. When that happens, the result is what can be called ‘sprinkles approach’ to government communication whereby the contribution of the communication section is added only at the last minute, usually with little effect. For example, Paul (2012:191) illustrates that “commanders or operation will direct information officers to sprinkle some of that information officers stuff on an already completed military plan”.

The issue that most often deter against sophisticated strategic government communication initiatives are “lower levels of trust and budget and staff constraints”. For strategic government communication to work, it should “it must be first and foremost practical and realistic in terms of resources and expectations” (Mertinelli, 2012:146). Additionally, for

strategic government communication to be truly effective there must be a buy in from top management or the dominant coalition. If not, it is most likely to fail both in planning and in operation.

Another significant challenge worth acknowledging is that “the leaders who provide strategic direction for a government agency are not only the managers of that agency but also legislators and the chief executives”. For this reason, the challenge for strategic management as defined by Bingman and Kee in Grunig (2007:33) are as follows:

“Strategic management in the federal government involves constant accommodation between politicians/policymakers and the administrators/managers. Very often the manager must follow a vision set by others, with limited ability to influence its design. Even where the manager helps to establish the vision, it is subject to annual change and validity in the legislature budget processes”.

The other challenge to strategic government communication as noted by Grunig and Jaatinen (1998: 229-230) is on the implementation of communication strategies. Communication strategy documents interpret the reality as well as the ideal in actual practice. However, in spite of excellent communication strategy documents, the implementation of the policy is impeded by two factors. First, concerns “the lack of skills by government practitioners to implement the policy”. The second challenge in implementation can be ascribed to “a widespread incomprehension of the policy by programme or line managers” (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998:229). However, there is a sense that the application of communication strategies across government departments is uneven. In some departments, the communication strategy is adopted wholeheartedly because it received strong support from the dominant coalition. Therefore, the implementation of communication strategy documents depend on the knowledge base of practitioners and support found from management (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998:230).

In offering some suggestions in alleviating the challenges of practicing strategic government communication, Paul (2012) recommends the following. “To be really good at strategic communication, everyone, including commanders/ decision-makers and their

subordinates, need to have a communication mind-set”. By communication mind-set, Paul (2012:192) refers to an inclination to consider what executing a given plan will communicate or signal to others and a willingness to include such considerations in planning. This supports Grunig and Jaatinen (1998:222) sentiments that “the key terms in the excellence theory can be found in the statement that organisations are likely to be more effective when their public relations function helps to build strategic, symmetrical relationships with key public”.

4.8 MODELS FOR DEVELOPING COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The area of academic research and discourse in strategy scholarship is dominated by a focus on the process in which strategy is formulated and implemented (Moss & Warnaby, 1998). The strategy management process refers to the methods by which strategies are derived, incorporating various steps or phases through which strategies are formulated and implemented (Steyn, 2004:173).

Phase 1: Environmental scanning

Steyn considers environmental scanning as the first step in the strategy management process. The environmental scanning phase provides a link between the stakeholder environment and the organisation. Steyn (2004:174) describes this process as follows: “The organisation collects information into the strategic formulation process, and anticipates issues /trends that will help to buffer threats and take advantage of opportunities”. This should incorporate step 1-2.

Step 1. Analyse the internal environment – corporate profile, visions, mission, culture, values & policies.

Step 2. Identify strategic stakeholders and publics – identify strategic stakeholders in the external and internal environment by drawing up stakeholder map (public relation audit), identifying stakeholders’ perceptions, attitudes and concerns (issue-management), and identifying stakeholders familiarity with the organisation (corporate image studies). “The overall strategic management of organisation is

inseparable from the strategic management of relationships” (Steyn & Puth, 2000:64).

Phase 2: Strategic thinking and strategic formulation

Steyn (2004) reminds scholars of the distinction between strategic thinking and strategic planning. “Strategic thinking is the process that the organisation’s management uses to set direction and articulate their vision”. This process is both introspective and externally oriented to produce a framework for the strategic and operational plans to determine the organisations strategy. This involves step 3- 5:

Step 3. Identify and prioritise key strategic issues. Part of the strategic role of the communication manager is being a member of the team that identifies the key strategic issues facing the organisation (Steyn & Puth, 2000:69). “When organisations create consequences for others, they must manage diffuse linkages. When diffuse stakeholders organise, they create consequences for the organisation. The more turbulent an organisation’s environment, the more linkages the organisation must manage with its environment and manage more rapidly those linkages change” (Steyn & Puth, 2000:65).

Step 4. Identify implications of strategic issues for stakeholders. Identify the implications of each strategic issue for each (strategic) stakeholder.

Step 5. Decide on the communication strategy – deciding what must be communicated to each stakeholder to solve the problem or capitalise on the opportunity presented by the strategic issue.

Phase 3: Strategic planning, implementation and control

Strategic planning is the means to operationalize strategy already generated through the strategic thinking process. Strategic planning merely formalise the strategic process as began in the strategic thinking phase (Steyn 2004:174). A master plan is detailed in a strategy document. The implementation phase operationalizes the process by turning strategy into a reality by means of detailing shorter-term plans and deciding on tactics to

operationalize the master plan. The control phase consists of management ensuring that the strategy stays on course and achieves set goals. This involves step 6-10.

Step 6. Set communication goals. A communication goal is therefore the destination to be reached by means of the organisation's communication.

Step 7. Develop a communication policy

Step 8. Submit the draft of the corporate communication strategy to top management. "The more they understand the important contribution that the communication unit is making towards the achievement of organisational goals, the easier it will be to obtain funds for implementing the strategy" (Steyn & Puth, 2000:73).

Step 9. Conduct a media analysis. Identify specific media and channels to be used and how they will be used.

Step 10. Develop a communication plan. That is the master plan of how to do it. Communication plans implement the strategy, they provide action points by developing either a communication campaign around the strategy or a communication programme (continuous) or both.

Grunig and Repper (1992) advanced " a multi-stage model for the strategic management of public relations which focuses initially around the analysis of organisational stakeholders, publics and issues which in turn leads to the formulation of specific communication programmes to address the stakeholders, publics and key issues affecting the organisation".

Martinellie (2012) process model for strategic government communication is as follows: First, communicators should discuss the benefits of strategic planning to help the larger unit (department) achieve its goals and get administrative buy-in to begin the process. When management understands that the communication unit will help contribute to the goals and visions of the larger department, the value of communication is realised and support is granted. More research to define the unit's current situation should be conducted in order to understand the specific problems, opportunities, or goals of which the department wishes to attain. In this case, situational analysis of the unit's strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (swot analysis) should be conducted.

Secondly, take into account targeted constituents. Each citizen affected or targeted by the government department must be defined in terms of who they are demographically, regarding their ages, income, education level, income level et cetera. The geographical and psychographic details are also relevant in profiling certain government services. This can be used for promotional purposes. It is also essential to discover what targeted public know about the department in order to determine the attitude they already hold. Such information can be found in media content analysis, surveys polling and focus groups for example.

Thirdly, key messages should be devised. After determining preliminary information regarding the target audiences, goals, and objectives of the department, strategic key messages must be identified. The message should appeal to the audiences' self-interest, what is called the unique selling proposition (usp) in marketing terminology. "Each communication tool or tactic developed should include a specific call for action, which tells people what they can do to act on the message". Fourthly, Communication tactics should be delineated. The communication plan must be formalised and specific tasks or tactics outlined in order to support the identified strategies, objectives, and goals (Mertinellie, 2012:151).

Fifth, the timetable must be set. The timetable should include a yearlong communication plan scheduled task /tactics and their respective personnel assignment. Strategic planning should be an inclusive process entailing all communicators. Sixth, on-going evaluations are essential. "Communication plans should be dynamic documents that are evaluated on an on-going basis and adopted accordingly to meet objectives and goals" (Mertinellie, 2012:151). Although the steps in the process of developing a communication strategy were indicated in a linear fashion in the chapter, it does not necessarily always happen in this sequence in practice. Essential to the enactment of strategic communication are topics relating to the structuring of the communication department and communication evaluations. These issues are discussed next.

4.9 ORGANISING THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

Strategic communication is deeply affected by the position of the communication unit within an organisation. There is no one best way to organise the public relations department. To Gregory (2009:20), the way each organisation manages, structures, and undertakes its public relations (PR) activities is unique. Some departments may consist of one communication individual while others may house a number of communication professionals with specialised units responsible for distinct communication activities (Seitel, 1984:55). Some departments may have decentralised organisational structures with different communication professionals reporting to different structures of management whereas other departments prefer a more centralised structure in which all communication professionals report to one communication executive who then reports to the dominant coalition. The specific objectives determine the structure. In this case “structure must always follow strategy – not vice versa” (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007:260).

4.9.1 POSITION OF THE COMMUNICATION UNIT WITHIN AN ORGANISATION

The location of the communication unit within an organisation depends on a variety of factors. Gregory (2009) outlines these factors as follows: the position of the most senior communication manager in the organisation, the tasks allocated to the communication unit, and how the communication unit is situated in relation to the other functions in the organisation.

Gregory (2009:27) argues that the position of the most senior communication manager within the organisation provides a good indication of how the communication function is valued within the organisation. Grunig and Repper (1992) have already argued that communication is valued in an organisation if it is a part of the dominant coalition to determine the goals and priorities of the organisation rather than merely to communicate those goals once decided. A compromising role where communication managers are not part of the dominant coalition is within the ‘senior adviser’ role. Within this role, the senior

communication manager is not part of the dominant coalition per se but reports directly to the CEO and holds a special position of power and influence as a reputable advisor.

4.9.2 ACCESS TO MANAGEMENT

Research on the managerial role of communication represents a major strand in the communication management literature. Much of the research on the managerial role of communication centres on “arguments about practitioners involvement or exclusion from participating in management decision-making and strategic planning” (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005:873).

There must always be direct access to the top of the organisation, and that this access should be used to exert influence to strategic planning. Communication units may be influential, advisory, or merely a support service. Communication departments may not have direct access to ‘top management’ if they are situated low in the organisational hierarchy. Van Ruler (2000:409) warns, “Communication managers who do have access to the top do not always translate this into influence”. On a research of communication management in the Netherlands, Van Ruler (2000:409) found that “the majority of respondents in that survey regarded access as important because they had to know what was going on and so they could alert senior management to threats to the corporate image. Only a small minority considered that influence over strategic planning was part of their role”. The next section discusses the importance of communication evaluation to strategic communication management.

4.10 COMMUNICATION EVALUATION IN GOVERNMENT

The enactment of strategic communication is heavily dependent on continuous communication evaluations. It has become apparent that “in an organisational environment characterised by downsizing and zero-based budgeting, public relations no longer can convincingly argue that the function is justified without evidence of measurable results” (Hon, 1997:1). The demand for research comes from outside communication management. It comes from managers schooled in the management by objective

philosophy, seeking accountability from communications. However, Dozier (1992:336) maintains that practitioners are slow to adopt evaluation research into their daily practice. Research on the effectiveness of communication management often fails to identify the contribution of communication management to an organisation itself. “Some effect that were posed and critiqued included increased inquiries, sales, votes, attendance, and donations, more volunteers, improved employee morale and job satisfaction, and cost saved by avoiding litigation and negative issues campaigns to fend off external pressure”. None of these demonstrates the effectiveness of communication management to the organisation itself.

Communication management attains value only by helping an organisation achieve its goals. Increasingly, communication managers are preoccupied with demonstrating the positive financial return on investment (ROI). On the other hand, KwaZulu Natald, “other professionals are focused on showing that public relations messages have effects on cognitive concepts such as reputation, brand, image, or identity, which they believe increase the value of an organisation beyond its tangible asserts” (Grunig, 2006:159). Rhetorical theorists fall under this group. Though difficult to place momentary value, the excellence theory posit that good strategic communication management, which is based on scanning the environment and symmetrical relationships saves an organisation money by reducing costs of litigation, regulation, legislation, and negative publicity caused by poor aimless policies, strategies and poor relations.

Although it is old data, Hiebert and Devine (1985:46) research found that government information officers almost universally proclaim the importance of research and evaluation to their work, however, there was a huge gap between the admission of importance and the actual conducting of communication evaluation. “Public information officers in the federal government conducted almost no research and evaluation” (Hiebert & Devine, 1985:47). Hiebert and Devine (1985:46) identified the following barriers preventing the uptake of communication evaluations in government: lack of budget, lack of time, lack of knowledge and qualification to conduct communication evaluations. The public information directors did not use the techniques because they were oblivious to them and because they felt such techniques were at the exclusive use of the private sector. Some would say

“we are not selling soup... these techniques don’t apply to government” (Hiebert & Devine, 1985:56)

Developing a framework for the evaluation of government communication is also a key task for researchers (Canel & Sanders, 2012:92). Public relations evaluation concern all research designed to determine the effectiveness or value of public relations’ efforts such as the success or failure of specific PR programmes, strategies, activities, or tactics. These are measured against a predetermined set of objectives (Lindenmann, 2003:5). Most professions have recognised measuring tools, but public relations’ efforts have always been gauged in a variety of ways - each using a different kind of measuring stick and units. Sanders *et al.* (2011:5) lamented the lack of sufficient published descriptive data of government communication, which makes it impossible to profile structures, processes and outcomes suggestive of professionalization and thus serving as an index of professionalism in government communication.

This study draws on Sanders’ *et al.* (2011:5) framework for the analysis of government communication. The proposed approach in quality management is to survey three central aspects of any organisation, namely, structure, processes, and outcomes. *Structure* concerns the conditions in which an activity takes place (i.e. the unique communication environment of the public sector) and the rules governing an activity (e.g. communication policies and professional guidance). *Processes* are a set of ordered actions such as roles, functions and communication practices, and *outcomes* are the results or consequences of communication processes (e.g. government reputation). Please see table 6.

The framework analyses structure, processes, and outcomes. **Structure** encompasses two sets of clusters, namely administration and human resource. Administration covers formal rules, legislation and communication policies relevant to government communication. Guidance and organisational charts detailing communication roles and functions are included as part of structural administration of government communication in the department. Another structural dimension is human resources inclusive of the skills, knowledge, and values of the entire communication workforce (Sanders *et al.*, 2005:6).

Financial resources such as budget and other rewards may fall under the human resource rubric.

The communication **processes** dimension incorporates information gathering, analysis, and dissemination (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:6). This cluster is malleable enough to include analysis of all government communication activities. However insinuated, a lesser highlighted dimension in Sanders' *et al.* (2011:5) framework is the **outcome** dimension. This cluster encompasses information evaluation in its entirety. All research on communication effectiveness and media analysis may fall here.

Table 6: Sanders framework for the analysis of government communication

Structure	Administration/ professionalization	Formal rules	Organisational charts Legislation Policies and guidance
	Human resources	Financial resources Skills knowledge values	Budgets Reward systems Professional profiles Training
Process	Communication	Information gathering and analysis	Research work (commissioned or internally undertaken) Coordination and planning mechanisms and routines
		Information dissemination	Briefings, meetings, press conferences. Digital media Campaigns advertising
*Outcome		Information evaluation	Feedback mechanism. Media analysis. Communication metrics (return-on-investment measures)

* Added by current researcher for clarification purposes.

On evaluating government communication **outcomes**, Grunig and Grunig (1999) discern four levels of evaluative research in government communication. First, the programme level evaluates individual communication programmes such as media relations or corporate reputation. The functional level evaluates the effectiveness of public relations in the overall management of the organisation. The third level, the organisational level is done by comparing the structure and process of the departments to the structures and processes of similar departments and to theoretical principles and scholarly research (benchmarking). The fourth level concerns the societal level because public organisations have an impact beyond their own boundaries. As such, organisations cannot be said to be

effective unless they are socially responsible (reputation analysis can be a basis for research in the societal level).

When most government communicators think of research, they think of research directly related to specific communication programmes. They are evaluation-only studies, which generally have not been preceded by formative research to help plan the programme. These studies do not measure objectives based on formative research, so they have no benchmark. The measures cannot be used directly to conclude whether public affairs programmes contributed to the effectiveness of the organisation or society. Performance measurement can clarify the benefit that government communication has contributed to government operations and successes (Vos, 2009:363).

Formative research precedes the communication effort to identify strategies, publics, to determine how the organisation can communicate best to develop quality programmes and communication strategies. Evaluative research is one conducted after the communication process to determine the success or failure or progress of the communication effort. “Public relations is not a start/stop communication process where an organisation stops interaction with publics while the results of a media relations programme are measured” (Watson & noble, 2007: 88). Evaluation is a continuous process so any model must reflect the “dynamic, progressive and continuous nature of this process” (Watson & noble, 2007:89).

Lindenmann (2003), and, Watson and Noble (2007) highlighted major PR measurements and evaluation components. The *in-put* inclusive of environmental audit and objectives works as a benchmark. The audit will tell us what the problem is while the objectives will tell us the solution of the problem (Watson & Noble, 2007:91). *Outputs* are usually the immediate results of a PR strategy such as the amount of exposure that the organisation receives. Media content analysis is one of the principal methodologies used to measure media outputs. Both quality and quantity of outputs can be measured and evaluated. PR *outtakes* are more specific such as determining if key audiences actually received the message, paid attention, understood (apprehended and retained), and recalled the message (Watson & Noble, 2007:87). PR *outcomes* measure effects such as opinion

change, and behavioural change. It is more difficult and more expensive to measure PR outcomes, data-gathering research tools and technique are required (Lindenmann, 2003:10). A mixture of qualitative and quantitative research techniques are often used to measure PR outcomes and PR outcomes. Surveys, attitude surveys, focused groups, interviews and ethnographic research may be used for this purpose.

The purpose of Vos's (2009) study was to understand communication quality and to find a way in which government communication performance could be measured at a municipal level. Vos (2009:368) outlined seven quality criteria for government communication. The first element is transparency and the value of accountability. Vos argues that performance measurements lead to transparency, which in turn stimulates innovation in practice. Accessibility of information and organisation is a second quality measure. This indicator means that citizens and other stakeholders are able to find what and who they are looking for. The third indicator of quality in government communication is the level of publicity through the media. Active media relations and responsiveness to the media signals symmetrical engagement. Fourth, responsiveness is also an essential indicator meaning that communicators observe feedback and applies it in making improvements. This requires a monitoring system and the willingness to use feedback honourably. Interactive polity forms the fifth indicator. Interactive policy refers to "the active involvement of target groups in policy projects" (Vos, 2009:368). A culture of collaboration in policymaking is needed for this indicator to be enacted. Sixth is communication policy, which requires well-considered embedded communication as a policy tool in addition to other instruments. This requires strategic considerations and planning. The last indicator of quality government communication is the degree of effective and efficiency of communication. The indicator is only possible when a result-focussed and efficient deployment of communication is apparently added with well-considered forms of research and cost-conscious implementation of communication tactics (Vos, 2009:368).

4.11 CONCLUSIONS

Strategic government communication should be planned, managed by objectives, evaluated, and connected in some way to organisational objectives. Although challenges

and hindrances to the practice of strategic communication in government have been identified in this chapter, literature profiled offer solutions and preconditions for strategic government communication to be possible. Those requirements are encapsulated as follows: strategic government communication is only enacted within a symmetrical two-way communication model. This means that dialogue is fostered between the unit and its constituents. Issue management, preceded by active environmental scanning and complemented by precise communication evaluations should become consistent activities of government communication. Moreover, communication must be planned and such planning should be reflected in government communication strategy documents. The strategic management literature insists that strategic communication is sustained by a conspicuous buy in of top management in the department. Strategic communication requires the presence of communication managers who practice public relations as a management function. Another recommendation is for the adoption of modern marketing and identity management as functions towards a visible and available organisation or government. Such issues of government visibility, rhetoric, identity management, and media relations may be considered strategies towards communicating with the public as external stakeholders. The next chapter explores the practice of government communication.

CHAPTER 5: THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Important in this chapter is an exploration of how government communication is actually practiced. A suggested approach in conducting a communication practice research is to survey three central aspects of an organisation, namely, structure, processes, and outcomes (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:5). *Structure* concerns the conditions in which an activity takes place, that is, the distinctive communication environment of the public sector, already discussed in chapter 3. *Processes* are a set of ordered actions such as roles, functions and communication practices. *Outcomes* are the results or consequences of processes such as government reputation as an outcome as discussed in chapter 2. Particularly vital to this chapter is a discussion of *processes* as defined by Sanders *et al.* (2011:5).

This chapter begins by defining communication as a practice, essentially reviewing what a practice is and what qualifies government communication to be a practice. A practice is related but different from a profession. The definition adopted here is that a practice concerns the day-to-day operation of a profession, whereas a profession refers to the standardisation and the management of the practice. In this chapter, roles and functions of government communicators are outlined. This is followed by an assessment of challenges confronting government communication. Moreover, issues concerning the professionalising of government communication are described.

5.2 COMMUNICATION AS PRACTICE

According to Craig's (2006) definition, "a practice is a coherent set of activities that are commonly engaged in and meaningful in particular ways, among people familiar with certain cultures". A practice is a method, procedure, process, or rule, used in a particular field or profession (www.businessdictionary.com). A practice involves not only engaging in

certain activities but also thinking about those activities in particular ways. Practices can be done well or poorly, that is way it is essential to evaluate the effectiveness of a practice. As a practice develops, a normative discourse about the practice develops along with it. The normative discourse is a constitutive part of the practice. Such is the on-going communication about the practice as standards of excellence, ethical norms, techniques, styles and so forth are continually conceptualised and disseminated through a culture that makes the practice meaningful and regulates the conduct through professionalism (Craig, 2006).

Theory provides ways of interpreting practical knowledge. However, no theory can explain everything necessary to participate in a practical activity. Practical knowledge comes only with the accumulation of direct experience. Nonetheless, theory contributes to discursive consciousness. A theory of practice provides a particular way of interpreting practical knowledge. It should be noted that every theory considered as an interpretation of practical knowledge presents an idealised normative standard for practice. Roles and functions are best able to demarcate the parameters of a practice and best able to delineate the nature of a practice through explanations of lived experiences.

5.3 ROLES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS

According to Dozier (1992:328), roles define the everyday activities of public relations. Roles guide the actions of individuals. Practitioners' roles are imperative towards understanding the function of public relations and organisational communication. Roles and professional status are tightly intertwined (Dozier, 1992:328). In an organisational setting, argue Steyn and Green (2001:2), the concept of 'role' refers to the standardisation patterns of behaviour required of individuals in specific functional relationships. For Van Ruler, (2004:124), a role can be considered an expected behaviour associated with a social position.

Communication roles have been studied from a variety of perspectives. Public relations roles have been studied in relation to the power of the communication department within the organisation. In addition, they have been studied in relation to environmental scanning,

issue management, models of public relations practices, job satisfaction, role specialisation, professionalization, and gender empowerment/discrimination (Clemons, 2009:11).

5.3.1 TYPES OF COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONER ROLES

Broom and Smith (1979) operationally conceptualised five conceptual role models: the expert prescriber, technical service provider, communication process facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator, and the acceptant legitimizer. Dozier (1984) found two major roles, the manager and the technical roles. In addition, he identified two minor roles: the media relations specialist and the communication liaison. The Pretoria School of Thought (PST) identifies three South African communication management roles: strategist, manager and technician. These are similar to those identified by the European Body of Knowledge (EBOK), which are reflective, managerial and operational (de Beer, Steyn and Rensburg, 2013:309).

In communication practices, two central roles always emerge. The communication technician and the communication manager are two dominant roles that consolidated the consensus of many scholars (Broom & Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1992, Van Ruler, 2004; Grunig 2007). “The management – technician role dichotomy has been the most widely used framework in role research over the past two decades” (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005:873). Grunig (2007:44) distinguishes between these two roles as he explains, “communication managers’ plan and direct public relations programmes, communication technicians provide technical services such as writing, editing, photography, media contacts, or production of publications”. However, Grunig (2007) argues that the majority of public relations people are technicians.

The Pretoria School of Thought (PST) identifies the **communication strategist** role as one senior to the traditional manager’s role. Only the strategic manager’s role is capable of instilling strategic communication management by enacting a reflective role. The reflective role has to do with analysing changing standards, values and norms in society and pointing these out to organisational decision-makers (the dominant coalition) so that they

can adjust the standards and values of the organisation regarding social responsibility and legitimacy (de Beer, Steyn and Rensburg, 2013:309). This role has been described more closely in chapter 4 in the strategic government communication chapter. Below Steyn and Green (2001) distinguish between the communication manager and the communication technician:

Practitioners in the manager role make communication policy decisions and are involved in corporate communication decision making - they frequently use research to plan or evaluate their work and to counsel management. Communication technicians, on the other hand, do not participate in management decision making, but provide the communication and journalistic skills - writing, editing, audiovisual production, graphics and the production of messages - needed to implement communication programmes.

For Dozier (1984:333), the communication manager “facilitates communication between management and publics and guide management through what practitioners describe as a rational problem-solving process”. The role of the manager originated from Broom and Smith’s (1979) conceptualisation of this role into three different categories: the expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator (Steyn & Green, 2001:3).

An **expert prescriber** is an informed practitioner, one who becomes the best-informed person in the organisation (Broom & Smith, 1979:48). Such practitioners are regarded as experts on public relations, best informed about public relations issues, and best qualified to answer public relations questions (Dozier, 1992:327). In explaining this role, Broom and Smith (1979:48) refer to the ‘doctor-patient’ relationship where the doctor (expert prescriber) diagnose the problem and offer prescriptions (solutions) to a passive (agreeable) patient (organisation). The expert prescriber “operates as an authority on both the public relations problem and the solutions that should be implemented” (Broom & Smith, 1979:48; Broom, 1982:18).

Communication (process) facilitator is the go-between, facilitating communication. This role is also called the interpreter or the communication link. It is an information mediating role where the “primary function is to facilitate the exchange of information so the parties involved have adequate information for dealing with each other and for making decisions

of mutual interests” (Broom & Smith, 1979:53). The role concern process, the quality and quantity of information flow between management and publics (Dozier, 1992:330). This role involves the maintenance of a two-way communication between the organisation and its various publics.

Problem-solving process facilitator is a practitioner helping management systematically think through organisational communication and public relations problems and in collaboration with clients (management), designs and implements solutions (Dozier, 1992:330). This communication practitioner works closely with management to solve issues whereas the expert prescriber works independently to solve issues, which consequently renders management passive and dependent. It is a collaborative relationship entailing joint efforts of diagnosis, planning, and implementation (Broom & Smith, 1971:51).

Communication technician role is one of a **technical service provider**. These practitioners are also called the journalist in resident because they are hired for their journalistic skills in writing and dealing with the media. Here, the client (management) themselves define the problem and select the solution. This means that the dominant coalition makes strategic decisions, specifying organisational actions and designating the communications directed at the public about such actions. The communication technician then is retained to provide those mandated communication service (Dozier, 1992:327). Hence, the communication technician operates in ways consistent with the clients (management) expectations and prescriptions (Broom & Smith, 1979:49).

The **acceptance Legitimizer** involves a nondirective role emergent from psychology where the practitioner’s role is in helping the client “through sympathetic listening and empathy support” (Broom & Smith, 1979:53). Here, the practitioner works as a spokesperson in presenting the ideas of the client organisation. This role is the least active of all other roles. Broom and Smith (1979:53) explain further, “while this role is the least active of our experimental role models, we included it because public relations’ practitioners are often subordinated to this position in highly structured organisations”. For some reason, this role fell out of literature in subsequent years. For example, Broom

(1982), Dozier (1992) and Van Ruler (2004) do not mention this role in their renditions of Broom and Smith's (1979) communication roles.

Two additional communication technician roles are found. Those are the **media relations** specialist and the communication liaison. The media relations specialist specialises in external media relations rather than internal communication production activities. Similar to technicians, media specialists make no policy decisions, nor are they held accountable for outcomes (Broom & Dozier, 1986:41). The **communication liaison** officer specialises in linking communication between management and key publics. They too are isolated from decision-making and accountability (Broom & Dozier, 1986:41; Dozier, 1992:333).

In their article, Moss, Newman, and DeSanto (2005:873) review the methodological paradigm in which managers' roles are conceptualised and measured. What were found worrisome are the limitations of the measures used to identify managers' role enactment. The foremost criticism of role research regards the tendency of scholars to treat roles as static categories into which communicators are 'pigeon-holed' (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005:874). It is therefore essential to remember that these roles are highly inter-correlated and usually performed inter-changeably by the same practitioner meaning that they are conceptual components to the same empirical role (Steyn & Green, 2001:3).

Although most communication literature indicates a two-role typology of the manager and the technician roles, a third role had emerged since 1995. The conceptualisation of the third role is however conflicting. An *agency profile* is one of the roles noted to fit the description of the third role. The agency profile is same as a managerial role but also include counselling management of communication issues. Van Ruler (1997) identified two additional roles one named the sales manager and the other named the intermediary role. The *sales manager* is concerned with synchronising the behaviour of a public with that of the organisation, largely enacting the two-way asymmetrical role while the intermediary enacts a two-way symmetrical role building bridges to ensure mutual understanding and harmony between the public and the organisation. Steyn (2000) concurred with academics on the existence of a third role. This was termed the strategist role. According to Steyn and Green (2001:4), the role of the *strategist* is regarded as a role

at top management level of an organisation. A corporate communication practitioner in this role gathers strategic information on stakeholders and issues from the external environment by means of environmental scanning, and feeds this strategic intelligence into the organisation's strategy formulation processes. This represents a corporate communication's contribution to strategic decision making. Van Ruler (2004) presented a Typology of communication role by means of metaphors. They are summarised in a tabulated form in table 7 below.

Table 7: Van Ruler's typology of communication roles

Role/ metaphor	Description of communication management role
1. The town crier: <i>PR is broadcasting his master's voice.</i>	In broadcasting their master's voice, their jobs entail is nothing more than making their master's communication factual, clear, correct, and reliable. In this, effects and research is unnecessary.
2. The Steward: <i>PR is pampering.</i>	They are tasked with putting the public at ease and making them receptive to positive notions about the organisation. Success and failure is judged by close informal observations.
3. The traffic manager: <i>PR is transfer of information.</i>	Communication is viewed as a controlled one-way process. The focus therefore is on the means of communication, targeting, timing, reach, planning, and control of distribution process. Success in such media relations is judged by delivering the right message, to the right public and the right time.
4. The conductor: <i>PR is harmonic performance.</i>	Communication is seen as persuasion. Herein, the conductor's task is to develop a prominent brand position. For this to be effective, research is essential. This role resonates with the asymmetrical model.
5. The creator: <i>PR is about creating a bond.</i>	"Creators are the types of public relations professionals who aim to create agreement between the organisation, its members, and its constituencies". The symmetrical model is enacted wherein communication is guided by active research about the environment, audiences, and their issues.
6. The facilitator: <i>PR is about hosting dialogue.</i>	Communication is viewed as an interactive two-way process. For the facilitator, communication is about mediation. Communication is as management of relations.
7. The seat-of-the-pants: <i>PR is an art, not a profession.</i>	Communication is seen as a talent, there is no value in education and professionalization because the sheer complexity of public relations cannot be analysed and categorised. They draw on gut feelings rather than on research

Source: Van Ruler (2004:130-137) typology of communication roles.

Moss, Newman and DeSanto (2005:873) conducted a survey of 9000 communicators based in the United Kingdom. In terms of public relations roles research, the majority of studies take a quantitative approach, primarily utilising survey-based research. The research sought to map, explicate, and compare the main elements of the managerial role performed by communication or public relations practitioners. The findings of this study outlined a five-factor dimensions interpreting contemporary communication managers role.

The first dimension is labelled the *monitor and evaluator* dimension. This type of management role is responsible for organising, controlling, and monitoring the day-to-day work of communication. The second management role is termed the *key policy and strategy* advisor. This role focuses on the relationship public relation practitioners have with senior management function (the dominant coalition). Moss, Newman and DeSanto's (2005:873) results demonstrated that this dimension was the exception rather than the rule in most organisations. The third communication management role is *issues management* expert. This role relates to the public relations practitioners role in diagnosing and responding to external threats from major to minor issues that may affect the organisation. Fourthly, the trouble shooting/ problem –solver dimension – focus on the practitioners' role in responding to and dealing with a range of internal and external challenges, threats, or crises confronting the organisation. The last role of the technician relates to handling and overseeing of technical work.

The major findings of Moss, Newman and DeSanto's (2005:886) research were a confirmation of the interdependence and intertwinement of communication roles. "The findings point or conceded with the tendency for practitioners to enact elements of both the manager and the technician role" (ibid). This finding reaffirms the findings of other role-researchers who argued that, in practice, all practitioners enact activities of both the manager and technician roles.

5.3.2 COMMUNICATION ROLE DIFFERENTIATION

Van Ruler examined whether role differentiation exist in the government communication profession, and if so, what tasks' are carried at certain levels of responsibility. Van Ruler

(2000) identified four levels of communication management roles. The highest level is level D, the strategic communication policy manager. In level D is, “a communication specialist with general responsibility for communication policy and general communication management with overall duties, who gives advice at a strategic level”. Level C is assumed by senior communication officers in middle range. Herein, a communication expert specialises in strategic policy areas, such as communication advice, project management, media relations, outreach programme et cetera. The communication officer is placed in level B, the lower level of communication management. Here, a communication expert at an executive and practical level, coordinates production and is able to advise on implementation of already decided communication strategies and goals. The last and lowest level of them all is the level A of the general communication officer or the communication assistance (e.g. interns) who provide assistance to others and carry out general implementation and communication administrative duties (Van Ruler, 2000: 410-412).

However, Van Ruler (2000:412) acknowledges that the four levels are not always present in all organisations. For instance, a small organisation with fewer communication practitioners may compel the few communicators to fulfil all four roles by themselves. Likewise, a communication department situated at a low position within the organisational hierarchy may be confined to performing the lowest level roles because of isolation to strategic decision-making and inaccessibility of management.

Although it was expected that there would be a difference between the profiles of those at each level of responsibility, the data collected from a study of communication management in the Netherlands, showed no role differentiation within the various levels. Van Ruler (2000:417) found no differentiation in the sense that the nature of the task performed varied at each level. In other words, the profiles at the various levels are, to a large degree, extensions of one another.

5.3.3 INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

In order for the communication unit to contribute meaningfully to the enterprise strategy, it must be involved in the organisational decision-making process. Research has linked roles, decision-making, and the nature of the organisation's environment. A closed – system approach to communication management is consistent with the technician role. Technicians are said to be dominant in organisations with nonthreatening and static environments. For instance, Dozier (1992:343) postulates that when the environment is both threatening and dynamic, the role enacted is the public relations manager role, emphasising expert prescription.

Involvement in organisational decision-making is the single construct that is perhaps more important to the profession of communication management than any other measure of professional growth. Broom and Dozier (1986:42) point out that isolation of communication from decision-making limits the practice of communication management to a low-level support function. Participation in strategic decision-making is extremely important for practitioners. Dozier (1992:342) advises that “if practitioners are to help organisations adapt to changes in the environment, they must participate in the management decision-making process, not simply implement decision made by others”. Dozier (1992:342) maintains that “practitioners’ roles are conceptually and empirically related to participation in management decision-making”.

Grunig (2007:44) argues, “The theory of excellence in public relations states that a public relations programme cannot be effective unless it has a manager to manage it strategically”. It seems there is a strong correlation between the public relations managerial role and the two-way symmetrical model. Practitioners who only know the technical roles may not be able to manifest a two-way symmetrical form of government communication, which is an ideal form of communication management. Dozier (1984) identifies a public relations manager's role “that included attributes of problem-solving process, facilitation as interchangeable conceptual components of the same empirical role”.

Van Rule (2000:423) worries that “although staff may well have jobs at management level within the organisation this certainly does not always mean that they perform in a ‘managerial’ way in the sense that they base their work on data acquired through research and goal oriented planning”.

Practitioners in management functions that are involved in decision-making are able to change management knowledge, predispositions, and behaviour than those in the technician roles. Information about priority publics gets factors into organisational decisions, policies, and actions (Broom & Dozier, 1986:42). Grunig and Hunt argue that practitioners should be part of the dominant coalition. This approach is called functional public relations because it increases organisational sensitivity to the environment and adopts organisational behaviour that accommodates publics and their dynamic issues.

5.3.4 JOB SATISFACTION

Job satisfaction is imperative to the individual practitioner “Job satisfaction measures both external and intrinsic components of practitioners’ feelings about their jobs” (Broom & Dozier, 1986:43). Extrinsic components include attributes of satisfaction such as the perception that ‘others’ recognise the value of the work, its perceived status, and its external reward. Intrinsic components are those attributes of satisfaction that describe jobs as personally gratifying and enjoyable activities as an end in itself (Broom & Dozier, 1986:43). Annual income, participation in decision-making, and job satisfaction represent three indicators of professional growth.

5.3.5 ROLE SPECIALISATION

Role specialisation is one of the most essential requirements of professionalisation as it is likely to enhance expertise in every profession or practice. This implies extraordinary in-depth knowledge and specialisation. According to Van Ruler (2000:413), “As a rule, when a profession is in its pioneering phase everybody involved turns his or her hand to everything. During the professionalisation phase, though, in-depth knowledge and specialisation are able to deliver further only if differentiation is introduced”.

5.4 FUNCTIONS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS

The functions of government public relations and communication management are ill defined and thus misunderstood (Glenny, 2008:153). Glenny's (2008) research revealed confusions and contradictions concerning the roles and functions of government communicators. The discord is due to divergent opinions regarding the ideal role of public relations in general (Meintjes & Niemann-Struweg, 2009:5). Poor understanding of government communication and public relations' roles stem from disagreements in both practice and literature about the roles and scope of public relations in general. Hutton (1999) provides a more illuminating discussion of this phenomenon.

In analysing the nature and functions of government communication, Glenny (2008) evaluated Huttons' (1999:199-214) situational roles of public relations as persuader, advocate, educator, crusader, information provider and reputation manager. The situational roles mentioned are deemed appropriate guidelines for the ideals of diversity to government communication functions (Glenny, 2008:155). Government communicators must *inform* and *educate* citizens about policies and services. In addition, *persuasion* is essential for the promotion of policies and social marketing. Through a constant supply of *information*, government communicators are expected to *advocate* on the behalf of both government and its subjects, which is the foundation of *relationship management* necessary for a positive *reputation management*. However, which among these various roles is the most important or most noble?

It is true that the responsibility for communication is delegated to the public relations or communication department. Nonetheless, Grunig (1992:23) recommends, "in addition to communicating on the behalf of management, public relations practitioners also should be responsible for training and coaching other managers to be more effective communicators".

Killingsworth's (2009) research explored the values and practice of excellent public relations based on the principles of Grunig's excellent theory in local government department of Western Canada. Killingsworth (2009:62) found that government

communication is used to build relationships with key stakeholders such as the public whilst other external stakeholders are relegated into secondary constituents to whom communication is limited (Killingsworth, 2009:70). Moreover, communication is used as a publicity mechanism and not sufficiently utilised for 'issue management' (Glenny, 2008:155). For that reason, the communication function of government is effective at raising awareness of issues rather than managing them.

Killingsworth (2009:70) found that the role of communication is under-appreciated and undervalued as per Liu and Horsley's (2007) finding. In this regard, communication managers are not part of the dominate coalition and lack representation in the daily management of the department (Killingsworth, 2009:71). Communications is respected only at a technical level and unrecognised at the management level (Killingsworth, 2009:71).

In a study to explore the roles of senior corporate communication practitioners in the Department of Housing, South Africa, Steyn & Green (2001) questioned whether senior practitioners heading communication directorates in government departments are indeed playing strategic managerial roles in facilitating the achievement of organisational goals leading to institutional effectiveness. It was found that communication directors merely exude Dozier's (1984) *media relation specialist* role of publicity. The role of communication practitioners as *managers* and *strategists* were unobservable (Steyn & Green, 2001:1-5).

Clemons (2009) argued that very little research exists in investigating the reasons why government communication has the propensity to be technical in practice. Clemons sought to determine the perceptions held by government communicators and public administrators regarding the role communication management ought to play in the public sector. The result indicated that public administrators viewed and valued communication purely as a technical function, whereas government communicators viewed it as serving a management role. The role of communication management in the public sector is to serve as a link between public administrators and the publics they serve (Clemons, 2009:1).

Glenny (2008:155) opposes this technical dispensation arguing instead for a more holistic communication approach inclusive of strategic functions of communication in policymaking and decision-making. This would embrace strategic communication planning and implementing, communication research and advice, counselling of senior management and relationship building (Glenny, 2008:156).

According to Edes (2000:458), the typical functions of government communication comprise of: “monitoring media coverage of public affairs; briefing and advising political officials; managing media relations; informing the public directly; sharing information across the administration; formulating communication strategies and campaigns; and researching and assessing public opinion”. Some of these functions are summarised next (Edes, 2000:458-461); (Theaker, 2004:219-224); (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:307).

- Media relations- to establish and maintain effective channels of public communication for the department (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:308).
- Monitoring media coverage is one of the most important functions of government communicators because it forms the basis to which communication strategies are built (Edes, 2000:458).
- Internal communication- sharing information across the administration and facilitating internal communication with the department (Edes, 2000:460).
- Campaigning- designing social marketing campaigns and general campaigns to educate and encourage public’s support of major government initiatives and policies (Edes, 2000:461).
- Create and maintain an informed opinion about subjects with which the department deals. Interpreting public opinion (about policy) back to the department (Theaker, 2004:219).
- Government must maintain open communication channels with the public and provide sufficient information to enable citizens to make informed decisions about their lives (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:308).
- Identity Management- getting the relevant stakeholder to recognise which services are provided by which government department -who is responsible for what (Theaker, 2004:219).

- Make the public aware of their rights and obligations (Theaker, 2004:220).

Monitoring media coverage is one of the most important functions of government communicators because it forms a foundation to which communication strategies are built. Through monitoring media coverage, government communicators can establish which journalists cover their beat (industry) and how the press generally represents them (government). This allows government communicators to frame issues in a way that is attractive to the media.

Senior government officials depend on government communicators for advice on policies and on “facing the media in awkward or uncomfortable situations” (Edes, 2000:458). Occasionally, government communicators encourage a workable relationship between government officials (officialdom) and the media. However, in order to do this, senior government communicators must have unrestricted access to top officials within their ministry (Edes, 2000:458).

The media remains an essential vehicle through which the public is informed. In this case, government communicators spend a significant amount of time building relations with the mass media. Another function of government communicators involves sharing information across the administration, facilitating internal communication with the department (Edes, 2000:460).

The role of formulating communication strategies and campaigns encompass formulating general campaigns and social marketing campaigns. From time to time, campaigns are conducted for the marketing of government policies to educate and encourage public’s support on major government initiatives. (Edes, 2000: 461).

Measuring and evaluating public opinion is an essential way of understanding public perceptions, needs, and desires. This is facilitated by formal and informal research such as polls, questioners, focused groups, public hearings (Edes, 2000:461). Research helps to formulate campaigns that are directed to the right section of society, addressing the right issues of concern using the right set of communication tools.

Additional research is still required to further understand the role, purposes and functions of government communicators (Glenny, 2008:165). It is essential to probe for a strategic role of government communicators that surpasses publicity and one-way communication. Because government communicators work in a different context with different constraints and problems, they often face unique challenges different from their private sector counterparts.

5.5 CHALLENGES CONFRONTING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Edes (2000:463-464) listed some of the challenges confronting government communicators in emerging democracies. Firstly, government communicators often face an 'immature media', one that lacks professionalism and ethics required for a balanced and objective coverage of the government and its proceedings. According to Edes (2000:463), facts are not always double-checked and news is based on unsubstantiated rumours and sensationalism.

Secondly, government is often criticised for a lack of transparency, falsification of information, secrecy, and spin. These are formidable limitations to government communication (Gelders & Oyvind, 2010:34). Secrecy hampers the ability of government communicators to perform their mandate with poise (Edes, 2000:463). Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins (2007:25) offer Cotterrell's (1999:414) definition, that "transparency is the availability of information on matters of public concern, the ability of citizens to participate in political decisions, and the accountability of government to public opinion". Transparency entails opening up of organisation to both media and public scrutiny. Albeit policies against state secrecy exist, their implementation, adherence to complete transparency and public access to information are non-apparent at worst and moderate at best. "The Promotion of Access to Information Act, (2000) was enacted to ensure access to information held by the state and public bodies. However, despite much activity, it has proved difficult to translate principles into practical and well-coordinated measures to improve access to government information (Lor & van As, 2002:101). The Protection of Information Bill and the Media Appeals Tribunal in South Africa are cases in point.

A study by Fairbanks *et al.* (2007:23) sought to understand how government communicators value and practice transparency. It was found that transparency is rated high amongst government communicators even if it is a concept difficult to materialise in government (Fairbanks *et al.*, 2007:28; Liu & Levenshus, 2010:9). This finding is corroborated by Vos (2006:252) who established that “to make government business transparent” was seen as the most essential goals of government communication. A follow-up study by Vos and Westerhoudt (2008:22-23) accentuates that government communicators acknowledge transparency as the foundation of all successes of government communication, such as legitimacy, trust, accountability, positive media coverage, and public participation.

Political influence is another challenge noted by Edes (2000:464). Government communicators are torn between being objective communicators explaining policies and services for public understanding on one hand, and justifying and marketing the policy for public acceptance on the other (Gaber, 2009:85-86; Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:34-35). Furthermore, government officials expect government communicators to support them regardless of inappropriate policies and behavioural misconduct, essentially soliciting an ‘advocacy’ role of PR.

Increases in the complexity of government policies, rules, and practices; the widening chasm between citizens and their government; and the escalating demands made by citizens are additional difficulties faced by government communicators (Lattimore, *et al.*, 2009:311).

Lack of training and skills may pose an additional constraint. Comtask (1996) found that lack of training and skills in South Africa sometimes results in poor performance, particularly regarding primary functions, like media liaison. Edes (2000:464) exposes lack of training, hard work and minimum pay as plights of many public relations officers in many government organisations. Education programmes specialised for government communication is scant in higher education, which most often choose to specialise on the lucrative corporate communication of the private sector, leaving government communicators with no specialised differential training (Lee, 2000:216). Adding salt to

wound, most transitional democracies, including South Africa have no specialised professional fraternity for government communicators within which they share experiences, skills, and knowledge (Meintjes & Niemann-Struweg, 2009:9). This deficiency leaves government communicators ill equipped to untangle the complicated web of government communication.

Although challenges of government communication are worthy of concern, there are significant measures in training and development that may alleviate some of the noted challenges (Glenny, 2008:165). The training and development of government communicators is the next topic of discussion.

5.6 PROFESSIONALIZING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

A number of researchers have sought to operationalize indicators of professionalism in government communication. Research on professionalism attempt to explore in measurable terms what is meant by professional government communication (Canel & Sanders, 2012:92). An example is Gregory's study of British government communicators. Gregory (2006) devised a framework suggesting that effective research, planning, implementation, evaluation and management processes provide the platform for effective communication activity that should be underpinned by the organisation using the appropriate skills and competencies. Vos (2006), and Vos and Westerhoudt (2008) inspired by quality management literature, have designed an instrument to assess government communication in relation to transparency, accessibility and communication uses (roles). Sanders *et al.* (2011) examined the professionalization of central government communication in Germany, Spain, and the United Kingdom applying a framework derived from sociology at work and from strategic planning and quality literature.

Dozier (1992:64) defines the attributes of a profession as follows: "a set of professional values, membership in strong professional organisations, adherence to professional norms, an established body of knowledge or theory to guide practice, and technical skills learned through professional training". Adding to Dozier, Van Ruler maintains that one of the characteristics of 'management style' public relations is the possession of a 'body of

knowledge' that enables an intellectual and systematic approach to the profession. This implies a specialised higher education or a comparable level of knowledge gained through experience and training.

Professionalization of government communication is an essential step towards its legitimisation. "Professionalization occurs through certain stages, from an occupation being performed full-time, to academisation, the founding of professional organisations, the introduction of licensing or certification and the development of professional standards laid down in a formal code of ethics" (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:3). This begs the question, on which stage of professionalization is government communication in South Africa for example.

A study conducted by Meintjes and Niemann-Struweg (2009:1) explored the opinions held by practitioners on the role of public relations professional associations in the processes of professionalising the field in South Africa. It was found that overwhelming support (97%) exists for a professional body but fewer than 10% register for professional association such as PRISA (Meintjes & Niemann-Struweg, 2009:9). The study concluded that professionalization in South Africa has become the responsibility of practitioners themselves. Professionals will be judged on the merits of their ethical values, integrity, passion, responsibility, and the quality of their work. The limitation of this study as noted by the researchers themselves is in not distinguishing between the sectors or the working context of the respondents.

Elmer's (2000) study explored the nature of professionalism in government public relations, testing Brante's relational model as a market-based model of professional value in the ministry of Defence in the United Kingdom (UK). The study explored ways in which professional value is created and what constitutes professionalism. Elmer's (2000:192) study demonstrated that education and training was crucial for professionalism. It is postulated (Elmer, 2000:195) that "those with a formal public relations education have different values and expectation to those without. If we remain true to established functional definitions, educated practitioners are more professional".

Gregory (2006:200) also alludes to an interesting discussion about how education plays a role in professionalising government communication. Meintjes and Niemann-Struweg (2009:9) illustrates the obstacles created by inadequate education and training of communicators. Poor strategies and application, poor writing skills, poor command of the English language, inadequate understanding of roles and purposes, are cases in point. Educated practitioners are deemed more professional. If education is the foundation of professional government communication, maybe then, differential specialist education is imperative.

Gregory's (2006) research focused on the training and development of government communicators in order to devise a process-driven model for government communication in the United Kingdom (UK). Professional development and training needs identified by Gregory (2006:200-201) include among others:

- honing traditional skills of government communication in media relations while exploring other avenues of information diffusion such as e-government;
- improving standards in the recruitment, promotion and continuous professional development of government communicators;
- Improving the connection and interaction of all government communicators from internal communications to stakeholder managers, e-government, marketing, and media liaison. This would improve co-ordination, consistency and cohesion and reduce the multiplicity of divergent voices;
- enhancing communication strategies that meet audience and customers' needs; and
- Seeking professional development for government communicators.

Sanders *et al.* (2011) address the issue of professionalization of government communication, exploring how the development of professionalism is expressed in structures and processes in three Western Europe countries (Spain, Germany and United Kingdom). This study unravels a (practice) dimension of professionalization largely unexplored in government communication. In summary, the study concluded the following. In an effort to formalise, professionalise, and depoliticise government communication, the development of formal rules governing the practice and the structures of government communication are notable in all three surveyed countries. Although, the establishment of

professional profiles, specialised education, and training are underway, communication practices are still far from being fully systematised. Sanders *et al.* (2011:15) documented the influential professionalising and standardisation roles of government institutional bodies such as the German Federal Press and Information Office (Germany) and the British Government Communication Network (UK). These are counterparts to the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) in South Africa. Government communication budgets figures were however not readily available. This proves to be a sensitive subject in many government departments. What was startling about the findings was that senior positions in government communication are largely occupied by political appointees rather than career communicators in Spain, Germany, and UK (Sanders *et al.*, 2011).

5.7 COMMUNICATING GOVERNMENT SERVICES

It is unfeasible to explore the distinctiveness of the public sector in all practices of government communication. For simplicity reasons, only one flow of communication is considered, namely communication with the public as external stakeholders. That is external communication. Corporate reputation is about the after-effect, brand equity - the total result of all external communication efforts. Therefore, government reputation can be evaluated as an indicator of the overall outcome of good communication management. The measurement and even the inference of government reputation are outside the scope of this thesis. Nonetheless, rhetoric, identity management and media relations are discussed as strategies towards communicating with the public. It is through the mass media that governments construct and communicate its corporate identity. Government communicators ought to be more proactive and persuasive in selling government information to the mass media. Lee (2000:458) defines direct communication as an “activity that can be performed by communicating directly with the public, instead of being dependent on the media as an intermediary”. Social media are added as the most recent tool of direct communication. Each of these elements is explored next.

5.8 COMMUNICATING THE CORPORATE IDENTITY

Organisational silence that historically prevailed is no longer possible. Organisations and even governments increasingly operate in the public spotlight. They are therefore forced to reveal more about themselves and justify their activities for the sake of transparency. As they are pushed to open up, they look for ways to present an attractive face to their constituents. The objective of a corporate identity management (CIM) is to establish and maintain a positive reputation between the organisation and its various publics (Bick, Abratt & Bergman, 2008:10). An organisation's identity matters because it creates identification as discussed in the rhetorical theory.

Corporate identity is often used synonymously with related terminologies such as organisation identity, business identity, corporate image, branding, and reputation (Bick *et al.*, 2008:10). The nuances in meanings must be clarified among the identified concepts. For instance, reputation, like corporate image, resides in the minds of individual stakeholders (Luoma-aho, 2008:448). Reputation is developed over a long period given that it is the overall outcome of corporate identity management, corporate branding, and publicity (Luoma-aho, 2008:448; Wood, 2004:96). Therefore, corporate identity management is within the controls of the organisation, while corporate reputation is within the prerogative of stakeholders.

The actual definition of corporate identity is still highly contentious despite the attention given to it over the past two decades (Melewer & Jenkins, 2002:76). This leads to the illusion and confusion of the term with regard to its usage, application, and management (Bick *et al.*, 2008:10). Corporate identity can be enacted through the corporate identity mix: communication, behaviour, and symbolism. They are the means by which a company manifests its personality. Nevertheless, there is no consensus of what constitutes the components of the corporate identity mix and which of the three is most essential (Wood, 2004:97-99).

Governments must establish and maintain a commendable 'corporate identity'. The reason is that government departments are committed to all communities. Therefore, they must

maintain a high level of awareness in the community (Bezuidenhout & Van Heerden, 2003:6). Government services must be made highly visible and accessible to the public.

To a certain extent, branding in the public sector correlates with private sector branding since all branding seek to maximise customers' satisfaction and inspire confidence. The primary reason for branding in the public sector is to render government services known and accessible to the public (Whelan, Davies, Walsh, & Bourke, 2009:1164). The other reason is to create awareness and loyalty to the brand that only arise from positive associations stakeholders and customers make towards the brand (Whelan *et al.*, 2009:1164). An advantage of a strong corporate identity is that it enhances tolerance, support, and goodwill for a government department (Bezuidenhout & Van Heerden, 2003:5).

The purpose of a corporate brand is to personalise the (government) organisation as a whole in order to create value and an emotional association (Bick *et al.*, 2008:10). This casts a favourable halo over everything the organisation represents (Van Riel, & Fombrun, 2007:40). It is argued that a good reputation or identity will be translated by stakeholders (various publics) into a propensity to buy that organisation's products and services, to work for, or to invest in the organisation (Van Riel & Balmer, 1997:342).

Brand awareness refers to how aware customers and potential customers are of the organisation and its services. The ultimate success of brand recognition is that the brand is well known and easily recognisable. The goal of any brand management team is to make certain that the consumers and the public are familiar with the brand. In government, brand awareness would have been achieved if citizens as external stakeholders were fully aware of the government department and its services. The corporate identity mix is discussed next.

The behavioural element encompasses internal values, corporate culture, rituals, and norms (Wood, 2004:99). Companies reveal their identities through the initiatives they support and behaviours they enact (Wood, 2004:99). Behaviour includes actions of the organisation, managers, and its employees. Through interaction with stakeholders,

employees form the first impression which influences what customers make of the brand which in turn shapes the external view of the brand (Whelan *et al.*, 2009:1164). This same experience may damage the corporate brand when employees fail to deliver on brand promise (Whelan *et al.*, 2009:1166).

A symbolic definition of corporate identity focuses on the more tangible aspects of identity which are easy to manage such as graphics, brand marks, names, logos, sounds (jingles) and corporate colours (Van Riel, & Fombrun, 2007:62). Visual images are powerful symbols for implementing a corporate identity strategy (Wood, 2004:99). In contrast, Melewer and Jenkins (2002:77) caution that a solitary focus on the visual aspects of identity neglects other factors. Identity is more than the general 'logomotion' or visual presentation; it includes a corporate culture, values, and morale (Kiriakidou & Milward, 2002:50).

Bezuidenhout and Van Heerden, (2003:7) study questioned the viability of creating one unitary corporate identity for all South African government departments. However, the study focused only on the behavioural and the visual elements without evaluating the communication element of corporate identity. For them, behaviour is a stronger indicator of corporate identity than any other element of the corporate identity mix. In contrast, the proposed study focuses solely on the communicative element of the corporate identity mix. Hence, the proposed study adopts Bick, Abratt and Bergman's (2008:10) definition of corporate identity as "a concept that deals with what managers want to communicate about their organisation".

The third element of corporate identity is rooted in the organisation's communication strategies, publicity, advertisements and corporate stories told. Corporate identity is a concept that deals with what managers want to communicate about their organisation (Bick, Abratt & Bergman, 2008:10). This includes the brand promise – communication of the primary benefits associated with the government department, its mandate, and its services. Much of the communication element of the corporate identity mix can be identified from the perusal of the departments' communication strategies and other publicity material.

The objectives of branding in the public sector differ from those from the private sector. It cannot be the same because the sectors differ in functions, scope, publics, and objectives. Unlike the corporate sector, the public sector (and most of politics) does not have a commodity to sell except rhetoric and a promise of service delivery. It is through the mass media that a (government) department anticipates communicating its corporate identity. The next section discusses media relations in government communication.

5.9 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND THE MEDIA

Lee (2000) observes that the press remains a vital channel of communication between any public administrator and his clientele. It is assumed that the primary responsibility of the press is to disseminate information about events and activities of government, communicate ideas and educate the public on public policy issues (Lee, 2000:456). Therefore, one of the most important functions of government public relations' practitioners is to establish and maintain good media relations (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:173).

Media relations (publicity) are the backbone of the public relations practice. Person and Patching (2008:2) argue that government media relations command a serious study because it forms an interface between an informed citizenry and democracy. The relationship between government and the media has been a subject of a plethora of studies (Person & Patching (2008:4). However, only a few of these studies investigate the relationship from the practitioners' point of view. Van Slyke Turk (1986), and Jackson and Lilleker (2004) are some of the few studies that consider the role of government practitioners in media relations.

In government communication, the media remains an essential vehicle through which the public is informed. In this case, government communicators spend a significant amount of time building relations with the mass media. On the contrary, Edes (2000:459) claims that a contentious relationship is more apparent. A cordial relationship is advised considering journalist and government communicators are interdependent, the former for publicity and the latter for news feeds.

Journalists see themselves as watchdogs over public institutions, seeking the truth, putting it in perspective and publishing it in the public interest (Cutlip, 1976:6). For this purpose, stories that are accurate, fair, and balanced are covered regardless of whether they represent government in a negative light. On the other hand, government organisations see journalists as a medium through which to reach the larger public (Seitel, 1984:321). Moreover, government organisations often distrust the news media for fear of prejudice and constant negative coverage (Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:172-174). Hughes (1995) discusses how this discord of perception can be problematic.

Government communication dominantly expresses a process model of communication. Hughes (1995) discusses the practical and conceptual limitations of the process model of communication as applied to the relationship between government communicators and the media. He proposes other models such as the semiotics and cultural studies models as prospective alternatives to the process model.

Within the process model, a transmitter (government) sends a message through one or more channels to a receiver (publics), upon whom the message has some effect (Hughes, 1995:1). Government communication is still treated as information transfer or as “a sender who tries to persuade a receiver” (Gelders *et al.*, 2007:327). Government communicators make the mistake of seeing the media as neutral channels through which to express a message or to exert influence (Hughes, 1995:1). This model fails to accept the media as “active communicators in their own right” (Hughes, 1995:1).

Hughes (1995) introduces semiotics and cultural models as alternatives to the dominant process model. Within the semiotic model of communication, there is no distinction between transmitter and receiver. It is not only the transmitter (government) who sends a message that the channel (media) dispatches unaltered to the receiver (stakeholders), all participants are equally responsible in the production of meaning (Hughes, 1995:1). Because communication requires a shared meaning and shared experiences (Hughes, 1995:2), government and the media must create a shared experience through constant interaction, as they are equally responsible for the end message received by citizens.

The central assumption of the cultural model resonates with the semeiotics model on the premise that communication is a constant struggle over the creation of meaning. This notion was earlier articulated by Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985:359) who claimed that “the struggle to shape and manage the news has escalated in intensity as the media’s power and the political stakes have increased”. Thus, communication between the government and the media not only involves shared meaning, but also contains with it, contradictions, and contestations. However, according to Hughes (1995:3), this does not denote a failure of communication.

Gaber (2009:86) complained of government communication inundated by ‘good news only’. There is an over-supply of government information and a corresponding over-emphasis on the positives (Gaber, 2009:86). This is called the permanent campaign. The cult of ‘good news only’ contributes to the growing distrust of government by the media and the public.

On the relationship between the media and government public relations, Lee (2000) bemoaned the growing media disinterest in government news. He discussed the despondency pertaining to the efforts of government communicators to convince the media to run government stories. The media often accuses government news to be boring to viewers. Lee (2000:454) found that media coverage of government is mostly about the failure of government agencies and programmes, followed by misappropriation of funds and corruption.

5.10 DIRECT COMMUNICATION (DIRECT REPORTING)

According to Lee (2000:454), in order to overcome the impasse of media disinterest, government public relations practitioners should focus on improving three traits. One is enhancing the policy of entrepreneurship role. Government communicators ought to be more proactive and persuasive in selling government information to the mass media and most importantly in being able to define the angle of coverage (Fairbanks, *et al.*, 2007:24). Secondly, practitioners must learn to talk to the media on its own terms. That is packaging information in a way that is attractive to the mass media.

Governments can do public reporting directly or indirectly. Lee (2007:145) distinguishes between direct and indirect reporting, “Indirect reporting refers to communicating efforts through the intermediary institutions of the news media. Direct reporting focuses on non-mediated communications from the agency to the public at large”.

Lee (2000:458) defines public reporting as an “activity that can be performed by communicating directly with the public, instead of being dependent on the media as an intermediary”. To do so, new media technologies such as the internet prove helpful. Although the media remains an essential instrument for information diffusion, it is occasionally wise to approach the public directly with pertinent information. Edes (2000:460) outlines two reasons why this is necessary. The first is that the mass media may be uninterested in the issue and the message might be too important to be left to the latitude of the journalist.

Government public reporting is essential for two reasons; one, for using publicity as a substitute for regulation and having the public serve as eyes and ears of the government department. Secondly, direct reporting is vital for providing information for information sake in order to contribute to an informed public/citizenry. Two key elements identified to be essential for effective direct public reporting are content and distribution. “Effective reporting also requires significant efforts to disseminate reports as broadly as possible” (Lee, 2008:146). Social media are useful here.

5.11 SOCIAL MEDIA AND WEBSITES AS DIRECT COMMUNICATION

“As the government breaks new grounds in Web/Gov 2.0, there is likely to be many unknowns and much uncertainty, as well as technical, security, and privacy concerns that can have a significant impact on whether government will actually utilise new media” (Byars, 2012:139).

Sadeghi (2012:126) projects that “companies around the world, regardless of their location, have recognised the value in using Web 2.0 to spread the word about their products and services as well as listen to feedback from their customers”. Web 2.0 represents a collection of internet-based tools that enhance communication through openness and interactive capabilities (Sadeghi, 2012:126). These tools may include blogs,

and social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter, YouTube, flicker, micro-blogging, social networking, wikis and mashups. Byars (2012:136) claims that Facebook and Twitter are the most used social networking platforms so they are suitable for government communication. Web 2.0 technology continues to evolve at a very rapid pace making peer-to-peer connectivity easier and faster. Web 2.0 is still relatively new and we can expect to be introduced to more innovative technologies. According to Byars (2012:131) social networking sites can be defined as web-based services that provide users with the ability to connect share and create content.

In government, web 2.0 demonstrates “powerful examples of how internet-based tools can enhance digital democracy and diplomacy efforts” (Sadeghi, 2012:127). In that regard, Gov 2.0 is a term introduced by the Obama administration to refer to the government use of web 2.0 and the adoption of social media as a government communication tool. Many of Gov 2.0 efforts have been well received. Gov 2.0 can assist government departments improve e-government services and to simplify online interactions with citizens. This can improve government transparency by providing accessibility to data and online documents, which will in turn increase government effectiveness holistically. Participation and citizen input are vital components of Gov 2.0. (Byars, 2012:135).

Many citizens around the world have started using social media to gain new information pertaining to government services, post questions and comments, and provide innovative ideas to address government’s complex problems (Sadeghi, 2012:127). “It is estimated that the average user spends about seven hours per month on Facebook” (ibid). Government can use Facebook to engage citizens, post events and news, and shape photos and short videos (Byars, 2012:132). Internet based technologies are increasingly becoming go-to sources for government information.

Micro-blogging is similar to blogging. Micro blogs provide the same service although with more limited character space to post content. “With a 140 character limit, governments can use titter to post short and relevant messages such as a reminder to attend a meeting, or to participate in a free-event, or take an online poll” (Byars, 2012:132). On twitter, publics

are free to follow departmental posts, alerts, messages and all stories through their twitter page.

By using traditional methods of communication, many government departments are missing an entire niche audience who use internet-based technologies (Sadeghi, 2012:127). Most governments lack a systemic plan to implement Gov 2.0. While a handful of government departments can be found on Facebook, many have not yet entered this social media platform. However, some have entered the platform but remains stale, some government Facebooks are largely stagnant. The reception of social media in government has been mixed. Some government departments have made these services a central part of their communication strategies, while many others are ambivalent and concerned that social media may be destructive, unruly, and unnecessary.

One of the most significant challenges in social media has to do with time. Because of the 24-hour service associated with social media networks, some government communicators feel pressured and compelled to act on issues quickly and report outcome back to citizens instantaneously. “Many working in government, while realising the vast potential in using web 2.0 also assume that citizens expect them to function at a 24/7 level of availability to respond to comment and fix reported problems” (Byars, 2012:136).

Despite the promising new that web 2.0 offers, many governments are reluctant to use them, partly due to antiquated technologies, computers, and users. Byars (2012:134) adds, “Another barrier has to do with fear of technology and the age of the typical government employee”. On one hand, the majority of government communicators are baby-boomers age between 43-63 years with very little technology training. On the hand, the younger generation has grown up with Smartphones, ipods, iPad, blackberries, laptops, and web 2.0 technologies. However, Byars (2012:135) is optimistic as he projects that “as the baby boomers retire and phase out of government, it is likely that this new generation of workers will influence change within organisation structures and in how they collaborate with the public”.

Byars (2012:130) argues, “The best examples of government implementation of web 2.0 were developed with a strategy”. This Gov 2.0 strategy must identify a core team or individual who is expected to maintain and respond to citizens’ enquiries, a right platform must also be selected as best serving both the needs of the department and those of the target audience. The platform must match identified outcomes. The strategy must make account of the policies for utilisation also detailing how government communicators should respond to negative comments, inaccuracy of information and misrepresentation of news online (Byars, 2012:130).

5.12 CONCLUSIONS

With the purpose of discussing government communication as a practice, not only was the concept of communication practice defined, the roles, functions and challenges of government communication were also described. In addition, chapter 5 deliberated on the professionalising of government communication. Practitioners’ descriptions of the practice of government communication in KZN are presented in chapter 9, which is the findings chapter.

5.12.1 CONCLUSION TO THE LITERATURE

There cannot yet be a conclusion to the government communication debate. It is an on-going issue, constantly influx and responding to the dynamics of changes in the socio-political spheres of society both nationally and globally. Much of the literature here is written from the perspective of the west. However, “scholars have finally realised that some, but not all, aspects of the Anglo-European-American concept and practices of communication management can be transplanted onto the field in Africa” (Rensburg, 2007).

Perhaps the question to ask is not only whether government communication is distinctive and different to that of the private sector, but also whether it is distinctive and context based. It is worth extrapolating Marsham, Skinner and Rensburg’s (2011) debate on whether South African communication management is indeed unique to Africa and thus

different to western practices of communication, which laid the foundation to the literature discussed here? It is essential to study and evaluate the nature of government communication in South Africa as a quest to creating our own theories and models, which are distinctly African.

Academic researchers should embark on building an African body of knowledge of communication management and theories based on an African philosophy and worldview (Marsham, Skinnner & Rensburg, 2011:2). It is to this end that Marsham, Skinnner and Rensburg (2011) inquire how should an African model of communication management be structured? In this, it may be further extrapolated, how a model of (South) African government communication can be framed. Accordingly, the following chapter outlines the developments of government communication in South Africa.

CHAPTER 6: GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector impacts upon the nature of communication management practiced in the South African government sector (KZN) and the degree to which this distinctiveness is perceived and experienced by government communicators. In addition, the study aims to examine the role of the GCIS in standardising and professionalising government communication at a provincial departmental level. The purpose of this chapter is to introduce the context of the study. For that purpose, the chapter discusses the historical development of government communication in South Africa and an outline of policies guiding government communication in the country. In addition, the status of academic research on government communication in South Africa is described. The second part of the chapter is the outcome of a thorough document analysis examining government communication guidelines and policy documents in order to paint the context and describe the nature of government communication in South Africa.

6.2 THE STATUS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION RESEARCH IN SOUTH AFRICA

Government communication research in South Africa centres predominantly on mediated political communication (Johnston, 2005) and political rhetoric (Van Audenhove, 2003). Such studies are analysed mainly through discourse analysis. Another interest focus is on political rhetoric during election periods, particularly political campaigns such as political posters (Fourie, 2008), print advertisement (Teer Tomaselli, 2005) and the role of political blogs (Goldfain & Van der Merwe, 2006).

Much of government communication research conducted in South Africa is predisposed to a notion of government communication as a tool of participatory development (e.g. Msibi & Penzhorn, 2010; Netshitomboni, 2007). The importance of effective communication in

promoting successful implementation of developmental initiatives cannot be understated (Rasila & Mudau, 2012:134). For instance, Msibi and Penzhorn's (2010) study questioned the extent to which the Kungwini local government implement acceptable participatory communication principles and practices in order to communicate with the local community of which they found participatory communication to be appreciated and successfully applied. Likewise, Rasila and Mudau (2012) attempted to create a new effective communication model that will bridge the communication gap between the structures of government and the community members in order to encourage sustainable public participation.

With regard to participatory communication in governance, Mabelebele (2006), like Netshitomboni (2007), evaluated *Imbizos* as a model of communication and governance while Abibio (2007) analysed the notion of ward committees as collaborators in participatory democracy within local governance. Another research focus in South Africa is the analysis of the general role of the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS). None of the above-mentioned themes is near exhaustion. However, it seems that the general category of government communication research is on the decline as compared to an uptake of e-government research, which have become ubiquitous and a norm in South African government communication research.

Notwithstanding a vibrant government communication research in South Africa, there remains a dire need to understand government communication from an organisational perspective. This is because the individual government department remains responsible for the actual transmission of government communication to the public. As such, the *practice* dimension is necessary to understand the nature of government communication in South Africa. There are a few noble studies in this area. For example, Steyn and Green (2001) investigated the roles of communication managers in the Department of Housing. Price and Bezuidenhout (2005) analysed leadership communication management (i.e. internal communication) in government departments. Bezuidenhout and Van Heerden (2003) evaluated the corporate identity of government departments in South Africa. Haycock & Lambuschagne (2006) investigated the process of developing communication strategies in local government (Mogale city).

Rasila and Mudau (2012) contend that government communication systems currently lack effectiveness due to lack of effective models of communication. Rasila and Mudau (2012) noted that in South Africa, all government departments and major local municipalities have a communication unit or personnel responsible for communication. There is also a budget in each government institution dedicated to the communication function.

6.3 THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

Berger (1997) recommends that the South African government should operate from a philosophical perspective of acknowledging the right to communicate. Entrenched within such a philosophy, the government should aim for interactive government communication with the public, rather than the one-way 'push' model of communication. For this type of government communication to be possible, Berger (1997) offers three recommendations to the South African government. Such is for government to boost its press liaison capacity; improve direct communication with the public and create an enabling environment for citizens to communicate with government by developing more avenues through which the public may communicate back to the government.

The dawning of democracy in 1994 in South Africa compelled the 'new' government to restructure the way it communicates (Rasila & Mudau, 2012:138). In 1996, the then deputy president Thabo Mbeki set up a Task Group on government communication (known as the Comtask) to look into communication within government, the structure of the media and the relations of government with the media, international communications and other aspects of governmental communications (Lor & van As, 2002:106). The produced report was entitled *Communications 2000: a vision for government communication in South Africa*. Rasila and Mudau (2012:1398) put forth an argument that many of the findings of the Comtask report are still applicable in today's government communication system in South Africa.

The Comtask group (2000:13) reported that under the old apartheid government of the National Party, "a culture of secrecy, disinformation, and restrictions on press freedom had

infused government thinking”. The constitution of the ‘new’ government makes provision for freedom of expression that requires a transparent government, a culture of accountability and the right to know. A strong government communication and information service can only coexist within a culture of freedom of expression and information. Therefore, the report stressed the need for improved communication between the government and its citizens, with emphasis on disadvantaged communities in rural and urban areas (Lor & van As, 2002:107).

Today, the government communicators’ handbook (2011) still identifies a fundamental need for government communication to reach the majority of the population, especially the disadvantaged and those previously marginalised through all forms and channels of communication. For that reason, “having communicators who are always at the cutting edge of their profession and understanding the environment better is critical”.

With regard to **government communication as a profession**, early in the 1990s, the Comtask report acknowledged the low status accorded to government communication. The document stated that “there is poor recognition of the need for a professional government communication and information service in South Africa”. Communication is not taken sufficiently seriously at a high enough level. Related to this, the Comtask group perceived an existence of a poor understanding of the role of communications and its functions in government. The report (2000:47) advocated for the status of the profession of government communication to be elevated:

“Whatever structural, infrastructural or other changes are made, if government in its entirety does not develop an understanding of the role of communications, together with the political will to ensure professionalism, efficiency and information delivery at all levels, the opportunities presented by the new recommended system cannot be realised”.

The **challenges of government communication** units identified in the Comtask report (2000:21) were that “there is no clear standard for setting budget levels or defining the functions of the communication personnel. The line reporting structure, combined with a tradition of rigid control of information severely hampers creativity and responsiveness of communications professionals”. Moreover, a lack of communication and information policy

was acknowledged in the Comtask report. According to the report, “there is no clear policy in relation to government communication and information in South Africa”. In addition, government communicators identified a lack of media access and media responsiveness as significant challenges. Poor training of communication officials, a lack of human resources and a lack of finance were also ranked as major concerns.

On **integrated government communication**, the Comtask report (2000:14) bears recognition of the interdependence of government departments and the need for balance between its three tiers. The report provides that “the policy and practice of the new government needs to recognise the importance of the communication and information function within every department of state and within all three tiers of government”. The provincial government is positioned in the middle of the three tiers between the national government and the local government. Consequently, the provincial government acts as a robust link between the tiers of the South African government. It is for this very reason that the provincial government was selected for the present study.

On **strategic government communication**, the Comtask report identified a need for strategies and objectives in the South Africa government communication practice. The question of how to develop budgets, goals, and strategies needs to be visited. Ad hoc communications is expensive and often wasteful. Furthermore, it often fails to meet targets and reach audiences. In this regard, a more professional (strategic) approach towards government communication was advocated. The guideline policy document titled ‘*Strategising for communication 2007*’ delineates further guidelines on the formulation, processes and implementation of strategic government communication in South Africa.

On **government identity management**, the Comtask report recognised a failure of the South African government to present a coherent image to the public. Government must be seen to be transparent, accessible, and indeed part of the fabric of society. Currently government communicates through the Public Participation Programme (PPP), formally known as *Imbizos*. “During the PPP, the president, the deputy president, ministers and their deputies visit the municipalities accompanied by premiers and members of provincial executive councils (MEC’s) and political leaders at local sphere to listen to challenges

facing communities” (Rasila & Mudau, 2012:140). In South Africa, PPP are synonymous to public participation and bringing ‘branded government’ to the people. The ‘*Corporate identity and branding guidelines*’ document provides further details concerning government branding.

On **politics**, the Comtask report did not mention anything regarding the relationship between government communication and politics. The GCIS *Government Communication Handbook* of 2011, on the other hand, identifies a harmonious link between politics and the government communicator. According to the handbook, “the communicator straddles the relationship of political administrative operations and harmonises the varying emphasis of these two fraternities to emerge with messages that reflect their unity of purpose”.

However, the handbook also recognises a need “to make the fine distinction between communicating government policies and improperly using one’s position to promote the interest of a political party”. According to the handbook, government communicators are public servants whose operational code includes impartiality and professionalism as encapsulated in section 36 of the Public Service Act of 1994. Government media relations in South Africa and the role of the GCIS in encouraging a harmonious relationship are discussed next.

6.4 GOVERNMENT MEDIA RELATIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Much of the debate on government media relations in South Africa centres upon the concept of the national interest and the public interest. The national interest has been described as the “aggregate of things that guarantee the survival and flourishing of a national-state whereas the public interest is meant to represent the interests of the aggregate collective of citizens” (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005:199). However, the media presume the national interest to be counter to the public interest (Fourie, 2002:35). The question of who decides on the national interest remains the point of contention. The invocation of the public right to know may serve as an excuse for sensationalism and gross antagonism of the government as the media masquerades as a watchdog of the people in power (Wasserman & de Beer, 2005:202). Wasserman and de Beer (2005:202)

council that the notion of the public interest can be linked to a libertarian ethic best suited for societies with developed social, economic, and technical infrastructures.

An uneasy relationship exists between press and the government in South Africa. On the one hand, government complains that its actions and initiatives do not receive adequate media coverage. “Reports are often superficial, incomplete, and distorted” (Comtask, 1996:17). On the other hand, the press alleges that government communication efforts are often incomplete, opaque, and superficial. Media complains of the general unwillingness or clumsiness of government communicators in providing in-depth and background information to government policies and decisions (Comtask report, 1996:17). Recently, the GCIS 2010/2011 annual year report depicts that the GCIS increased its engagement with the media having convened meetings with the South African National Editors Forum and Foreign Correspondents Association to ensure that all local and foreign media were informed of the plans of government.

The GCIS has since put together a government and media liaison programme. The purpose of this programme is to provide strategic leadership to government departments in an attempt to assist in the development of departmental and provincial communication strategies informed by the *National Communication Strategy* (NCS). This ensures that communication policy guidelines are used to improve government communication and that the media is informed of government initiatives and activities. There are additional sub-programmes in support of this initiative such as the *National Liaison*, which promotes interdepartmental cooperation and integration of communication to encourage integrated planning and coordination of government’s communication programmes. The News Service (BuaNews) provides government news and information to communities and mainstream media, locally and abroad while the *Parliamentary Liaison* provides government information to Members of Parliament (MPs) through the *Information Resource Centre* (IRC). The *International and Media Liaison* on the other hand, are responsible for communication at an international context.

Three direct reporting initiatives are worth noting in South Africa’s government communication. During 2010/11, the GCIS produced and distributed 10 million copies of

Vuk'uzenzele magazine. It is also available as an A4 magazine in Braille and available on the internet. GCIS translated some pages from English to other official languages to be distributed in communities where the language is dominant. GCIS is working on a strategy to optimise this publication. *The public Sector Manager Magazine* produced two trial editions at the end of 2011. The magazine highlights work of managers in the public sector, sharing knowledge and best practice. In attempt to strengthen provincial and local government communication through unmediated communication and face-to-face initiatives, the *Thusong Service Centers* were established. GCIS has put systems in place to ensure that the public has constant access to information on programmes, policies, and opportunities by opening up 4056 local development communication projects. Fifteen (15) Thusong Service Centres were opened in 2010/11 bringing the total number of operational centres to 165.

6.5 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND INFORMATION SYSTEM (GCIS)

Comtask recommended the closure of the South African Communication Service (SACS) to be replaced by a Government Communication and Information System (GCIS). GCIS was formally launched on May 18th 1998. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) is established in terms of section 239 of the constitution, following section 7 of the public service Act of 1994. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the GCIS attends cabinet meetings and is the official government spokesperson. The GCIS is located in the presidency and is responsible for government communication systems mandated to communicate and inform the public about policies and programmes of government. The new mandate of the GCIS is to coordinate communication in ministries and government departments. This includes the establishment of a national coordinating mechanism for officials responsible for communications.

GCIS strives to achieve professionalism, integration, and coordination of government communication through the *Government Communication Handbook* and other guideline policy documents. The Government Communicators' Handbook is a toolkit for government communicators aimed at assisting them to understand and implement the objectives and

philosophies of the central government communication. In combination, government communication guideline policy documents provide practical guidelines to everyday and special communication efforts of government to ensure uniformity of practice. In addition, the GCIS provides strategic support in media bulk buying in order for government to benefit from an economic of scale realised through coherent and centralised government media bulk buying. Moreover, the GCIS provides media monitoring and content analysis services for government programmes, departments, and policies. The concerning question is whether these guideline documents are being utilised within the South African government departments and whether the function of the GCIS is felt within provincial departments?

The Comtask report had noted that the “SACS provincial offices operate with varying degrees of efficiency”. Today, a very essential role of the GCIS concerns the restructuring of provincial communications (Lor & van As, 2002:112). The GCIS runs a provincial coordination programme support. The purpose of the provincial coordination programme is to “strengthen the system of government communication and implement development communication through sound stakeholder relations and partnerships to ensure that the public is informed about government policies and programmes to improve their lives” (46, GCIS annual report 2010/11). This function is supposed to provide strategic leadership and advice to provincial and local spheres of government, coordinate government’s Public Participation Programme (*Imbizos*) across all three spheres of government and to strengthen intergovernmental communication alignment.

Currently, government communication in South Africa starts at the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS), which is now the highest communication office, based in the presidency. Every year, the GCIS sets the communication tone for government. The provincial governments only develop their communication strategies after receiving guidelines from the GCIS. Therefore, “provincial departments, districts, and municipalities also align their communication strategies to the provincial one” (Rasila & Mudau, 2012:139). Sanders *et al.*, (2011:5) posit that the structure of the communication unit is an essential determinant of the practice of government communication. For this

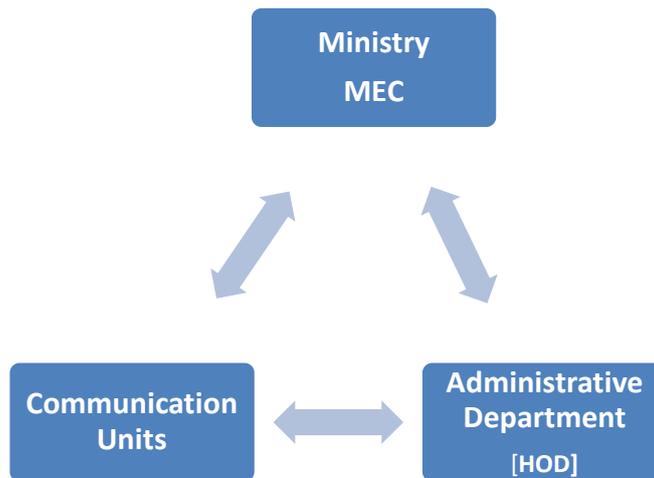
reason, the Comtask/GCIS proposed structure of communication units inside ministerial government departments is discussed next.

6.6 THE STRUCTURE AND POSITION OF THE COMMUNICATION UNIT WITHIN GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN SOUTH AFRICA

The reasons behind the structure of government communication is to ensure efficiency and cost effectiveness, professionalism, political control of the communication process and credibility and transparency (Comtask, 2000:64). The head of communications (HOC) is appointed by minister and must operate from the ministry office. If HOC is a public servant, he/she will be the head of communications in the departments. If hired externally, director reports to him/here. According to the Comtask (2000:64) recommendations, the ministry departments should author their own communications strategies and manage daily news under the coordinating eye of the GCIS.

Government has both a duty and a right to present the case for its policies and actions and this advocacy role needs to be strengthened. This requires that the minister take the lead in developing and managing the communications strategy through the ministry. Recommendation 21 of the Comtask report (2000:64) proposed for “the management and direction of the communications line function to be transferred from the departments to the ministries, reporting directly to the minister whose responsibility will be to determine overall communications policy in respect of her/his ministry and department”. The minister should be free to select an individual of the necessary seniority to act as head of communications. The communication functions in the ministry department should report through the ministerial head of communications who shall be directly accountable to the minister. Close co-operation of the department director general (HOD) should be sought. However, “formal approval will be required only with respect to his/her role as accounting officer for budgetary approvals”.

Figure 1: Position of the communication units in government departments



Source: Adapted from the *Comtask report 1996*

6.7 POLICY GUIDELINES FOR GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN SOUTH AFRICA

As already noted, the role of the GCIS is in coordinating, standardising and professionalising government communication in the national, provincial and local tiers of the South African government. The Government Communicators handbook confirms that the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) strives to achieve integration, coordination and high levels of professionalism in the government communication profession. In order to facilitate this role, the GCIS has developed a number of government communication policy guidelines for government communicators in all levels or tiers of government. The following is a summary of the government communication guidelines policies:

- Access to Information Manual of August 2013 – is a guide on how members of the public can access information held by the GCIS. It describes what information is accessible and what information has been classified. “The promotion of Access to information Act, 2000, states that each body must designate an information officer and deputy information officer(s) who will be responsible for processing applications for access to information, and help applicants lodge their applications”.

- Best practice guidelines for the procurement of marketing, advertising, and PR services (2008). The aim of this policy document is to encourage diversity and promote transformation by encouraging small, medium, and micro-enterprises (SMMEs) to participate in the industry. The purpose is to ensure uniformity and consistency in the implementation of government procurement policies in outsourcing marketing, advertising, and PR services.
- Corporate identity and branding guidelines – this policy document contains guidelines for the use of the National Coat of Arms. The current national coat of Arms was adopted by the cabinet in the year 2000 thereby replacing the one that served South Africa since 17 September 1910.
- Editorial style guide (March 2013) – this is a style guide on writing different government communication documents and dealing with the media. It contains language issue, grammar, and referencing styles.
- Government Communicator's Handbook. This is a 230-page guideline on the practice of government communication in South Africa. The first handbook was published in 2003 and the last (current) one was published in 2010/11. The government communicators' handbook is designed to assist government communicators to locate themselves in the overall government communication system. It contains guidelines on government communication, government communication strategy, media liaison, campaign management, development communication, marketing and advertising and the management of government corporate identity. "The handbook also helps government communicators by putting issues into context and providing background, easy reference tips, and practical guidelines on issues they will come across in their daily work".
- Marketing communication sponsorship guidelines for government (June 2007) – This guideline document provides a framework for government departments and institutions who engage in sponsorship to ensure that such partnerships are held in government integrity and the corporate image of government is not brought into

disrepute in the process. It defines sponsorship guidelines for use when attracting additional resources for government programmes and initiatives.

- Policy guidelines for South African government websites – this policy guideline came into effect in October 2012. The policy guideline of government websites was necessitated by the inconsistencies that existed between government websites. The purpose is to create a seamless, consistency and unified experience for users of South African government websites. Issues of content management, language use, advertising, design and navigation are discussed in the policy document. The government website is seen as an extension of the government communication strategy in that “it should tell the user everything about the department and what the department does and enable users to talk to the department”.
- Research guidelines for government communicators (Jan 2009) – this is guideline for government communicators doing communication research. The document emphasise that the effectiveness of government communication and the dissemination of government information can be enhanced through the application of appropriate scientific research processes and methodologies. The document provides general information on approaches of research. However, very little is presented on conducting communication effectiveness research.
- Social Media Guidelines (April 2011) – The social media guidelines came into effect in April 2011. The purpose of these guidelines is to create awareness of some of the opportunities and challenges that social media presents for government communication. The guidelines focus on guidance in the use of social media within the South African government communication environment, in order to improve government transparency, participation, and interaction with the public.
- Strategizing for Communication (July 2007) – developed in July 2007, the strategizing for communication document provides an outline of the process of strategizing for government communication. The document identifies nine steps in

the formulation and implementation of government communication strategy documents. This document is discussed further in chapter 8.

6.8 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter outlined the historical development of government communication in South Africa. It also discussed the scholarship of government communication in South Africa. In that way, this chapter provides the necessary context in which the nature of South African government communication can better be comprehended. Moreover, such context is of vital importance in understanding the foundation of the present study. The outcome of this chapter was a thorough document analysis of government communication documents. Document analyses was conducted for this purpose because limited scholarly studies currently exist in South Africa to fill the role of: (1) tracing the development of government communication in South Africa, (2) providing an overview of the practice of government communication in South Africa and (3) and elaborating on the policies that influence and guide the practice. It is imperative for the reader to understand the context of the research before approaching the results and discussion chapters. The following chapter describes the research methodologies used in the data gathering and analysis process.

CHAPTER 7: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the methodology plan selected for the study. The chapter begins with a description of the inquiry strategy and the research design, while the characteristics of a descriptive research are explained next. This is followed by a methodology triangulation on which the study is based. Moreover, the elected data collection methods and instruments are delineated. The study is predominately qualitative, although aided by a limited-scale survey. From a qualitative approach, the multiple case-study method is chosen. The data collection methods selected for this purpose are in-depth interviews and document analyses. A questionnaire survey of 30 respondents complimented the study by providing quantifiable data. This mixed methodology ensures validity and reliability of the research findings. A discussion regarding the quality of the research design concludes the chapter. However first, the research philosophy is demarcated next.

7.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM / PHILOSOPHY

In this section, the main research philosophies guiding the research question are presented along with their implications for the study. This study is positivist in its attempts to verify the distinctiveness theory and constructivist in exploring the effects of such distinctness to the practice of government communication. Although espoused by some elements of positivism, the study is predominately constructivist as a way of ensuring validity and reliability.

A research paradigm sets the scene for the entire study as it typically influences the choice of methodology, tools and sample (Ponterotto 2005:128; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009:108). A paradigm is a set of beliefs representing a worldview, which in turn guides perception and action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:9; Plack, 2005:224; Saunders *et al.*, 2009:107). It contains the researcher's assumptions about knowledge (epistemology). The parameter of the study is therefore determined by the paradigm selected (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:108).

The positivists' paradigm is an objective, controlled and rigid study predominated by quantitative research methodologies (Plack, 2005:224). Here, truth is considered objective, singular, and apprehensible. Positivists advocate a context-free, value-free, bias-free, and replicable research inquiry (Plack, 2005:226). Hence, this paradigm is devoid of opinions, beliefs, assumptions, and feelings. Some of the elements associated with a positivist approach include the presentation of hypothesis, controlled experimental studies, and statistical data leading to the verification of theory (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:113). Positivism typically works from a deductive methodology. This study does the same to test the distinctiveness theory and gauge its effects on the practice of government communication. The primary goal of positivism is not only to explain, but also to predict and control phenomenon (Ponterotto 2005:128). A model that demonstrates the conditions in which government communication can be distinctive, strategic, and ethical could facilitate such prediction and control.

Constructivism contradicts the positivist research paradigm that assumes a single objective reality (Ponterotto 2005:129). It conceives a multiplicity of reality that is not only external but also internal (Plack, 2005:228). Primarily the purpose of a constructivist research is to unearth and bring into surface the unconscious lived experiences of the subject matter (Ponterotto 2005:129). Therefore, a constructivist paradigm, assumes relativist ontology where multiple realities exist, as well as, a subjectivist epistemology where the researcher and the respondent co-create meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). On *epistemology*, constructivism attests to knowledge being comprised of multiple interpretations that are value-laden (Plack, 2005:229).

Axiology pertains to the personal value of the researcher in the inquisition of knowledge (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:116). Whereas positivism assumes an objectively detached researcher, constructivism prefers an involved scholar (Ponterotto 2005:129). Interactions between the researcher and the object of study are encouraged as they are expected to jointly construct knowledge. The focus of constructivism is on explaining phenomena rather than predicting and controlling (Plack, 2005:229; Ponterotto 2005:129).

The trustworthiness of a constructivist research is customarily judged by positivist's credibility criteria of internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity. However, some researchers (Mouton 2001:410) contest the above methodologies as insufficient for the qualitative constructivist approach. In their place, criteria such as creditability, transferability, dependability, and conformability are endorsed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:35). As for determining the trustworthiness of the research findings, constructivism discerns multiple interpretations of data, while positivism does not. Consequently, the validity of a constructivist research is not as accentuated as that of the positivist paradigm (Ponterotto 2005:131).

For constructivism, the trustworthiness of a study is judged by its 'functional *fit*'. The latter refers to how the findings 'fit' a given research project and achieves the set objectives. The *fit* criteria include the contribution of the research findings to extant knowledge and the relevance and applicability of the results to a given context (Plack, 2005:230). *Transferability* is another concept usable in validating a qualitative constructivist research. Transferability refers to the degree in which the findings are transferable from one situation to the next (Plack, 2005:231). The research inquiry strategy is described next.

7.3 INQUIRY STRATEGY: DESCRIPTIVE STUDY

A descriptive research may be an extension of an exploratory study or a forerunner to an *explanatory* study (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:140). Explanatory studies are those that establish causal relationships between variables, whereas an exploratory study is one that simply explores a phenomenon. As such, a descriptive research stands at the centre of the two above mentioned research purposes. This means, a descriptive research contains with it the features of both exploratory and explanatory research. This is where the proposed study is demarcated.

There has been some considerable *exploration* to the study of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment but none of these studies are conducted within an African context (see Gelders, Bouckart & Van Ruler 2003: Rainey 2003: Pandey & Garnett 2006: Liu *et al.*, 2007, 2008 & 2010). Whereas, a basic exploratory study runs a

risk of reinventing the wheel, a pure *explanatory* study is impossible considering that too much remains unknown of the relationship between the distinct communication environment of the public sector and the communication management practice that results. The scholarship around this research field has not yet confirmed a conclusive causal relationship.

Whilst the topic of study (the uniqueness of government communication) is currently insufficiently explored in South Africa, there is an emergent research, internationally, that provides some exploratory grounding applicable to this particular study. Hence, a purely exploratory study is academically insufficient, yet necessary for the context of study. For this reason, a descriptive study is proposed. In addition to being explorative, the study takes a notch up towards the descriptive. A research project that utilises description is likely to be a precursor to explanation, which is essential for this study.

A descriptive research aims to describe the nature of a phenomenon such as the characteristics of the communication environment of the public sector. However, a descriptive research may fall short of depicting correlations between government communication and the distinctive environment in which it is practiced. Descriptive studies cannot definitively test cause-effect relationships (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:81). This is where an explanatory research would fill the gap. Explanatory studies build on descriptive studies to investigate causes and reasons for the described phenomenon (Neuman, 2000:23). For example, *in what ways the described distinctive features of the public sector's communication environment affect government communication in practice*. An explanatory research enables control and prediction, which are ultimately its goal. Neuman (2000:22) indicates that descriptive and explanatory research has many similarities. They blur together in practice. As much as this study is descriptive, it attempts to explain the relationship between the internal context of public organisations and the nature of communication management that result.

The above discussion proves that no research paradigm can claim to fully comprehend all inquiry into human life and knowledge (Plack, 2005:226). No research methodology is better than the other is. Each methodology is better at doing different things and answering

specific questions (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:116). For that reason, a triangulation of methodology is proposed.

7.4 RESEARCH DESIGN: TRIANGULATION (MIXED-METHODOLOGIES)

The research question primarily informs the selection of the research strategy, the choice of collection techniques and analysis procedures, and the time horizon over which the study is undertaken. (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:136). The research design is, therefore, the general plan of how one goes about answering the research question. It must describe research strategies, research choices, and time horizons. Moreover, strategies of inquiry connect the researcher to specific methods of collecting and analysing empirical materials (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

The research design situates the researcher in the empirical world. Not only does it guide the data collection process and the analyses of the collected data, it also specifies how the investigator will address the two critical issues of representation and legitimation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:13). Through a research design, a link is forged between the research question, the data collection, analyses, and the research results. The research design chosen for this study is a methodology triangulation incorporating in-depth interviews, surveys, and document analyses.

Triangulation is the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously. It entails the permutation of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study. A methodology triangulation adds rigor, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:8). Triangulation equates the researcher to a *bricoleur* who makes quilts deploying whatever strategies, methods, or empirical materials available (Becker, 1998:2 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:6). If new tools have to be invented or pieced together, then the researcher will certainly do so. The choice of methodology selection depends on the question asked (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:6; (Seidman, 2006:11).

Triangulation employs multiple investigators, theories and various methods of data collection to ensure the quality and validity of a study (Plack, 2005:232). Methodology triangulation is the use of multiple methods of data collection procedures in a single study (Leedy, 1992:143). Another form of triangulation is the use of various theories to interpret the same data (theoretical triangulation). Investigator triangulation is yet another form of triangulation. The latter makes use of multiple observers to gather data. The proposed study adopts a methodology triangulation, particularly a mixed-method entailing in-depth interviews, document analysis and self-administered surveys. Mixed method research are often used in ensuring validity in a predominately constructivist approach. Effective and efficient research draws on methodologies from diverse research approaches and traditions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:147).

Methodology triangulation combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches, and may consider both primary and secondary data (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:151). Method triangulation is also known as a mixed method research. A mixed method research is different and should not be confused with a multi-method research. The latter refers to the combination of methods within the confines of a single approach, either quantitative or qualitative (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:153). Although, different methods can be used for different purposes, in this study, all three methods are designed to augment each other in answering the research question proposed in the study. A mixed-method is complementary in nature because the limitation of one method is often complemented by a different method (Leedy, 1992:144; Saunders *et al.*, 2009:154). This inspires confidence in the findings and conclusions of the study. Neuman (2000:124) puts it frivolously when he states, “It is better to look at something from several angles than to look at it in only one way”.

A key to the success of mixed-methodologies is thick descriptions. The researcher must provide sufficient details of the methodology to allow the reader to make appropriate judgments regarding the transferability and validity of the study (Plack, 2005:231-232). All methodologies start with demarcating a representative sample for the study at hand. What follows is a brief discussion of the sampling plan elected.

7.5 POPULATION

A sample is drawn from a population. In research, the term population refers to aggregates of texts, institutions, or anything that is being investigated. A population can be very small or very large (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 1999:41). Deacon *et al.* (1999:45) maintain that defining a population provides a basis for deciding upon an adequate and appropriate sampling strategy and signals how broadly the findings can be extrapolated.

The study population is delimited to government communicators and communication units in the KZN provincial government. Thence, the findings of this study do not extrapolate to communication units in government municipalities or ministry regional offices within the KZN province nor does this study attempt to reflect the situation in all communication units in the various provinces of South Africa nor the opinions of all government communicators in the country. Nevertheless, the results may easily depict, to a certain extent, the realities of government communication in other provinces.

South Africa hosts about 35 national ministries such as department of education, department of health, department of transport, COGTA et cetera (<http://www.info.gov.za/aboutgovt/contacts/ministries.htm>). These ministries are in the care of a minister and a chief director (Head of Department). Each ministry has a central office in Pretoria (national government), provincial offices in all nine provinces (provincial government) and regional offices in each municipality (local government). Of special note, this research is confined to provincial ministry departments in the KZN province (in Pietermaritzburg). It is acknowledged that the situation described in the results of this study may, or may not, be similar to other nine provinces.

There are in overall 16 provincial (ministry) government departments in the KwaZulu Natal province. Table 8 contains a comprehensive list of all provincial government departments in KZN. The study profiles eight (8) departments, accumulating to half of the population targeted, for this reason, the sample is sufficient. The sampling list is presented in table 9.

Table 8: List of all KZN provincial government departments (Ministries)

1. Office of the premier	6. Economic Development and Tourism	11. Provincial Treasury
2. Agriculture and Environment	7. Department of Education	12. Planning Commission
3. Arts and Culture	8. Department of Health	13. Sports and Recreation
4. Community Safety and Liaison	9. Human Settlement	14. Social Development
5. Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs	10. Legislature	15. Department of Transport 16. Public Works

7.6 SAMPLING

This section presents a review of units of analysis chosen for the study. There are of two categories of unit of analysis selected: eight (8) government departments (for multiple a case study) and 30 government communicators (for in-depth interviews). Sampling techniques usually fall under two comprehensive categories: random sampling (probability sampling) and non-random sampling (non-probability sampling). In random sampling, units of analysis are selected by chance; every unit of a population has an equal chance of being selected. Non-random samples are purposively selected. The selection chance of each unit is known, hence, it cannot be guaranteed that every unit of a population has an equal chance of being selected (Deacon, Pickering, Golding & Murdock, 1999:41).

The units of analysis selected for this study are provincial government departments located in the KwaZulu Natal province whose primary external stakeholders are the general public. The identified government departments are usually at the forefront of service delivery protests as they are considered the custodians of basic social services. For this reason, communication with the public (citizens) is not only essential, but mandatory. The *population* of the study is largely provincial ministerial government departments in South Africa. It is nonetheless noted that the generalisability of findings can only be applied to the KwaZulu Natal province following a lack of representation in other provinces. See table 9 below:

Table 9: List of sampled government departments



Department	Mission statements
<p>KZN Office of the Premier (Provincial Communication Service)</p>	<p>The Provincial Government Communication's mandate is to provide a coordinated Government Communication service within the Province of KwaZulu Natal. It has also been tasked with improving and sustaining a positive Provincial Government image as well as implementing the Provincial Communication Strategy. The unit also manages and promotes the KwaZulu Natal Provincial Government's corporate identity. It provides professional media services to the Premier and the Department, thus ensuring accessibility of Government to the media and the public. http://www.kznpremier.gov.za/</p> 
<p>KZN Public Works</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u> "We will lead in infrastructure development and property management in KwaZulu Natal"</p> <p>http://www.kznworks.gov.za/</p> 
<p>KZN Department of Health</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u> "Fighting disease, fighting poverty, giving hope".</p> <p>http://www.kznhealth.gov.za/</p> 

<p>KZN Department of Education</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u> “To provide equitable access to quality education for the people of KwaZulu Natal”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">www.kzneducation.gov.za</p> 
<p>KZN Social development</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u> “Our task is to develop and monitor the implementation of social policy that both creates an enabling environment for and leads to the reduction in poverty. We ensure the provision of social protection and social welfare services to all people who live in our province”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">http://www.kznsocdev.gov.za</p> 
<p>KZN COGTA</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u> “To strengthen cooperation amongst all spheres of government, support and build capacity of local governance institutions, facilitate and coordinate stakeholder engagement, in pursuance of people-centered, accelerated service delivery”.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">http://www.kzncogta.gov.za/</p> 
<p>KZN Sports and Recreation</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u> We will maximize opportunities through the promotion, development and transformation of sport and recreation to create cohesive and sustainable communities and enhance the quality of life of the citizens of KwaZulu Natal.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">http://www.kzndsr.gov.za/</p> 
<p>KZN Economic Development and tourism</p>	<p><u>Mission statement:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop and implement strategies that drive economic growth; ▪ Be a catalyst for economic transformation and development; ▪ Provide leadership and facilitate integrated economic planning and development; and ▪ Create a conducive environment for investment.



The aim was to interview a total of 40 government communicators in eight KZN provincial government departments classified by various levels of employment and responsibility. Interviews were supposed to be held with five (5) respondents working at various levels of government communication in each of the eight departments as follow: Head of communication, senior communication manager, communication officer, media liaison manager and a webmaster (social media). This would result in a total of 40 respondents (5 x 8= 40). However, a total of 30 out of the targeted 40 respondents was achieved. Departments that did not employ a dedicated webmaster responsible for social media platforms caused the reduction in the number of the response rate. The other reason was due to two instances where the head of department delegated a senior communication manager to handle the interview on his/her behalf. In such situation, the respondent represented both the senior manager and the head of department. The sample achieved for both the interviews and surveys is tabulated in table 10. However, this table excludes the two interviews held with the GCIS since they did not complete the questionnaire and were asked different questions from those answered by communicators working in government departments. Given its purpose as a custodian of government communication, the functions of the GCIS are different.

Table 10: Units of analysis: Interviewees

Department	Head of communication	Senior Manager	Media Liaison manager	General communication officer	Webmaster Social media	Total
1. Office of the Premier	1	1	1	1	1	5
2. Public Works	1	1	1	2	0	5

3. Health	0	1	1	1	0	3
4. Education	1	1	1	1	0	4
5. Cogta	1	1	0	1	0	3
6. Sports and Recreation	1	0	1	1	0	3
7. Economic & tourism development	1	1	0	1	1	4
8. Social Development	1		1		1	3
10 Total	9	7	6	6	3	30

7.6.1 PROBABILITY PURPOSEIVE (NON-RANDOM) SAMPLING

Despite the fact that probability sampling is generally considered the best, it cannot be a standard appropriate for all research. Non-probability sampling is generally associated with qualitative methodologies. The most important element about a sample is that it can provide answers to the research question (Sumser, 2001:66). Unlike their quantitative counterpart, qualitative researchers rarely assemble a large representative sample from a population. The primary goal of sampling in qualitative research is less concerned with representation than it is with the relevance of the sample to the research topic (Neuman, 2000:196).

The present study employs a purposive sampling method. Purposive sampling is different from random sampling in which every unit has an equal chance of being selected (Neuman, 2000:197). This type of sampling allows the researcher to select special cases that are most suitable and abundantly informative in answering the research question (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:147). It is for this reason that purposive sampling is also called judgmental sampling (Du Plooy, 2002:114). Purposive sampling is more useful and sufficient for a very small sample such as those required in a case-study research (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:237). A purposive sampling technique is appropriate for a subject matter of which little is known (Kumar, 1999:163) as the case is for this study.

A heterogeneous sampling is best suited for this study because whilst the sample is small, there are maximum variations within it. Each government department is different in its mandate and services offered to the public (Luoma-aho, 2008:450). This diversity must be taken into account. A considerable drawback of purposive sampling is its lack of external validity. There is often a contradiction between selecting information-rich cases and obtaining statistically representation of the population (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:214).

Two forms of purposive non-probability sampling methodologies have been used in this study. The theoretical sampling and the snowball sampling method were chosen. In theoretical sampling, the researcher deliberately seeks out respondents who are most likely to aid theoretical development by extending and even confounding emerging hypothesis. The theoretical sampling was reasonable for this study as it was imperative to sample government communicators working in various departments and in different employment levels. The employment levels were categorised as follows: (A) one head of the communication unit (referred to as head of department), (B) senior communication manager, (C), Media relation manager/officer and (D) General communication officer. Where possible, and highly unlikely, a web-manager or anyone responsible for social media (E) was included. However, web-manager/social media practitioners were found only in three departments.

Snowball sampling is often adopted for practical reasons rather than clearly identified theoretical objectives. "Snowball sampling is mainly used where no list or institution exist that could be used as the basis for sampling". A snowball sample grows through momentum whereby initial contacts suggest further contacts. Snowball sampling is opportune in a closed nit network where entry/access is difficult and where members of the group are secluded. In this case, initial contacts become invaluable in opening up and mapping out tight social networks. For this study, a snowball sampling was applied purely for practical reasons as the sampling frame was already determined from the theoretical sampling. Thus, the snowball sample was used only to identify people within the sampling frame.

The snowball sampling was indispensable in this study because the social network of government communicators is a closed net and access is difficult because government communicators associate research with unnecessary scrutiny. They are habitually distrusting of media and other evaluators. Moreover, the high degree of public scrutiny in government means that government communicators are frequently bombarded with requests for interviews for different reasons. This research took place at the highest level of provincial government, so it was necessary for the researcher to be guided and introduced by key members of the in-group.

The reason government communicators were difficult to locate is twofold. First, most government communicators are not affiliated to any professional fraternity from which a list of contacts could have been archived. Secondly, there is a high degree of job-hopping between departments in the province. For instance, a media relation officer would be identified from contacts in the website, only to follow up and be informed that the particular media liaison officer has moved to another department, which may or may not be in the sample frame. Because of the reasons identified above, a snowball sample as guided by a theoretical sampling proved to be the most useful sampling techniques for the study.

What size does a sample need to be for it to be considered credible? The common sense that a larger sample is best is often directly challenged by qualitative research. Big is not always beautiful. This is because a lot of qualitative studies are less concerned with producing extensive generalizable findings than in providing intensive examination of complex human and social phenomena in highly specialised circumstances (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:43). Thus, qualitative research tends to use comparatively small samples than do quantitative studies. The aim of qualitative research is not to build a large number of similar cases essential for making broad inferences, but rather to stop gathering information once the research reaches a point of saturation (where the data collection stops revealing new findings and the evidence start repeating itself) (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:41). This study reached a saturation point at the end of interview number 20, but the researcher continued with data collection until the predetermined sample of 30 had been acquired. Such continuation provided validity as evidenced by repetitive data. Once the sample was identified, data collection methods were selected and their corresponding data

collection instruments prepared. The next section focus on the data collection process applied in the study.

7.7 DATA COLLECTION

This section describes the instruments and methods of data collection utilised. As already indicated, the study employs a methodology triangulations. To this end, methods of data collection are considered from both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. The selected qualitative collection instruments are interviews and document analysis while self-administered questionnaires added a quantitative element to the study.

7.8 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative researchers study things and people in their natural settings. They attempt to make sense of phenomena in terms of the meanings people ascribe to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:5). Qualitative research is invaluable for under-explored research topics. In a case where theories and concepts are not well delineated, variables are often not clarified enough to command a quantitative study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:135). Qualitative researchers posit that objectivity in the study of relationships and social structures is neither desirable nor possible (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:135).

Qualitative research affords the researcher the luxury of description, interpretation, verification and the evaluation of phenomenon (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:136-137). Three of these characteristics are relevant to this study. First, the study seeks to *describe* the elements of government communication. Secondly, this study seeks to *examine* the existence of a distinct communication environment. Lastly, a qualitative approach will grant the ability to *interpret* the practice of government communication within a context of distinctiveness. Interpretation enables a researcher to (a) gain new insights about a particular phenomenon, (b) develop new concepts or theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon, and/or (c) discover the problems that exist within the phenomenon (Leedy, 1992:141).

In attempt to study, describe and understand the subject matter comprehensively, and without omission, qualitative research employs an assortment of various data material from case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, interview, artefacts, cultural texts, observations, historical archives, visual texts, et cetera. The methodology of a qualitative research may continue to evolve with the development of the study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:135). However, the approach is often criticized for lack of generalizability and for being incapable of replication (De Vaus, 2002:5). To redress this critique, qualitative research often makes use of multiple forms of data collection in a single study (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). For this reason, a multiple case study was selected for this study.

7.8.1 MULTIPLE- CASE STUDY

This is a cross-sectional study as it takes place at a single point in time. It differs from a longitudinal study that captures data over a longer period in order to capture change and development of a phenomenon (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:146). A case study is valuable in investigating a less known and poorly understood area or subject matter. A case study examines a phenomenon within its real life context (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:146). This affords the researcher an understanding of the context and the processes of the phenomenon in question. A researcher is able to collect extensive data regarding the case study. The data collection method of a case study research may be various and all encompassing. It may include interviews, observations, documents analysis and surveys (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:135). Saunders *et al.* (2009:146) argue that a case study is worthy in that it provides a safe context to test, validate or falsify theory.

A particular case is selected because it is unique. Alternatively, it may be selected because its features are comparable to similar situations (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:146). In a situation where a single case study is considered, one should be careful of generalising the findings to similar situations (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:147). In contrast, a study may incorporate multiple cases as proposed in this study, of eight (8) government departments. A multiple or a collective case study is a study that groups together a number of similar cases (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:146). A collective case study enables comparisons and thus

a legitimate generalisability of findings (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:137). In addition, a case study does not only sanction a comparison of cases with each other, but allows a comparison of the results with those of previously reported cases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010:137). However, the challenge of a case study research is that negotiating entry into an organisation for conducting a case study is sometimes difficult and stressful. Some of the issues to consider in access negotiation are explored next.

Access is a formidable impasse in organisational research and case studies in general. Without gaining access to the primary source of data, there is no research. In addition, a lack of access may reduce the representativeness of the sample, which in turn reduces the reliability, and validity of the study. Access could be declined by the highest level of management in the organisation. In such cases, the research cannot proceed regardless of the willingness of the participant employees themselves. On the contrary, even if access is formally granted by the organisational management, further negotiations remain to be conducted with employees participants who reserve the power to volunteer in the research or not to partake in it (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:170).

Saunders *et al.* (2009:170) advise that it is better to negotiate access to the organisation as a continuing process. In this, a researcher gains entry to conduct an initial part of the data collection and then seek further permission for the next set of data collection. This strategy proved useful for the present study. Saunders *et al.* (2009:170) identified some of the factors that may cause an organisation to deny access for research to be conducted in their organisation. One reason could be a lack of perceived value or relevance of the research to the organisation in question. In this case, it is advisable for the researcher to highlight possible benefits of the proposed research to the organisation. This also proved to be a valuable strategy in gaining access. An analysis of a communication environment provides an opportunity for government communicators to not only understand the environment, but also, to be able to predict and control it for the enhancement of communication performance. Access can be denied due to the potential sensitivity of the research matter. Fortunately, the topic discussed by this study is of a professional concern, which relatively reduces potential sensitivity.

7.8.2 IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

The proposed study makes use of semi-structured interviews. Interviews are generally open-ended or structured. Interviews are one of the most powerful ways in which researchers attempt to understand fellow human beings; they offer a deeper understanding of the issues, structure, processes, and policies (Seidman, 2006:130). Interviews generate useful information about lived experience and its meanings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:47). This research made use of in-depth face-to-face interviews. Interviews are considered suitable for this study because they are the primary way in which researchers can understand institutions and their processes by questioning individuals who carry out and experience those processes (Seidman, 2006:7).

7.8.2.1 Structured interviews

Interviews can be structured, semi structured or unstructured. “In structured interviewing, the interviewer asks all respondents the same series of pre-established questions with a limited set of response categories (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:68). All respondents receive the same set of questions asked in the same order or sequence (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:68). The interviewer works with formal interview schedules and is required to repeat the wording of each question exactly the same way and to observe the order in which the questions are listed (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:64). Thus, structured interviews generally leave little room for the interviewer to improvise as he/she advance with the research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:69). The interviewer records the responses according to a coding scheme that is already established. This makes reliability the strongest advantage of a structured interview in that a replication of a study is possible. The drawback is that structured interviews do not easily accommodate emerging issues (Du Plooy, 2002:138).

7.8.2.2 Unstructured interviews

Open-ended interviews accord the respondents the latitude to explain and build on their responses, which is valuable for qualitative studies (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:325). The advantages of open-ended interviews are their flexibility to accommodate emerging issues

(Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:148). The disadvantage, however, is that each interview may yield different results that may not fit any category or correlate with the next interview.

This research made use of open-ended questions, doing so encouraged the respondents to expand on their own experiences. Thus, a wealth of information was obtained from in-depth interviews. The researcher travelled from Durban to Pietermaritzburg to conduct interviews with government communicators at a place of their natural settings, in their workplace. The interviews lasted for two hours, on average. The timing of the interview depended largely on the comfort of the interviewee. Time was extended or shortened with consideration of the interviewee's availability and willingness to engage further with the study. Where the respondent seemed anxious with time, the interview was shortened. However, it was found that most interviews started with the participant being anxious, but once the conversation commenced, they relaxed into the discussion without being cognisant of time.

In-depth phenomenologically based interviews resemble life-history interviewing. Open-ended questions are used for this approach. "The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience within the topic under study" (Seidman, 2006:11). Given its qualitative nature, unstructured interviews yield a greater breadth of data than any other type of interview structures. Whereas structured interviews attempt to capture precise codable data in order to explain behaviour within pre-established categories, unstructured interviews aim to understand the complex behaviour of a phenomenon without imposing any priori category that may confine the inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:75). The purpose of in-depth interviewing is to get answers to questions, and not to test hypothesis (Seidman, 2006:8). Some renowned researchers offer guidelines to appropriate and effective in-depth interviews:

- *Accessing the setting*: the researcher must find an insider, an associate who is an admired member of the in-group under evaluation, someone willing to be an informant. The associate would act as a guide and a translator of cultural mores and, at time, jargon or language (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:77). The identified allies

for the study were the KZN director of Provincial Government Communication and the director of KZN GCIS. They ushered the process of entry and introductions.

- Seidman (2006:7) warns that at the heart of every interview is an interest in other individuals and their experiences. This requires the interviewers to keep their egos in check. To remember that it is not about them but the interviewees.
- *Gaining trust*: the interviewer must cultivate trust with the respondents. Gaining trust is essential to the success of the interviews (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:77). However, establishing rapport is risky as the researcher could possibly go native, and start acting as a representative of the subject group. This researcher managed to maintain the academic distance required for objectivity.
- *Avoid leading questions*: leading questions are those that may influence the direction of the responses. Seidman (2006:84) recommends open-ended questions that set the scene while allowing participants to take any direction they want. Such has been done for this study.
- *Collecting empirical material*: researchers must take notes regularly and promptly. They should write everything down and analyse their notes frequently. (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:79). This researcher kept notes of emerging issues and observable data.
- *Elaboration and digression*: structured interviews can only deliver answers to the questions asked. They do not allow the researcher to trawl around for new issues (inductively). Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, do not impose restrictions upon the interviewer and the interviewee. Although the interview guide was followed in its entirety as to accommodate some deductive issues essential for theory verification, the interviewer was given enough space, courage, and time to discuss any other issue of concern within the overall theme of the research (government communication). Thus providing a wealth of inductive data.

The interview structure generally trailed the intuition of the interviewee by allowing him/her to jump from section to section, thus making the interview as natural a conversation as possible. However, Deacon *et al.* (1999:69) caution, “interviewees might spend so much time talking about the things that interests and concern them, that they never adequately address the issue that concern the researcher”. In the beginning, this seemed to have been an issue of concern, but later it was established that most of the inductive data emerged from nonchalant discussions about government communication and the individual experiences of communicators. As the data reached saturation, these emerging issues started to repeat themselves as reiterated by other respondents. Some of these issues would have never emerged from direct structured interviews because they were not yet identified by prior research, theory and literature.

No matter how organised a researcher may be, he or she slowly becomes buried under an increasing amount of field data. Research based on in-depth interviews is labour intensive. Seidman (2006:112) explains the demands:

“Keeping track of participants through the participant information forms, making sure that written consent forms are copied and filed in a safe place, labelling audio types of interviews accurately, managing the extensive files that develop in the course of working with the transcripts of interviews, keeping track of decision points in the entire process all requires attention to details”.

According to Seidman (2006:113), it is difficult to separate the process of gathering and analysing data. Some researchers claim that the two stages of gathering and analyses should be integrated in order to inform each other. In most cases, interviews would be held, then the researcher would analyse them before formulating new questions as a results of what had been found, then further interviews would be conducted. In contrast, this study avoided all in-depth analyses until all interviews data was collected so as to avoid imposing meaning to interviews. Nonetheless, after each interview, the researcher made a list of follow up questions to probe further in subsequent interviews.

In order to help the researcher establish enough information to ask appropriate questions in the survey questionnaire, often interviews are held prior to a survey research. It was planned that the researcher will conduct in-depth interviews after the analysis of the survey

in order to identify some patterns and issues to explore further in the interview sessions. However, because of time constraints, both data clusters were collection concurrently. Surveys were administered during the interview session. Questionnaires aided in obtaining quantitative information about the opinions and experiences of government communicators, while in-depth interviews explored deeper into those opinions and lived experiences.

Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:11) claim that people are more likely to attend in-depth interviews that take place in a familiar venue. For that reason, all interviews were conducted at government departments during the most convenient time for the respondent. In-depth interviews are easier to conduct with a group of respondents that is already sympathetic to the issue at hand. This study dealt with the most concerning issue for government communicators, which had received little attention before. The significance of this study to government communicators optimally increased participation in the study.

7.8.3 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Document analysis is a remnant of content analysis. According to Krippendorff's (1980:21) definition, "content analysis is a research technique for making explicative and valid inference from data to their content" (in Fico, Lacy & Riffe, 2008:119). By analysing the content, we can make a number of inferences about the people and organisations and even the environment that helped to produce the content (Wigston, 2009:4). A clearer definition of quantitative content analysis is provided by Wimmer and Dominick (2012:158) who maintain that "content analysis is a method of studying and analysing communication in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variable".

According to Bowen (2009:27), document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing and evaluating both printed and electronic documents. Documents that may be reviewed for research analyses may take a variety of forms such as organisational or institutional reports, public records or press releases. Through document analysis, researchers can examine how organisations have documented their activities, strategies and decisions (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:14).

For the purpose of this study, government department's communication strategy documents were analysed. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis require that the data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009:27). Documents are produced by individuals and groups in the course of their everyday practices and are created exclusively for their own immediate practical needs (Mogalakwe, 2006:222). They are therefore credible sources of data. Documents are unobtrusive and non-reactive. This means they are unaffected by the research process. The presence of the researcher does not alter the subject of study and stability of documents makes them suitable for repeated reviews.

Document analysis is usually used in combination with other qualitative research methods as a means of triangulation (Bowen, 2009:27). Nonetheless, document analysis are equally used in a single methodology study as a stand-alone method. Document analysis is particularly applicable to qualitative case studies as they offer data about the context within which participants operates. Much can be learnt from taking into account internal documentations (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:14).

For Bowen (2009:30-31), the purpose of documents analysis is to provide background and context, supplementary data, a means of tracking change and development, and verification of findings from other data sources. Documents provide background information as well as historical insight. The researcher may use data drawn from documents in order to contextualise data collected during the interviews. Moreover, information contained in documents may suggest additional questions to be explored in subsequent parts of the triangulation process. Furthermore, documents add supplementary data as they are able to verify findings from other data sources. Therefore, documents analysis contributes richly to the data reservoir.

Some of the limitations of document analysis are that they provide insufficient details because such data is not produced with the research agenda in mind. In this case, the researcher should be prepared to search for additional documentation in order to fill in the gaps. The other challenge is in the low irretrievability of documents (Bowen, 2009:31).

Organisations do not welcome researchers probing behind their carefully constructed public relations front (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:15). Therefore, studies that draw upon documentation are obviously constrained by the quality of what is available. Additionally, document analysis requires reflexivity, which requires awareness or an acknowledgement of the possibility of the investigator's influence on the research (Bowen, 2009:30). This study mitigated the challenges because (1) communication strategy documents were mostly comprehensive and detailed, (2) government departments willingly supplied the documents and (3) the researcher maintained a high degree of objectivity in the analysis of the documents. In addition, the documents were analysed following the themes found in the interview data.

7.9 QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY: SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRES

Quantitative research produces measurable mathematical analysis (Leedy, 1992:143). Albeit without depth, quantitative research can assist in understanding a wider aspect of the subject matter, (Babbie & Mouton, 2001:51). They illuminate information about the experiences, opinions, and characteristics of the subject matter (Neuman, 2000:246). The researcher starts with a conceptual research question and ends up with quantifiable empirical results suited for data comparison (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:144). Self-administered surveys are the quantitative methodology employed in this study. Due to limitation in data quantity (30 surveys), the quantitative methodology employed here is not meant to offer generalisation of data but rather to quantify the qualitative themes, patterns and responses gathered from qualitative data (interviews and documents).

Surveys are used in this study as one of the three methods of data collection. Survey research (questionnaires) is inherently quantitative and positivist in nature (Da Vaus, 2002:5). A draft of the questionnaire is included as Appendix A. One of the major advantages of questionnaires is width and breadth. A larger pool of a population may be sampled in a questionnaire survey (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:144). Another advantage is the inherent guaranteed anonymity to respondents (Leedy and Ormrod, 2010:189).

Electronic mail (e-mail) were used to distribute the questionnaires. E-mail surveys provide speed and are cost effective. An interactive questionnaire can be sent as an email attachment, answered, and returned by email (Da Vaus, 2002:123). In addition, the researcher can send reminders to non-respondents. This may improve the response rates. The disadvantage of e-mail surveys is their dependency on the availability of computers with internet and their proclivity to yield low responsiveness. This was problematic for the study as government communicators did not respond to requests or reminders to complete the online questionnaire. For this reason, questionnaires were delivered (by the researcher), completed, and returned on the day of the interview by the interviewee. This ensured that the same person being interviewed also completed the surveys for correlation between the qualitative and quantitative data.

The major disadvantage of questionnaires is a low return rate (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:144). This may reduce the validity of the results. Neuman (2000:267) discusses some of the reasons behind the growing trend of low response rate to surveys. Some of the factors discussed are, an overload of surveys, insensitive researchers and inadequate explanations of the importance of the survey and inadequate directives on responding to the survey (Neuman, 2000:267). Questionnaires can be an invaluable data collection instrument if the above pitfalls are acknowledged and accounted for. As mentioned, this study accounted for these pitfalls by delivering the questionnaire in person, and having it completed by the respondent on the day of the interview. As a result, a 100 percent return rate was achieved.

7.10 DATA ANALYSIS

It was previously unnecessary for qualitative researchers to explain how they analysed their data (Neuman, 2000:417). Recently, a detailed account of the data analysis process has become an expected feature in all qualitative research projects.

7.10.1 DATA CODING

Coding data for qualitative research implies that the researcher organises the raw data into conceptual categories and creates themes or concepts, which he or she then uses to analyse data (Neuman, 2000:420). According to Neuman's (2000:429) definition, "codes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study". Codes are usually attached to chunks of varying sizes, words, phrases, sentences or paragraphs. A question to ask in terms of coding is what counts as a theme. A theme is a collection of data collated into a category of related information, which captures patterns within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2009:83).

Both a deductive and inductive approach was used in the coding of this data. A number of features resembling a distinct communication environment of the public sector were identified from literature (see chapter 2). A deductive data analysis approach is best suited to test theories, features, and variables (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:489). A deductive approach signals that the researcher already has ideas about how the world operates and would want to test these ideas against 'hard data' (Neuman, 2000:49). This approach is instrumental in investigating the existence of the proposed features of public sector communication environment and their likely impacts on government communication practices in South Africa. In a deductive analysis, the pre-existing theory (e.g the distinctiveness theory) provides the empty boxes to which the researcher gathers evidence to fill them.

Using an inductive method on the other hand revealed emerging issues, themes and features of the public sector communication environment that were not previously identified in extant literature. Thus, coding of the data was conducted without trying to fit it into any pre-existing coding frame (Braun & Clarke, 2009:83). An inductive study builds the theory from the ground up by refining concepts, developing empirical generalisations and identifying preliminary relationships (Neuman, 2000:49). Once the data was coded, the codes were merged into themes.

7.10.2 THEMATIC ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is a dominant method for the analysis of qualitative data. According to Braun and Clarke (2009:79), “Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data”. Thematic analysis is seldom seen as a distinct data analysis method. On the contrary, Braun and Clarke (2009:79) contend that thematic analysis should be treated as a methodology in its own right. One of the benefits of thematic analysis is flexibility. As mentioned, themes or patterns within the data can be identified in one or two ways: inductively or deductively. A deductive approach can generate unanticipated insights and themes while an inductive approach sources the themes from the data themselves. Braun and Clarke (2009:84) outlined steps involved in conducting a thematic analysis. These are illustrated in table 11 below:

Table 11: Phases of thematic analysis

PHASE	DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS
1. Familiarizing yourself with your data:	Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.
2. Generating initial codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for themes:	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.
4. Reviewing themes:	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic ‘map’ of the analysis.
5. Defining and naming themes	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the report	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Source: (Braun & Clarke, 2009:83).

7.10.3 ANALYSIS OF QUESTIONNAIRES OF LIMITED SCALE

Data analysis refers to a search for patterns in data such as recurrent behaviour, objects, or a body of knowledge (Neuman, 2006:426). Because this study incorporated a surveys of a limited scale (30 questionnaires), there was no need to use computer programmes such as SPSS to analyse the content of the questionnaire. An Excel modelling programme was used to quantify responses of each question. A percentage was then calculated for each question. Please refer to a copy of the survey in the appendix.

7.10.4 ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

The difficulty of interview data emanates from the question of how to analyse the transcripts once the interviews are completed. Semi-structured, in-depth, interviews were conducted and the interviews recorded on the audio recording. The audio were transcribed in full. The data analysis of interviews was modelled from Burnard's (1991) method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research:

- **Stage 1** - For this study, throughout the research project and during the data collection process, notes and memos were kept. The researcher recorded everything that seemed important or intriguing about the interview, the environment (observation) and the actual notes of the interview session. The researcher transcribed the audio interviews using verbatim, taking into account all verbal and non-verbal signals such as pauses, coughs, and laughs. Albeit time consuming, interviewers who transcribe their tapes come to know their interviewees and understand the data better (Seidman, 2006:115). This was achieved.
- **Stage 2** - The aim of stage two is to immerse oneself in the data. This allowed the researcher to enter the participants' frame of reference and to perceive the lived-experience of the respondent and his environment.
- **Stage 3** - Transcripts were read thoroughly. Codes were determined by marking as many headings as necessary to describe all aspects of the content. At this point, all data were coded. Those un-coded were given interim headings. Both deductive and inductive coding were used at this stage. Mostly open coding were used for the inductive coding while distinctive features were sought deductively from the data. In open coding, the researcher locates themes and assigns initial codes or labels in first attempt to condense the mass into categories (Neuman, 2000).
- **Stage 4** - In stage four, the list of categories (codes) were surveyed by the researcher and then grouped together into higher-order headings (themes). "The aim, here is to reduce the number of categories by collapsing some of the ones that

are similar into broader categories” (Burnard, 1991:461). Stage four made use of axial coding where the researcher evaluates whether the codes and themes have some conceptual and structural order. During this axial coding, some themes were discarded, while others were explained further.

- **Stage 5** - The new list of categories and sub-headings was reworked through and repetitious or very similar headings were merged to produce a final list.
- **Stage 6** - In stage six, two colleagues are supposedly invited to code the data independent of each other and without seeing the researcher’s list. This enhances validity by eliminating researcher’s bias. For the present study, this stage was done by re-coding the data again, this time purely inductively, without any categories or list of issues. Different codes and themes emerged from the data. Much of the emerging issues were not anticipated or even conceived by the researcher. This stage was a useful one.
- **Stage 7** - Transcripts were meticulously perused to establish if the final list of codes and themes covers all aspects of the interview data. No oversights were detected.
- **Stage 8**- Each transcript was worked through with the list of categories and sub-headings and then the script was coded according to the list categories (themes).
- **Stage 9 & 10** - In these stages, the data was cut into pieces and all elements of each code were collated together in one separate document. The researcher ended up 23 different documents, each containing data of one theme and several sub-themes relating to the overall theme.
- **Stage 11 & 12** - Respondents were asked to check the validity of categories in which their quotations appear. In stage 11, all sections were filed together for direct reference during the writing process. Everything was kept; the original transcript was kept clean for rechecks in order to prevent distortions in data interpretation. Seidman (2006:114) advises that “preserving the words of the participants, (means

that) researchers have their original data. If something is not clear in the transcripts, the researcher can return to the source and check for accuracy”.

- **Stage 13** - In the last pass through the data, the major themes of the research should already be identified. The purpose here is to look for evidence in all categories of themes that support the major argument/theme/focus (Neuman, 2000). Once all sections were aligned together, the writing process began. Each theme was analysed selecting various examples from the data to offer ‘verbatim’ (direct quotations) that exemplifies the theme. The researcher continued until all sections were done.

- **Stage 14** - The data findings were separated from the data analyses. This meant that the results and the commentaries (analysis) were kept separate, each within its own chapter. Such separation arguably lessens researcher’s bias.

7.10.5 ANALYSING OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

The basic two types of document analysis are qualitative and quantitative document analysis. Whereas quantitative document analysis focuses on counting content in a rigorously scientific method, qualitative document analysis in contrast contains very little physical counting and does not attempt to be positivist in its approach. Quantitative data are usually numerical in value or frequencies. Quantitative document analysis is reductionist in nature as it reduces communication phenomena into manageable data (Fico *et al.*, 2008:119). Quantitative document analysis is particularly useful when the volume of documentary evidence is beyond the investigator’s capacity for examination (Fico *et al.*, 2008:120). According to Wigston (2009:5), quantitative document analysis proves more useful for examining manifest messages while qualitative document analysis is preferred for analysing latent messages. Because, this study sought to examine manifest and latent messages in communication strategy documents, qualitative document analysis was employed.

The analysis procedure entailed in document analysis entails “finding, selecting, appraising (making senses of), and synthesizing data contained in documents. Document analysis yields data – excerpts, quotations, or entire passages – that are then organised into major themes, categories, and case examples specifically through content analysis” (Bowen, 2009:28). Following Scott (1990:1-2), Mogalakwe (2006:224-5) identifies the following quality control criteria for handling documentary sources:

“Authenticity refers to whether the evidence is genuine and from impassable sources; credibility refers to whether the evidence is typical of its kind, representativeness refers to whether the documents consulted are representative of the totality of the relevant documents, and meaning refers to whether the evidence is clear and comprehensible”.

Documents analysis involves skimming (superficial examination), reading (thorough examination), and interpretation (Bowen, 2009:32). The analysis of documents may take the form of content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis is the process of organising information into categories as guided by the research question (Deacon *et al.*, 1999:17).

Thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data, demonstrating emerging themes from the document. Thematic analysis requires data coding and category construction. Bowen (2009:32) advises that in thematic studies, “Predefined codes may be used, especially if the document analysis is supplementary to other research methods employed in the study”. Following this advice, predefined codes and themes were established from the interview findings.

The foremost requirement of document analysis is not the quantity of documents selected for analysis, but rather the quality of the documents. “When documents are being used for verification or support, however, even a few can provide an effective means of completing the research” (Deacon, *et al.*, 1999:26). This study evaluated eight communication strategy documents. The number is sufficient for a triangulated study. The following section discusses the credibility standards achieved in this study.

7.11 ASSESSING AND DEMONSTRATING THE QUALITY AND RIGOUR OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH DESIGN

Reliability ensures that measures are stable and consistently produces the same results (Du Plooy, 2002:121). This means similar observations are reached by other researchers who replicate the study in a similar context (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:156). Moreover, there is transparency in how conclusions were drawn. A researcher must attempt to reduce threats to reliability such as participant bias and observer bias. Participant-error refers to inconsistency of results from the participants while observer-error refers to inconsistency of data capturing and analysis by the researcher (Saunders *et al.*, 2009:156). Internal reliability refers to inter-observer consistency in coding the in a uniform, consistent and systematic way. External validity refers to the degree to which findings can be generalised and replicated (Mouton, 2001:410). External reliability is difficult to ascertain in a qualitative research (Mouton, 2001:410).

Du Plooy (2002:124) argues that “a measure cannot be valid unless it is also reliable”. Validity refers to the degree to which a methodology adequately measures what was intended to calculate (Du Plooy, 2002:124). Saunders *et al.* (2009:157) opine that validity is particularly relevant in a causal relationship. There must be absolute truth in suggesting that x causes y or that x and y are related. Validity does not concern qualitative researchers because they value authenticity rather than validity. For them, authenticity (Neuman, 200:171) is achieved by giving a fair, honest, and balanced account of a phenomenon from the perspective of those who experiences it. The proposed research attempts to achieve authenticity in its quest to explore the distinct communication environment of the public sector in which government communication is embedded. Authenticity is mainly promoted by a high degree of research ethics to which we turn next.

7.12 RESEARCH ETHICS

Leedy and Ormrod (2010:101-104) caution that whenever human beings are observed as objects of study, ethical conduct should be considered. Nevertheless, the same standard of ethics should be maintained when investigating organisations. Saunders *et al.*

(2009:183) define research ethics as the appropriateness of behaviour of the researcher towards his object of study. The value of any research is in the honesty and integrity of its findings. With all ethical implications considered, this researcher conformed to the following ethical standards:

- Permission for government communicators to participate in the proposed study was sought from the managing echelons of the selected government department. In this, a full disclosure of the purpose and intentions of the study were offered. Appendix B contains a draft of the informed consent form used.
- The findings of the research were accessible by all participants seeking them.
- Voluntary participation to the study was encouraged and the participants reserved the right to withdraw from the study if the need arises.
- No financial or bribery incentives were granted to the participants prior to, or following their contributions to the study.
- All contributions made towards this study remain anonymous and confidential unless the participant wished otherwise. In which case, permission of disclosure was granted in writing.
- The researcher remained objective and honest to ensure that no falsification of data or misrepresentation of findings occurred.
- The researcher's objectivity, honesty and integrity guided the data analysis pertaining to this study.

Denzin and Lincoln (2003:13) counsel, "Because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are human beings, researchers must take extreme care to avoid any harm to them". Ethical concerns in interview data have traditionally revolved around issue of anonymity, informed consent and right to privacy. Informed consents were submitted by the respondents after they had been carefully and truthfully informed about the study and its purpose. Ethics are intrinsic to the constructivism paradigm because of the inclusion of the participants' values in the inquiry. "The close personal interactions required by the methodology may produce special and often sticky problems of confidentiality and anonymity" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994:115). These concepts are discussed next.

7.12.1 CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

Issues of confidentiality and anonymity are essential when government is the subject of study. Wiles, Crow, Heath and Carles (2008) are of the opinion that confidentiality is underpinned by the principle of respect for autonomy and is taken to mean that identifiable information about individuals collected during the process of research will not be disclosed without permission. This demonstrates that the concept of confidentiality has become closely interwoven with anonymity. Anonymity is one way in which confidentiality is operationalized. Confidentiality means, “not disclosing any information gained from an interviewee deliberately or accidentally in ways that might identify an individual” (Wiles *et al*, 2008:417).

Wiles *et al*. (2008:423) argue that protecting peoples’ identities is challenging for organisational research because identifying an organisation may shed light into the identities of its members. Wiles *et al*. (2008:423) noted that peoples’ stories can be very specific and that simple anonymisation, or even changing key characteristics is not sufficient to avoid their identities being disclosed.

Ensuring anonymity was challenging for this study because the sample of the interviewees contained purposely selected government communicators, at various employment levels, working in various government departments in the KwaZulu Natal provincial government. This meant that identifying an organisation or the level of employment would automatically identify the participant by default. This made it ethically cumbersome to identify the eight departments that participated in the study and the employment title of the respondents. At the same time, such identifications were mandated for comparison across departments and across levels of employment of government communicators. To protect the identities of the participants, such comparisons were refrained unless necessary. In such cases, where the data cannot be omitted altogether, key characteristic were altered to ensure the anonymity of the respondent.

In conclusion, chapter seven outlined the research design founded by a triangulation of methodologies, containing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies. This study is

predominately constructivist, aided by positivism. For this reason, a multiple case-study method was nominated. Interviews and document analysis are excellent qualitative methods for case studies. Surveys of limited scale helped to quantify the data. Questionnaires were administered immediately following each interview session. This strategy ensured a 100 percent return rate. However, such strategy is not feasible in administering surveys of a broader scale. Chapter 8 discusses data emanating from document analysis of government communication strategy documents.

CHAPTER 8: REVIEWING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter contains a preliminary response to research *objective four (4)* that aims to examine the link between government communication policies, strategies, and government communication practices. The purpose of this chapter is to understand the policy and strategies that guide the practice of government communication in South Africa. The actual practice of government communication in the KZN province is detailed in chapter 9.

Chapter 8, on communication strategies, and chapter 9 on practice, are synthesised in chapter 10 (discussion and conclusions) in order to interpret the usage of communication strategy documents in the actual practice of government communication. In this section, eight government communication strategy documents are analysed. Within the eight (8) government departments that participated in this study, six departments claimed to have approved communication strategy documents (table 12). Two departments reported that they had *draft* communication strategies that were not yet approved by management.

Table 12: Availability of communication strategy documents

Department	Availability of communication strategy
Office of the premier	Yes – document provided
Sport and recreation	No - a draft strategy was compiled in 2007, but it has not yet been accepted by senior management of the department (Not approved)
Cogta	Yes I do- We have a strategy to communicate how government is performing on those mandates.
Health	Yes, it was developed for year 2011-2012
Public works	Currently we don't have an approved communication strategy. We do have a draft strategy which is under review as we speak. We are trying to revive this one. (Not approved)
Education	We are developing a communication strategy and policy for the department of education because we have been operating without one.
Economic and Tourism Development	Yes we do have a communication strategy linked to our communication policy for the department.
Social development	Yes, I do. (document not provided)

8.2 THE ALIGNMENT OF DEPARTMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES WITH THE GCIS PROVINCIAL STRATEGY

In addition to the actual analysis of government communication strategy documents, this section examines the procedures and the processes involved in their development. Hence, sections 8.2 to 8.5 are based on the results from the interview sections while the rest of the chapter reports on document analysis of government communication strategy documents.

It was essential to evaluate the extent of alignment between government departments' communication strategies with the provincial GCIS strategies. All departments claimed that their communication strategies were to a certain extent aligned with the GCIS provincial communication strategy: *"It (communication strategy) is very much aligned with the GCIS communication strategy; we use policies and acts from the legislative framework of the GCIS"*.

Some practitioners also claimed that their communication strategies are aligned with the national government strategy, which is standardised for five years. The Head of Provincial Communication had articulated, *"I develop communication strategies which are particular to KZN but still informed by the central GCIS national strategy. They are interpreted from that five (5) year strategy"* (R1). Respondents concur on the notion that government departments' communication strategies should take into account the national government strategy because it determines where government as a whole is going: *"The strategy for the province depends on the priorities set by the national department. Our strategy has to be aligned with that one (national strategy)"*. A senior communication manager of another department explains, *"I operate on a five year communication strategy which is informed by the priorities of government which are education, health, rural development, economic development and job creation. We devise a strategy to communicate how government is performing on those mandates"*.

The results indicate that the provincial GCIS communication strategy and the national communication strategy documents are essential and considered in the formulation of each government departments' communication strategy. In addition, the environment of

each department is also considered relevant to the formulation of communication strategy documents.

8.3 THE VALUE OF THE ENVIRONMENT OR CONTEXT IN STRATEGIZING

The majority of respondents emphasised the importance of the uniqueness of context. They argued that it was essential for each department's communication strategy to take into account the unique environment of each province and the unique character of each department. Moreover, they claimed that the environment is the point of differentiation between various (department) communication strategies. Three levels of environments were found essential to the drafting of government communication strategies in each department. Namely: the national environment, the provincial and the departmental environment:

8.3.1 THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

It seems that there are two environments at the national level that must be considered. The first one is the national government environment as determined by the theme and the priorities of government as a whole. The second is the national environment of the ministry itself as per developments in the head offices of each ministry in Pretoria. The central offices of each ministry such as health, transport, education, et cetera are in Pretoria. According to this, the communications strategies of each ministry will have similar agendas, but the strategies will be differentiated by the unique context of each province:

“National government have general (communication) strategies, which are tweaked for KwaZulu Natal (province) because we may have issues that are different”.

“We cannot be communicating differently from national, that I can assure you. The programmes that they communicate, we also communicate. And we should not contradict what national communicates. So we communicate more or less the same”.

8.3.2 THE PROVINCIAL ENVIRONMENT

It was recommended by senior communication managers that each department communication strategy be fairly aligned with the provincial government communication strategy. The provincial communication forum was identified as an avenue in which such synergising could be facilitated:

“Here in the province we have a structure called the Provincial Communication Forum (PCF). Because there are peculiarities in provinces, what is produced is a framework that will guide and accommodate the unique features and characteristics of the province. We have to take into account who is our target audiences. We have about four languages. As provinces, we sit and analyse our own environment. When you do a communication strategy, you have to analyse your environment such as the mood of the media and the public”.

8.3.3 THE DEPARTMENTAL ENVIRONMENT

The departmental environment is determined by the nature of the department, services, communication programmes, and target audiences. *“Once we have sat in the communication forum (PCF) and developed the communication strategy for the province and is adopted by cabinet, we then look at the specific environment of our own department, stakeholders and the services we provide, then we develop our communication strategy”.*

“We have tried very much to align with the provincial strategy - there are elements that link with the provincial strategy, but one must also remember that that ours is a dynamic department, so there will be things that are particular to us as a department within the strategy as well”.

What becomes different is the programmes and target audiences. *“For example in my department, we deal with the LSM such as traditional leaders and councilors and so forth. They are a different LSM with that of the department of economic development (for example) who interacts with captains of industry, entrepreneurs and so forth. So the nature*

of the media will be influenced by that LSM. So these are some peculiarities that differentiate a departmental strategy from another”.

The departmental environment is also determined by the mission and goals of the department: *“You should acknowledge that each and every portfolio has its own dynamics. The strategy starts by indicating the mission of the department, who we are in relation to the rest of the provincial government”.*

8.3.4 SYNERGY OF THE THREE LEVELS OF ENVIRONMENT

Some participants noted the importance of synergy between the three levels of the identified environment. It was recommended that each communication strategy document demonstrate this alignment. There should be synergies between the departmental, the provincial and the national communication strategy. There should be a common thread relating to the theme of government to promote a united front. Each communication strategy is related although unique in consideration of its departmental circumstances.

In fact, government communication strategy is a matter of adaptation. It actually speaks to what the province want us to say and do. The approach at the provincial level is that we should work in unison, we should complement each other rather than working in solos.

8.3.5 THE VALUE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

A number of senior communication managers noted the value of government communication strategy documents. The following values were acknowledged:

Firstly, government communication strategies can be used to enforce accountability: *“Communication is a strategic tool for government. No wing of government should work without policy because people account where there is a policy”.*

Secondly, government communication strategies can assist government communication to become more proactive rather than reactive: *“Upon inquiring, I was told that there is no communication strategy. So we, in communication were reactive”*.

Thirdly, the communication strategy guides government communication programmes: *“The communication strategy sets the tone of what you communicate, how you communicate, and what type of channels you utilise based on the various stakeholders you deal with”*.

Fourthly, government communication strategy documents (especially a collection of them) outline the history of the communication unit in the department, past successes and failures, past programmes and a direction of the communication unit. All of which invaluablely provide history, structure and direction to new communication employees in the department. Some communication managers better express this point:

When I first came looking for a communication strategy, I was told stories. There was no strategic planning conduct by the department. When everyone was new HOD, MEC, we did not have a history in terms of where communication has been and where it is going” (Mid-level Management).

“I am developing a communication strategy and policy for the department because we have been operating without one. It was literally a takeover. It was not a handover. There was no communication strategy to base a direction or provide some history. I needed to hit the ground running” (Head of Communication).

8.3.6 THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPING AND APPROVING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Most of the communication strategies were developed in house, only one came out of a consultative process with an outsourced company: *“I identified a specialist in the communication field, I found someone who previously worked for government communication and who is now a consultant. I went to the HOD to seek permission to use a consultant. Got the go ahead and we started from that”*.

The process of developing a government communication strategy was explained in the interviews as follows: The communication unit sits together with guiding documents such as government communication guideline policies, provincial communication strategy and other documents detailed in section 8.5. The communication unit brainstorms in order to come up with a draft strategy. The draft strategy is circulated to different business units in the department for input. Once input is received from other business units, it is incorporated into the strategy document. The final draft is then tabled at MANCO (management committee) for discussion, input and approval. The last level is the approval of the strategy by the head of the department. The strategy has to be approved by the HOD (not the MEC) as an administrative head of the department.

Two departments mentioned they were in position of draft communication strategies, which were not yet approved by management. A senior communication manager of the affected departments reported:

“I compiled a draft strategy in 2007, but it has not yet been accepted by senior management of the department. It has been circulated to exco for comments but it has not yet been accepted because of the lack of capacity to understand. In government, senior management does not seem to understand the strategic role of the communication in the department, they see it as technical. In 2010, with the restructuring of the department, I thought that I could rework the strategy and finally get it approved. However, the communication strategy is not yet approved and no reason has been given” (department 1).

“Currently we do not have an approved communication strategy. We do have a draft strategy that is under review as we speak. We are trying to revive it. “We spent so many days and night to put this document together. There is a lack of understanding or lack of interest. It is still not approved. We present to exco – but nothing so far”. (Department 2)

Practitioners ascribed the un-approval of communication strategy documents to the devaluation of communication by the dominant coalition as reflected by a lack of understanding of government communication added with relegating communication to a

technical tool. However, for some departments, the process of approval “*was quick enough. It didn’t take that long*”. Some respondents proposed that the delay is caused by time constraints. “These things must be tabled formally, so sometimes MANCO do not make time to put it into the agenda. That demonstrates that communication is not prioritised”. Section 8.4 to the end of this chapter focuses on document analysis of government communication strategy documents.

8.4 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DOCUMENTS

The *strategizing for communication guideline document (2007)* provides that a well-written communication strategy document is a critical instrument for good communication. It becomes a guide for future actions, the standard against which the success or failure of communication is measured. The *strategizing for communication document (2007)* and the *government communicators’ handbook (2011)* provide guidelines and formats on how to formulate and implement government communication strategy documents. The guideline document identifies nine steps in the formulation and implementation of government communication strategy documents. The following is the officially recommended format for writing a government communication strategy. This is similar to the model discussed in section 4.8. (*The rest of the chapter will follow this structure*):

- background
- objectives
- environment
- communication challenges
- messages and themes
- messengers, audiences and channels, types of event
- a phased communication programme
- structures and processes
- action plan, including budget implications.

8.4.1 STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

All strategizing is about achieving objectives. Failure to determine such objectives would lead to the overall failure of the strategy. Communication strategies should be translated into achievable and measurable goals. The following section outlines the objectives of government communication strategies of various government departments in the KZN province.

8.4.2 PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION (OFFICE OF THE KZN PREMIER)

The strategy objective of the provincial government communication is to provide an integrated and co-ordinated government communication service in KwaZulu Natal. The strategic communication objectives are as follows: the first one identifies a need for an effective co-ordination and branding of all government information and messaging. The second one relate to effective positioning of the provincial government in the media environment provincially, nationally and globally. Both the first two outcomes are geared towards the promotion of government image. The third strategic communication outcome aims at achieving an “effective management, monitoring and reporting on provincial government service delivery efforts”. The fourth outcome talks to an “effective provincial government stakeholder engagement both internally and externally to build and enhance brand loyalty”. All four outcomes in combination are predominated towards image, branding, and reputation management.

8.4.3 DEPARTMENT OF KZN EDUCATION

The Department of Education (DoE) forms the biggest part of the KwaZulu Natal government in terms of budget size, and number of employees and schools. This places a particular onus on the department to fulfill a wide range of communication functions, such as marketing, media, advertising, branding, perception, image, reputation, stakeholders, and direct and intensive unmediated communication. The draft communication strategy document of the KZN Department of Education realises that “communication and media

operations and matters of corporate image, reputation, perception, and stakeholder relations have become increasingly crucial to the success or failure of any administration, particularly government”. The strategy document of the DoE defines “government communication as a strategic and planned process aimed at ensuring effective dialogue between government, stakeholders, and communities”. The communication strategic objectives of the KZN department of Education (DoE) are summarised as follows:

- Profile the programmes of the MEC,
- Profile the HOD as DoE’s Service Excellence Champion,
- Be the official voice of the DoE,
- Provide a co-ordinated, coherent, consistent and effective communication service that accounts for the Department’s programmes and activities,
- Promote corporate identity and image,
- Promote DoE’s reputation as a good employer and a competent service provider,
- Create and consolidate relations and partnerships with stakeholders,
- Set clearer targets for a communication programme and establish monitoring measures,
- Establish evaluation and monitoring mechanism.

8.4.4 DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS KZN

The public works communication strategy document outlines the roles and objectives of the government communication unit in the provincial government. The following are the identified objectives of the KZN Public Works communication strategy document and its implementation:

The strategy document provides that communication service is a directorate responsible for promoting the image of the department internally and externally and has a mammoth task to disseminate relevant and accurate information to the public through various media tools and techniques. To achieve this role, a positive image of the department must be created and its programmes be marketed vigorously through tailor-made messages to suit the specific target audience (both primary and secondary) in terms of their current

behaviour, their level of awareness, their level of knowledge and preferred methods and tools for receiving information. In addition, the document outlines that the communication services will also ensure continuous liaison with other stakeholders such as national, provincial, and local government structures, Government Communication Information System (GCIS), and various media to promote cooperative and good governance. In overall, the document provides, “the aim of this strategy is to promote the department of public works as a construction and property management brand in the province of KwaZulu Natal”. The overall purpose of the strategy is to create a climate of understanding between the department and relevant stakeholders through continuous liaison using appropriate channels of communication. Image, branding, and identity, management seem pronounced in the Public Works strategy document.

8.4.5 DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH KZN

The strategic objectives of the Department of Health appeared more balanced than those of other departments. Positioned on top of the list is an objective of information provision and education. Image management comes second, followed by encouraging public participation, and then ending with media management. The purposes of the communication strategy of the Department of Health are as follows:

- Provide a concise, simple, user friendly and all-encompassing communication approach that will promote effective communication platforms that keep external and internal stakeholders informed through information, education, and public awareness.
- Enhance the positive image of the department through active, vibrant, open, and transparent internal and external communication.
- Promote public participation.
- Establish and manage on-going media services by ensuring that the media is provided with timely and accurate information and reporting.

8.4.6 DEPARTMENT OF SPORT AND RECREATION

The department of KZN Sport and Recreation identifies the following strategic objectives in its communication strategy document. The first objective concern image and three concern information dissemination, while two concern internal communication:

- To project the department as taking a lead in certain areas,
- To promote access to department information and services,
- To provide an media monitoring service,
- To manage department displays internally,
- To provide photography and videography service for internal activities,
- To create and manage information dissemination tools such as the website, intranet,
- To promote feedback mechanisms and opportunities so as to assess internal perception and opinion on the status of the department.

8.4.7 THE DEPARTMENT OF KZN COGTA

The strategy communication document of COGTA outlines the framework of the function of the communication unit and provides a basis for communication in order to advance the department's agenda. The communication strategy is also geared towards the promotion (image) of the political leadership of the department. It requires all employees and representatives of the department to communicate the strategy, vision and action plans of the department (page 5). The COGTA communication strategy has been developed to further to department's objectives, which are identified as follows (the first and the last one are concerned with image management, while the middle is about relationship management with the publics):

- To promote a positive image of the KZN department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs.
- To increase the public understanding of KZNCOGTA policies and services.
- To profile KZNCOGTA to other government departments.

8.4.8 DEPARTMENT OF KZN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM

The communication unit of the KwaZulu Natal Department of Economic Development & Tourism is responsible for a range of crucial communication functions that govern the relationships between the Department of Economic Development & Tourism (DEDT) and its partner-organisations and other related various stakeholders. The following are the key objectives of the DEDT communication strategy. The first objective is integrated internal communication, second is information provision the last is about image management:

- The primary responsibilities of the communication unit include strengthening relations between the ministry (MEC) and the department (HOD).
- The corporate communications unit is also responsible for all communication activities including the production and distribution of all media, advertising and promotional material that is aimed at facilitating better working relations for the aforementioned stakeholders.
- It is the communication unit's responsibility to look after the reputation of the ministry and the department.

8.4.9 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

There is a direct relationship between the perceived functions of government communication and the communication strategy objectives. There are various functions of government communication as detailed in chapter 5. Ideally, each communication strategy document must reflect a balance of these functions. It was found in the interview and the survey research in chapter 9, that most government communicators rated the promotion of government services and image management as the most profound function of government communication. From the analyses of strategy documents, it was also found that publicity, branding and image management featured profoundly in government communication strategy documents. Information diffusion and public participation come a close second and third, respectively. What was surprising was an emergent role of government communication in monitoring. This role is described briefly in chapter 9. Again, it can be concluded that there is a direct link between the perceived functions of

government communication and communication strategy objectives. The most perceived communication function is often translated into communication strategies.

Regardless of their own perceptions on the formulation of government communication strategy documents, government communication are guided by the following policy documents in the formulation of government communication strategy documents. Those are identified in the next section.

8.5 POLICY DOCUMENTS GUIDING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

Most communication strategy documents identified policy documents and communication legislations that guided the formulation of the department's communication strategy document. Excluded from these are policies relating to the terms of trade of the department. Non-communication related legislative documents are excluded from this list.

The Public Works communication strategy is guided by the following legislative document:

- Strategic framework for government communication (2009-2014)
- Government Communication Information Service (GCIS)
- Government Communicator's Handbook (2000)
- Communication Task Team Report (Comtask 1996/97)
- Batho Pele Principles
- KZN Citizen's Charter
- Provincial Communication Strategy
- National Public Works' communication strategy

The KZN Department of Health communication strategy is guided by the following legislative document:

- GCIS policies and guidelines
- Provincial Branding Policy
- Departmental media policy
- Departmental events management policy

- Departmental branding policy (from the provincial branding policy)
- Departmental lingual policy

The COGTAKZN communication strategy is guided by the following legislative document:

The framework for communications for the Department of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (COGTA) KwaZulu Natal is informed by the Provincial Communication Strategy, department's mandate as outlined in the MEC's budget speech, government's ten point plan, provincial and national government's priorities as expressed in the state of the province and state of the nation address, as well as by the national communication framework (NCF) issues by the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) (COGTA Page 4).

The KZN Department of Education prescribes, "The formulation of its communication strategy is guided by the country's constitution, laws and policies, and input from government's legislation and policies on communication that ensures active citizens participation, transparency and accountability. The KZN Department of Education draft communication strategy document identified a greater spectrum of legislations informing the nature and standard of government communication in the KwaZulu Natal provincial government:

Legislative and Policy Framework on Government Communication

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, also contains a number of sections, which set the tone for government communication.

(a) Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000)

This Act operationalises sections 8 and 32 of the Constitution. It aims to foster a culture of transparency and accountability, and to promote effective access to information to protect an individual's rights. The Act applies to the records of public and private bodies, regardless of when the record came into existence (Section 3)

(b) Communication Task Team, October 1996

The Comtask Report adopted by cabinet in 1996 laid the foundation for an integrated and coherent system of government communication. The Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) must be designed in a way that is geared to the optimization of relationships and partnerships within and between the structures of government, as well as between government and civil society. The emphasis of the GCIS is therefore on co-ordination from the centre and aggressive implementation within government departments.

(d) Government's Communication Guidelines

This Communication Strategy emphasis the following government's best practice guidelines in the execution of

Communication programmes, namely;

- Best practice guidelines for the procurement of marketing, advertising and PR services/products.
- Marketing, communication and sponsorship guidelines for government.
- Social media guidelines.

8.5.1 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF GUIDING POLICY DOCUMENTS IN THE FORMULATION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

There is no standardisation of the documents used as guidelines for development of government communication strategies. There is a long list of possible documents to consult in the drawing of government communication strategies. These are outlined in chapter 6. All are important in their unique ways and in the contribution to the communication strategy document. Various departments use various policy sources and end up with different themes for the communication strategy document, those for example who draw primarily on information dissemination policies such as the promotion of access to information act, 2000 and the *Batho Pele* Principles may end up with a communication strategy more focused on participation and information dissemination than those who had for example drawn on the branding policy. There should be some standardisation of documents to be consulted in the formulation of government communication strategy documents.

8.6 POLITICS

Regardless of fact that the majority of government communicators claimed that politics has an effect on the practice of government communication, this issue is obscure in communication strategy documents. It is only the *provincial communication strategy* document of the office of the premier that made reference to politics and the ruling party. All other communication strategy documents remained silent about politics and its effects on government communication. The provincial communication strategy seemed to endorse the ruling party in the following passage: “*the latest local government elections confirm that the ruling party is not only consolidating its gains, but growing stronger in the face of weakening opposition*” (Feb 2012). The effects of politics (referring to one party government in KZN) on government communication can be witnessed in the following extract: “*This stability and unity of purpose on the political front has made it possible for great strides to be taken in the creation of a streamlined, co-ordinated and integrated communication system. It is believed that one part government (ANC) in KZN has contributed positively to a unified communication, in which government has largely done away with fragmented messaging, caused by two party political agendas (provincial com strategy).*”

In its communication strategy document, DEDT acknowledges political and legal challenges to which government communication functions. “*The Ministry also operates within a framework of politics and the law. It is thus important to ensure that the activities of the department and communication programmes follow proper legislative processes and demonstrate the department’s commitment to the rule of law and constitutional imperatives*”.

8.7 LEGAL CONSTRAINTS

Chapter 9 will describe the effects of legal constraints on the practice of government communication. From various communication strategy documents analysed, the following are some of the legal constraints identified in relation to government communication and government communicators:

In media relations:

- a) Media liaison officers and other communicators below the level of the general Manager for corporate communications may deal with general media enquiries. However, the general manager for corporate communications must be informed and consulted at all times,
- b) It will always be advisable for all media enquiries to be in a written format, so as to ensure accountability and easy sign off,
- c) A list of issues which the media liaison officers (MLOs) may comment on without first seeking the mandate of their principals should be made known to MLOs so as to ensure speedy responses and avoid the micro management of the communication process,
- d) No official from the department will be allowed to respond to media enquiries without seeking advice or approval from Corporate Communication Unit

In social media:

- a) All employees shall ensure that at all times when engaging in the social networking and other new forms of communication, such as Facebook or Twitter they don't conduct themselves in a manner that damages the brand of the department,
- b) No departmental official is allowed to speak or make comments, purportedly, on behalf of the department,
- c) Departmental officials, who, through their actions in the social networking space and other new forms of communication, wittingly or unwittingly, damage the image and the reputation of the department shall face disciplinary action.

8.8 BUDGETING

Chapter 3 identified budget constraints as one of the feature of the distinctive communication environment of the public sector. It was unanimously acknowledged in the interview data that budget constraints are a recurrent feature in all communication units. Section 9.6.3 in chapter 9 describes how budget constraints negatively affected the practice of government communication. It was therefore unsurprising that all government communication strategies would address this issue.

The *provincial government communication strategy* noted the challenges in limited budgets for government communication in KwaZulu Natal. The document projects that “the government has to fulfil its mandate in the context of a belt-tightening exercise initiated in response to over-expenditure in the previous years. In this regard, cabinet has imposed constraints on marketing and advertising activities. *As service delivery needs escalates further, it is always going to be a challenge to prioritise communication over basic needs such as houses, electricity and clean water*”. This strategy document seems apologetic and accepting that– communication is less important than other services. Communication has to be in equal weight with other service delivery because communication is in itself service-delivery and it is essential in service-delivery in terms of creating awareness of services rendered. The *Department of Sports and Recreation strategy document* also noted the limitation in budget; “*The members of this committee shall work as a cohesive team, especially in the light of the limited resources available*”.

The Department of Sport and Recreation KZN recognises the fact that the strength of any communication strategy document is in its implementation based on the budget available, without which a strategy document remains a dream, and merely a policy without practice. The DSR communication strategy document provides that, “*The allocated budget for the communication sub-directorate shall determine, to a large extent, the activities and degree of effectiveness of the component*”. The Department of Health communication strategy document also recognises that “*the ability to achieve (communication objectives) will be dependent upon the resources that will be made available for the financial year*”.

According to the communication strategy of the department of Economic Development and Tourism, “it is the ministry’s responsibility to ensure that the communication unit has the necessary resources to carry out its work effectively. These resources will include personnel, appropriate skills, technology and information”. All the communication strategy documents noted constrains in communication budgets and the challenging this imposed the attainment of excellence and effectiveness in the practice of government communication. Although the challenges of budget constraints have been noted, no solutions have been prescribed. Budget and adequate resourcing are essential in the enactment of strategic government communication, which is discussed next.

8.9 STRATEGY GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Recognising the strategic role of government communication is the DEDT communication strategy document which reads “communication should be an integral part of the planning and delivery of the departments’ programmes”. The document further states that “the corporate communications function is, without a doubt, of strategic importance to the Department of Economic Development & Tourism. It should be managed at the highest level to ensure that stakeholders have a sustained awareness about the department’s programmes and projects”. This demonstrate KZN government commitment (at least in policy) to uphold government communication as a management function.

The DEDT communication strategy document provides for the strategic position and strategic role of the communication manager in KZN government departments. It prescribes that the executive authority of the communication unit is the chief communicator of the department, with the title Head of Communication. He/she is expected to provide policy and strategic direction for communication activities (page 7). The Head of Communication shall report, operationally/politically, to the MEC and, administratively, to the Head of Department (HOD) as per the KZN Cabinet Resolution No 1 of 31 January 2007 and the Public Finance Management Act regulations. The document reads:

The reporting lines will ensure better alignment of the government’s strategic goals.

- a) The general manager for communication shall be responsible for the day-to-day activities of corporate communications and stakeholder relations,
- b) The general manager for communication shall be the official spokesperson for the Ministry and the Department,
- c) The general manager for communication shall ensure that all the systems and resources that will contribute to the effective execution of the communications unit’s responsibilities are in place,
- d) The general manager for communication shall be a member of both Management and Executive Committees (Manco and Exco) of the department.

Some communication strategy documents identified the importance of management's support in the realisation of government communication strategic objectives. For instance, the *Public Works communication strategy* states, "The success and the realisation of the impact of this communication strategy and the implementation plan thereof can only be achieved through the support of the MEC; HOD, senior management and the commitment of all members of the department" (page 15). The suggestion is that top management must decisively engage and drive the strategic communication process. "Top management must passionately and consistently live, lead, support, deliver and communicate DoE's communication values, over and over again". The *DoE communication strategy* provides that "successful strategic communication begins with clear leadership intent and guidance". In addition, top management must properly capacitate (resources) strategic communication as a priority equivalent to other important operations in the department. The communication strategy of the DEDT makes a similar point in stating that "the success of the ministry's communication efforts is dependent on support from the department's executive and management committees" (page 15).

According to the *communication strategy document of the KZN Department of Public Works*, government communicators are responsible for prioritising and interpreting government policies and articulating them to ordinary citizens. It is also the responsibility of government communicators to regularly assess the communication environment, identify communication gaps, and be proactive in identifying opportunities created because of interaction with the public (page 4). The next section describes the value of the communication environment in the formulation of strategic government communication documents.

8.10 THE COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT

The *strategising for communication guideline* document (2007) recommends that actions must be preceded by an understanding of the environment, of the public to be reached, their thoughts and how best to reach them. This guideline document adds, "Research must inform communication strategies because it gives insight to the dynamism of the environment and the challenges it brings". Accordingly, scanning of the communication

environment makes it possible for the communication strategy to take actions that are appropriate and therefore effective.

The *provincial government communication strategy* document cantered its environmental scanning on the analysis of the media environment in particular. The *provincial communication strategy* document provides that government communication “happens in a media environment that is not particularly favourable to the government due to a variety of historic reasons”. The document argues that 18 years into democracy there is still no media plurality. “Print media ownership is still largely concentrated in the hands of a few dominant media houses while vernacular media struggles for survival”. The document adds, “While the media in KwaZulu Natal has a positive attitude towards government, there is a tendency by some sections of it, particularly print, to perceive government developmental programmes as a futile, extravagant public relations exercise and occasionally distort, fabricate or become cynical about government efforts”.

Due to the media challenges identified above the *provincial communication strategy* document recommends that “it is imperative for government to have its own unmediated communication with its constituencies”. However, on the positive side of the media environment, the KwaZulu Natal province has shed an image of a politically violent and AIDS infested region towards a stable, prosperous and leisure destination.

The COGTA communication strategy document also identified the media environment in which the department currently functions. The strategy document reports, “*Recently local government is a subject that seems to be on top of the media agenda, in recent times, we saw an increase in content-driven media discourse on local government in particular fuelled in the main by community concerns over service delivery issues. The media is still putting more focus on the news administration to deliver as well as the cost of implementing the electoral commitments*” (page 8).

In addition to the challenging media-scrutiny environment, the *KZN COGTA communication strategy* document also identified additional communication challenges. The first challenge speaks to a need to heighten integrated communication with COGTA

nationally, thereby signalling a move towards centralisation. The second main communication challenge is to sustain public confidence in local government given the pace and quality of service delivery in some instances. The third challenge relate to identifying the issues best communicated in partnership with other business units (directorates) and municipalities for greater coherence and synergy (integration and centralisation). The fourth challenge is in measuring the overall impact of communication initiatives in a manner that will enable the department to identify and quantify communication gaps and additional information needs and wants of target audiences. The fifth and last challenge is moving from events-driven communication towards proactively enhancing the KZNCOGTA story in order to increase and sustain media interest (page 9).

The Department of Sport and Recreation communication environment is currently characterised by the following: First, is the belief that sporting programmes currently benefit the previously advantaged communities in the main. Second, is the media tendency to promote sporting programmes from outside South Africa, and that of local (South African) sport and sportspersons are relegated as inferior. Thirdly, lack of media access by marginalised, rural communities minimizes the benefits enjoyed by these high-priority communities because of poor access to information. These are all media relation challenges.

The *Public Works communication strategy* document provides that “*to implement the strategy successfully, the situation analysis strategy will consider the strength, weakness, opportunities, and threats for communication services*”. The public works communication strategy document identified stakeholder management and new media/social media as opportunities (in situational analysis). The threats identified are that public works is poorly branded. Poor coordination of departmental events and internal delays in the approval of printer’s proofs are additional threats. Also identified as a threat to the communication unit is the notion that “communication as a ‘science’ is less recognised” (page 7). This means that communication is treated as a technical rather than a strategic tool in the department. Among the internal threats identified are an understaffed communication unit, budget constraints, and that “communication in the department is re-active that proactive” (page 7).

With regard to the operating environment, *The Department of Economic Development and Tourism Communication Strategy* document only mentions two challenges. The first challenge is with regard to the competition emanating from other provinces, international agencies, which pressurise the department to offer services that are innovating, and adaptable to changing circumstances. The second challenge mentioned is stakeholder discontent that according to the document must be redressed not to result in antipathy towards the department.

The communication strategy document of the KZN Department of Health acknowledges that, for government communication to be effective, “the actions of officials must be informed by an understanding of the environment in which they are working, of who the communication is trying to target, what people are thinking, and how they are best reached”. Effective communication must be able to read and understand the public mood, expectations and concerns and respond to these appropriately (page 2). The document provides that “communication operates in a dynamic environment and requires a response which will be proactive and at other times, reactive” (page 3). The environment of Health is characterised by the following:

- Health is high on the government agenda
- Changing expectations and health needs
- Different levels of understanding based on population dynamics
- Growing number of platforms
- Ability to keep pace with modern technology
- Political and cultural diversity
- Ability to balance expectations with available resources
- Urban vs rural reach based on geographical spread
- Public perception of government and services delivery and its impact, both positive and negative

According to the *communication strategy document of the Department of Education*, scanning the communication environment enables the communication unit to take action that are appropriate, effective, and anticipate changes, crises and challenges, and make timely intervention. The draft communication strategy is formulating within DoE’s

environmental circumstances as expressed through strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis (page 14). The DoE environment is described as follows:

- A communication unit operating without a strategy.
- A communication team without clear roles within communication.
- Insufficient capacity among team members.
- Reactive approach to media.
- Channels of communications are slow and haphazard in getting messages across, in addition, staff do not use existing tools to pass on messages.
- Unnecessary work brought about by duplication of information distributed
- No annual events calendar.
- Weak stakeholder relations (unions, partners etc.).
- Negative coverage by media.

8.10.1 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF THE COMMUNICATION ENVIRONMENT IN THE FORMULATION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES

The importance of both the internal and the external environment in drafting communication strategies is well recognised in literature. In overall, all examined government communication strategy documents similarly recognised the value of environmental scanning. However, as per Watson and Noble's (2007) projection, the media environment is often on top of the list of external environments considered. All sampled KZN government communication strategy documents also focused heavily on the media environment. Although other environments have been considered, very little has been mentioned about the public and citizens themselves. Such projections on public opinion require sophisticated and consistent environmental scanning research. However, techniques, methodologies and processes on the actual scanning of the environment are not sufficiently details in the government communication strategies analysed (this is taking into account that the objectives of environmental scanning are different from communication evaluations). Nonetheless, most communication strategy documents identified the need for communication evaluations in government communication.

8.11 COMMUNICATION EVALUATIONS

The *Sports and Recreation communication strategy* document acknowledges, “The concept of monitoring the effectiveness of the communication service is crucial to the success of the component”. The document recommends, “The services of a tertiary institution specialising in media and communication studies should be utilised to provide a media monitoring service”. *Public Works communication strategy document* also concedes, “The success of any strategy or campaign is dependent on the continuous monitoring and evaluation to test its validity and value for money. Essential to the entire strategy and campaign is the question of measuring the value of each rand spent. However realising that, it is not always simple to assess the true effectiveness of a campaign without extensive and costly market research before and after the process” (page 14).

The KZN Public Works communication strategy document also adds, “A (communication) strategy must be measured against the organisational objectives to assess whether or not the messages are reaching its intended targets. This exercise requires extensive research, planning, implementation, continuous assessment, and review as well as developing a coordinated communication plan of action. There is no point measuring an increase in awareness where there is no base research” (page 14). For evaluation to be effective and accurate, it is essential that it become an interactive process that is ongoing from begin to end (KZN Public Works, 14). According to the *Department of KZN Health communication strategy* document, communication evaluations should be conducted on the four pillars of government communication, namely, internal communications, external communications, and media liaison and events management.

Communication evaluations are recognised as essential to the effectiveness of government communication. However, the interview data found that there were insufficient communication evaluations taking place in KZN. For example, the KZN COGTA communication strategy document reports, “*Currently there is little true evaluation of the work carried out by the corporate communication business unit. This is a strategic priority, as the monitoring and evaluation of communication efforts will not only inform future*

communication programmes, but will also help in ensuring that the messages convinced are developed and adapted in light of the interests and preoccupations of public opinion”.

With the above obstacle noted, the majority of government communication strategy documents projected an improved forecast on communication evaluations. For instance, the communication strategic document of KZN COGTA forecast that evaluations would be woven into programme planning from the outset. It will involve the ongoing pretesting and evaluation of strategies and tactics during communication development and delivery to ensure that programmes meet stakeholder needs’. Also promising a better prospect for communication evaluations is the *KZN Department of Education communication strategy* document. According to the DoE, the department of KZN Education will improve communication evaluations by incorporating media tracking, ensuring regular meetings with stakeholders and assessing communication programmes against their pre-determined objectives. KZN Department of Economic and Tourism promises that from time to time the corporate communications unit will conduct research and undertake all forms of practical initiatives that will provide a better understanding of the environment within which the department operates (page 4). It remains yet to be seen if the communication evaluations articulated in all KZN communication strategy documents will ever be implemented and carried out in practice.

8.11.1 SYNTHESIS AND DISCUSSION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION EVALUATIONS

This review of government communication strategy documents suggest that communication evaluations are held in high regard in the KZN provincial government. However, none of the communication strategy documents articulates how such communication evaluations are actually conducted in practice, or how many have been conducted with what results. Moreover, the methodologies also remain unarticulated. Literature had projected that there are poor communication evaluations in the government sector (Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010).

8.12 GOVERNMENT MEDIA RELATIONS

The *KZN provincial government communication* strategy declares that it approaches the media from the premise that they are partners in communications, both sharing the responsibility to keep the public informed for the purpose of empowerment... therefore, media relations will have to be continually built and natured using various mechanism. The KZN provincial government media strategy aims to establish a rapid response unit to perform the following roles:

- Establishment of a credible and up-to-date media database for all departments.
- Produce continuous and proactive media releases with emphasis on positive service delivery initiatives by government.
- Establishing a media briefing programme and standing timetables
- Embark on radio and television advertisements and infomercials to cover both mainstream and community radio.

Media relations in the Department of Health consist of managing mutually beneficial relations with various media houses in order to ensure that their information needs are addressed appropriately. The department aims to employ a variety of media platforms to communicate and provide information in multiple formats as an attempt to accommodate diverse information needs.

The role of the media liaison officer in government is aptly described by the *draft communication strategy document of the Department of Sport and Recreation*. It prescribes, “The Media Liaison Officer (MLO) shall provide an advisory service to the MEC on communication and media-based issues”. The MLO shall address all media queries, route them to the relevant officials and ensure that responses are relayed to all queries. It is the function of the media officer to comment on behalf of the MEC, collate information from relevant components of the department and prepare press releases. The media officer identifies media opportunities and arranges media interviews for the MEC according to the strategy document. The MLO shall compile a detailed database of all media houses.

The *communication strategy document of KZN Public Works* claims that the media is currently not hostile towards the department and there is a fair amount of positive reporting on departmental programmes. The public works media strategy seeks to promote the interest of the department by purposefully disseminating planned messages through the media. This can be achieved through professional handling of the media, regular briefing session with editors and senior journalists on departmental achievements.

The *Department of Economic Development and Tourism communication strategy* envisages a relationship between the government communication unit and the media that shall be based on professionalism and mutual respect. All media inquiries are to be treated with the urgency they deserve. A two-way communication process between the department and the media will be promoted. The communications unit will at all times endeavour to have a proactive engagement with the media rather than a reactive or responsive one. In overall this section demonstrates that positive media relations are envisaged by the majority of government communicators. The strategic documents project media relations as both a challenge and an opportunity depending on how media relations is tactfully managed. Strategic media relations is vital primarily for information diffusion, reputation and identity management. These aspects are discussed next.

8.13 IMAGE-BUILDING AND CORPORATE IDENTITY

The *KZN provincial communication strategy* provides that “clear and consistent corporate identity is required to assist the public in recognising, accessing and assessing government and government services”. It is deemed imperative for the KZN provincial government to maintain a recognisable and unified corporate identity in order to ensure that buildings, facilities, programmes, services and activities are clearly identified and appropriately branded. According to the KZN Provincial Communication Office, key corporate identity activities include the production of promotional material and exhibitions to profile the image of all government departments and their various programmes. Also identified is the production of the electronic version of departmental reports highlighting key successes and activities of the government department. Moreover, the provincial communication strategy identifies the need for developing and maintaining a modern

government website and the utility of multi-media community centres as a form of image building and identity management.

According to the Department of KZN Health, “the corporate brand refers to the corporate identity of the department, its image and the marketing strategies adopted to ensure maximum visibility” (page 6). The branding policy of the department should guide the corporate branding initiative, which entails implementing the new branding policy across the department and marketing the brand at all opportunities that present themselves and creating promotional materials. “*The branding policy will be aligned with the provincial branding policy*” (page 7). The *communication strategy document of the department of KZN Health* recommends that all employees of the department are brand ambassadors. They are vital in ensuring that the corporate brand is respected and sustained in order to uphold the reputation of the department. This was the first time that non-visual branding was mentioned. The rest of the communication strategies were delimited to visual branding.

In relations to branding and corporate identity management, *the KZN Department of Education communication strategy* pinpoints a need to ensure consistent and visible branding and corporate identity in all DoE events. It is postulated that branding will ensure coherent, coordinated and integrated DoE communication messages and programmes and build a strong culture of communication, coordination and ownership of DoE brand in order to promote the DoE’s brand image locally, regionally and internationally. Also an emphasis is on visual branding.

In relation to image- building, the *communication strategy of KZN Sports and Recreation* provides that, the DSR department will utilise appropriate promotional material and exhibitions/displays at opportune moments to profile the image of the department and its programmes. “Artwork, layout and design of promotional material, including departmental branding, shall be provided as per needs”. Moreover, branding shall include adequate internal (inside the building structures) and external (outdoor) equipment. Outdoor visual branding proves invaluable in external organisational rhetoric avenues such as government outreach programmes, which are discussed next.

8.14 OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

The KZN *provincial communication strategy* document asserts that outreach programmes to communities are central to the government communication strategy. According to the provincial communication strategy, key outreach campaigns include, “periodic *izimbizo* to raise awareness and receive feedback on key provincial issues”. Another feature of outreach programmes identified in the provincial communication strategy document is the ‘meet and greet’, in which the premier and MECs walk about in areas and communities targeted for service delivery, attracting ‘photo-opportunities’. The strategy document mentions that outreach programmes include ‘post *izimbizo* follow-up’. However, these types or elements of the ‘follow up’ were undisclosed in the strategy document.

In relation to events management, the *Department of Health communication strategy* reflected a need to ensure departmental representation in interdepartmental, provincial government, intergovernmental and public-private partnership community outreach programmes and events. The department also aims to facilitate community engagement platforms for public participation programmes and outreach initiatives inclusive of community mobilisation.

COGTA’s communication strategy document advocates for the development of separate and targeted communication strategies for all major events and activities. “When line-function units (directorates) are planning an event, they should approach the corporate communication unit for support and assistance, and a communication and project task team will then assist by developing a communication strategy, a media and marketing plan including key messages and the thematic thrust of the event/activity and develop information and communication products including media releases, feature articles, newsletters, brochures, publications, corporate videos and electronic invitations”. The line function team leader is responsible for developing a closeout report after the event and ensuring that all financial and administrative requirements have been met.

According to the *communication strategy document of the department of KZN Education*, the communication unit must find a way of getting the most out of events and increasing

positive coverage of DoE programmes and activities through the media. Increasing citizen's satisfaction and awareness ratings of outreach programmes is an essential function of the communication unit. For better coordination of outreach programmes, the strategy document recommends developing and maintaining a calendar for public and departmental events and disseminates it to all section heads. In terms of improving outreach programmes, the DoE communication strategy is outmost idealistic in its promise to: organise and co-ordinate special events almost every month, identify needs of target audiences and develop programmes that address those needs and hold regular mass public meeting to promote direct dialogue especially with people in disadvantaged areas.

The communication strategy document, the Department of Economic Development and Tourism aims to enhance interactive communication between the organisation and its stakeholder through corporate events in which the department interfaces with different stakeholders to discuss various aspects of the organisation's operations. This is in addition to the enhancement of a visible corporate identity for the department. The communication unit is responsible for the positioning and the protection of the DeT department's corporate brand identity. The image of the political principal shall be treated as the key element around the corporate image of the organisation and this has to be managed by the communication unit under the leadership of the general.

8.15 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The KZN provincial communication strategy prescribes, "Internal communication is an integral part of an institution's communication strategy". Fundamental internal communication activities in the provincial office include the production of communication strategy publications to be distributed amongst all departmental communicators in the province. The provincial government communication office aims to organise periodic workshops and conferences with communicators to evaluate the impact of the communication strategy and encourage the use of internal newsletters in line with the strategy in all government departments. This type of internal communication function is of course only relevant to the provincial government department in the office of the premier, which is the custodian of all government communication units in the province.

According to the *communication strategy document of the department of Sports and Recreation*, the function of internal communication involves updating the department's website and intranet and ensuring that the department's calendar schedule of activities is published on the website. For the Department of Health, internal communication focuses on promoting an enabling environment for staff to progress from general awareness to well-informed ambassadors of the department (employee relations).

Like the Department of Health, the *communication strategy document of KZN Department of Education* similarly described internal communication from an employee relations' perspective. It provides that "a consistent and open internal communication strategy is a pro-active approach to developing better directed, more committed, and highly efficient employees". The DoE internal communication strategy aims to develop a workforce that understands the vision, mission, goals, value, and procedures of the department. This will enable all employees to make better and more informed decisions that are aligned with meeting the long-term goals of the department. According to the document, internal communication at DoE is aimed at fostering a strong communication culture within DoE by creating a two-way flow of information between top and bottom employees.

The DEDT communication strategy document states that internal communication must be promoted to encourage the exchange of corporate information amongst staff members and management. This is critical in enforcing a sense of alignment with and belonging to the organisation. Informed employees are likely to exude passion and commitment to the strategic mandate of the department. The government communication unit is therefore expected to drive internal communication in equal weight to external communication (page 13). The COGTA *communication strategy document* cites extent research to illustrate a direct link between good internal communication and the high performance and motivation of staff. Effective communication is therefore vital to overall performance of the department (page 5). In overall, most government communication strategy documents approached internal communication from an employee relations' perspective. The most indicated role of internal communication are employee relation, website management, coordinating communication between various business units in the department, and the production of

internal publications (where applicable). Two-way communication and feedback in government communication are discussed next.

8.16 TWO WAY COMMUNICATIONS

The COGTA document argues that communication has a significant impact on how the public and the local government and traditional affairs community judge the work of the department. Research shows that well-informed clients are more likely to be satisfied with the departments' services and to be supportive of its work. Furthermore, the public is likely to participate in the developmental agenda when the department has created opportunities for the public to receive information, give feedback and know how to get involved (page 5).

The COGTA communication strategy document realises the need for greater dialogue in which two-way communication is encouraged between COGTA and its stakeholders. Symmetrical two-way government communication is empowered by raising awareness, facilitating opportunities for public discourse, sharing knowledge, and enabling information from grassroots level to reach decision makers to inform evidence-based planning at all levels. Also profiling a two-way communication is the DEDT communication strategy which states that "the Ministry's communication efforts shall be underpinned by a two-way flow of information between its constituents' department and the various stakeholders; through the use of different media channels and tools" (page 6).

8.17 KEY SPEAKERS /MESSENGERS

The GCIS *strategising for communication guideline* document states that in a communication strategy document, it is best to identify the principal spokesperson for the communication strategy. Someone to represent and reinforce the brand attributes of the department. The KZN Department of Health defines communication messengers as key messengers who will become the overall voices when a message is communicated.

The *Provincial Communication Strategy* outlines the key messengers according to their hierarchical positions as follows: "The premier, MECs, Director-General, Heads of

Departments, the Head of Communication in the Premier's office, communicators of the various departments and local government". Complementary messengers refer to the premier and his cabinet, mayors and councillors and parliamentarians. The KZN department of Sports and Recreation identifies its key messengers also, hierarchically, in which the MEC is the principal communicator for the department. The Department of Health categorises its key messengers as follows: the (MEC), HOD, Head of Communication and department spokesperson. Most communication strategies followed this hierarchical level in defining key messengers of government communication.

COGTA claims that while the Head of Communication is the frontline and official spokesperson of the department, the MEC is the key spokesperson on policy matters. The Head of Department (HOD), supported by relevant senior general managers is second. The DEDT communication similarly states that the MEC, as the political head, would serve as the chief communication officer on issues relating to the department. While several key messengers are identified in the provision of internal communication, two-way communication, strategic communication, identity and image management and outreach programmes, in practice government communication must be integrated. Integrated communication is discussed next.

8.18 INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

The *communication strategy document of the KZN Department of Health* declares, "A thousand voices speaking without a common message and a single purpose will, in the end, just make an indistinct noise that few would hear. The department must therefore speak with a shared purpose and clarity of message". Similarly, the *KZN provincial communication strategy document* of (2012/1213:40-41) recognises a "need for co-ordination of communication efforts in the province to ensure consistency and coherence". Identified instances of integrated communication are the adoption and implementation of provincial branding guidelines, the consolidation of various departmental newsletters into a single weekly newspaper (*Simama*) and an effective media monitoring system for all departments. The provincial *government communication strategy document* identifies the following initiatives towards integrated government communication in KwaZulu Natal:

- Guidelines have been developed detailing areas of communications that could be co-ordinated from the premier's office through establishing a core centre, for example in photography archives.
- Developing a calendar of key provincial events to avoid clashes and to consolidate provincial communication efforts.
- Improving the system to coordinate all provincial advertising, including media buying to ensure that the government's media buying power is consolidated effectively.
- Co-ordinate the implementation of the communication strategy through quarterly provincial communicators meetings and monthly cluster communicators' meetings.
- Develop a consolidated evaluation and monitoring system to monitor communications of various departments.
- PCF to meet quarterly & provincial communicators to meet monthly.
- MLO's to meet weekly & DCFs to meet monthly

The KZN department of Health aims to promote capacity building of Public Relations Officers working in various hospitals in KZN through effective PRO forums and workshops (centralisation). The Department of Health proposes to standardise health communication by encouraging compliance of protocols and government policies in media and events management. The department of Sports and Recreation identified a move towards integrated communication with districts (local government). The interview and the survey data in chapter 9 report on poor interactions between provincial departments and their regional offices in districts. Integrated communication is therefore recommended. In overall, government communication in South Africa is guided by the ten (10) commandments outlined below.

8.19 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION'S TEN COMMANDMENTS

There are certain core principles that guide all government communication strategies. The Ten Commandments are found in the GCIS *Communication Handbook*. These "Ten

Commandments of Government Communication” apply to government communication in all spheres, local, provincial and national:

1. Government work is essentially a public activity. We should continually challenge the paradigm that government work is a secret activity that unfortunately goes public from time to time. Rather, the approach should be how to manage the flow of information in the interest of the country.
2. A central communication service should have authority to carry out its work. It should be located in the highest office, privy to decision-making processes, including cabinet, and able to exercise discipline among all communicators.
3. Political principals are the main communicators. The public servant employed as communicators are first and foremost facilitators, creating opportunities for the principals to articulate their messages, rather than themselves courting publicity.
4. Everyone in government is a communicator, and therefore employees need to be empowered with skills and information to be good ambassadors of government policies, programmes, messages and campaigns.
5. Communication should be based on an integrated communication strategy and programmes, with core messages which guide all the role-players. This is a critical prerequisite to pro-active communication, instead of just responding to others' agenda.
6. Communication structures do not determine policy – they articulate it. In doing so, it is imperative to always tell the truth (or just keep quiet), for if attempts are made to embellish, this will be found out eventually. Further, it is critical in difficult situations to examine the real causes of the difficulties, and avoid blaming communicators, as a rule, for what may in fact be defects in the policy itself.

7. Communication is more than just media liaison: a multimedia approach should be adopted, particularly in implementing major campaigns, including own productions and other unmediated forms, with specific target groups in mind.
8. Direct communication and mutual exchange of views with the public is the most effective form of communication. Where resources are available, there should be communicators in all local offices who are multiskilled workers providing both information and services.
9. There should be a deliberate effort to understand the communication environment, including target groups, appropriate media platforms, messages and forms of interaction when compiling campaigns and programmes. In this regard, communication research is a critical element of the trade: communication is an art, but it should be based on science.
10. Communication campaigns work best when they are carried out in partnership with others outside of government. This would include researchers, non-government organisations, role-models for specific sectors and so on – all of which can, if mobilised and supportive, sometimes transmit similar messages with a greater measure of credibility and impact

8.20 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter presented a synthesised analysis of government communication strategy documents. The chapter contains a preliminary response to research *objective four (4)*, which aims to examine the link between government communication policies, strategies and government communication practices. The purpose of the ten 10 commandments is to standardise and professionalise government communication in South Africa.

CHAPTER 9: RESULTS AND DATA FINDINGS

9.1 INTRODUCTION

This research merges two emerging fields of study in government communication. One leading research interest in government communication is in identifying and proving the distinctiveness of government communication. Another dominant area of focus is in analysing government communication as a practice. Consequently, this research will attempt to investigate government communication as a 'distinctive' practice. This means that the distinctive communication environment of the public sector as identified in literature will be tested in the South African context and its effects in government communication practices evaluated. In the data analysis chapter, a framework is presented demonstrating the relationship between the 'distinctiveness' features and their effects on selected government communication practices.

A sample of eight (8) government departments was drawn from a population of 16 provincial ministry government departments in the KwaZulu Natal (see table 9). A triangulation of methodology was selected for the purpose of the study. Data collection comprised of interviews, questionnaires surveys and policy document analysis. In-depth interviews were conducted with 30 government communicators working across eight KZN provincial government departments. A purposive snowball sampling was used to identify the respondents. The identified respondents were, in addition to the interview, required to complete the questionnaires (essential to quantify variables and to tackle sensitive matters). To achieve a rich data and for additional validity, eight communication strategic documents were analysed. For the purpose of delineating the policy framework guiding the practice, the data findings from the analysis of government communication strategies were presented in chapter 8. On this chapter (9), the results from the interview and the questionnaires (surveys) are presented in order to describe the practice of government communication in the KZN provincial government.

In this chapter, a conscious decision was made not to temper with the data. As a result, much of the data is presented in participants' own words. In order to preserve objectivity, it

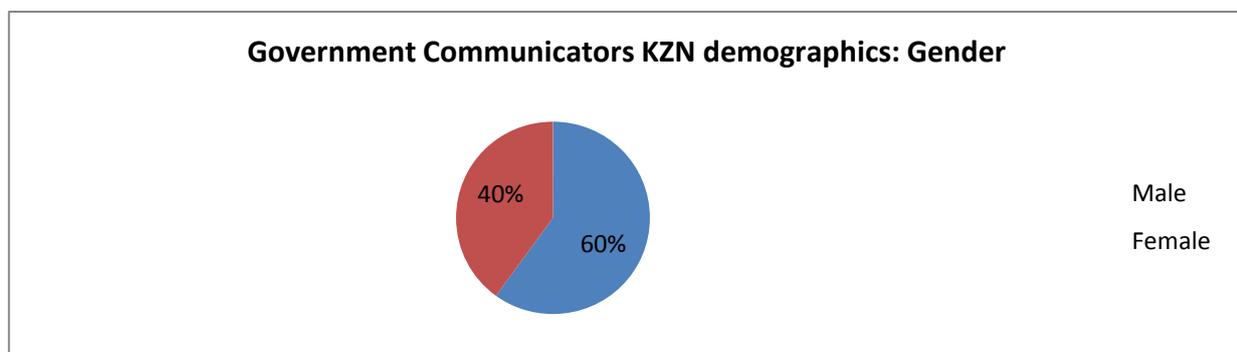
is a strong tradition in science to separate the results from the discussion of their significance (Perry, 1998:34). Therefore, chapter 8 and chapter 9 discuss findings of the research project with minimal analysis while Chapter 10 elaborates on the implications of the findings within the context of literature, theories and the objectives of the study.

9.2 DEMOGRAPHICS

A total of eighteen 18 (60%) male and 12 (40%) female government communicators were interviewed for the study conducted in the KwaZulu Natal province. Figure 2 demonstrates gender while figure 3 demonstrates the racial demographic of the sample. In terms of race, twenty-five participants (25) are of the black race, three are Indian (3) and two are of the white race (2). Although reflective of the actual population dynamics of the KZN province, this sample does not reflect much diversity.

Figure 2: Demographics (gender)

Figure 3: Demographics (race)



9.3 PERCEIVED PRIVATE/PUBLIC DISTINCTION

From the interviews, none of the participants disputed that communication in the public sector is different from communication in the private sector. “*The private sector is too different from government*” (R19). However, few respondents seemed cognisant of this actuality until the subject was introduced. For most respondents, it seemed like ‘*an aha*’ moment’ – a moment of realisation. The point of *distinction* however varied from respondent to respondent.

Although, certain ‘distinctive’ features pertaining to the communication environment of the public sector were already identified from literature and specific questions pertaining to each feature of distinctiveness had been investigated separately (and directly), it was also essential to examine practitioners’ views regarding their own perceptions of the distinctiveness of the public sector’s communication environment. For this purpose, participants were asked: *how do you view the similarities and differences of communication management within the two sectors?* From this enquiry, respondents identified the following points of distinction:

Government communication is a public good evaluated by media scrutiny

The data reflects a robust confirmation of the existence of distinctive features: ‘public good’, ‘high media scrutiny’ and ‘more stakeholders’ (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:34; Liu & Horsley, 2007:379). Some respondents mentioned, “*it is different working for the private sector. Much more eyes see you in here, government this or that; it is a bit more in the public eye and more stakeholders*” (R11). In addition, the media does not respond in the same way to public and private institutions. “*For the fact that this is a public sector, every member of the public has an interest (public good). There is a higher media scrutiny because government uses taxpayers’ money (media scrutiny). Therefore, they (citizens) have the right to know what you doing with their money. You have to make sure they get what they want*” (public good) (R23). “*The way they treat public and private entities will be different*” (R13). “*Private entities are not obliged to communicate. They communicate because they want to make money. They communicate to a certain level, because they are marketing themselves; as government, you must communicate*” (public good) (R23).

“There is a perception that the media always takes what government say with a pinch of salt (media scrutiny). But it is important for us to enhance relationships with the media” (R27). Unlike per Liu *et al.* (2010:192) findings, government communicators did not view heightened media scrutiny and public good negatively.

Limited job specialisation in government communication

Communication management in the private sector is considered more glamorous, specialised and diversified because stakeholders are also specialised. According to some respondents, *“the major difference is that with government communication , there is no clear distinction and boundaries between communications, public relations, media liaison, marketing, advertising and audio visuals (photography and video services).The private sector, on the other hand, acknowledges differentiations between these professional roles”* (R8).

Corporate communication in the private sector was perceived as more specialised in role performance that government communication: *‘You end up doing everything, just a little bit, but with no specialisation’*. Some respondents’ illustrated this point: *“It is the same work in the private sector, but much more differentiated. Work in the private sector is more diversified”* (R7). *“Communication management in the private sector is different, the private sectors is more glamorous, more specialised than the public sector”* (R13). *“Stakeholders for the private sector are more specific and specialised; in government, stakeholders are very vast”* (R13).

Respondents contributed four additional features of differentiations, which are summarised here. First, it was reiterated that **government communication is not profit making (Public good)**. *“The difference is that government is not profit-making – our adverts are not profit oriented”* (R2). Government communicators **are unsure of what they are promoting or selling: department, policy, MEC or politics?** *“The main difference of marketing in the private sector is that you promoting a brand – communicating brand attributes to the public. In government, you get confused of whether you are promoting a brand, a program, the department or the MEC. Even in some cases the party in power”*

(R10). “What you are really promoting is municipal excellent” (R3). “*We not selling a product we market communication*” added another respondent (R12).

A group of respondents claimed that **there was less work to do in government**In private sectors, they have a lot of work, unlike in government, you will find that there are a large number of people in one department, about twenty people for communication, so they do not have a lot to do. “*Here, the government is trying to create work for people; you end up doing so little*” (R10).

Government communication is political...“*I think it is definitely different, here in government I think is more political, I know it has to be about service delivery. But I have seen that it is more political because at the end of the day we are working under political heads*” (R4).

The issue that government communication is not profit-making (public good) and that it is political were already identified in literature. Furthermore, the first point that government communication is in the public eye (media and public scrutiny) was similarly recognised in literature. What was unexpected were claims among respondents that there was less work to do in government and that government communicators were not always certain of what they are supposed to be promoting, either the MEC, HOD, policies, ruling party or services. Added to these unexpected findings, is the perception that there is no specialisation in government communication.

9.4 POLITICS

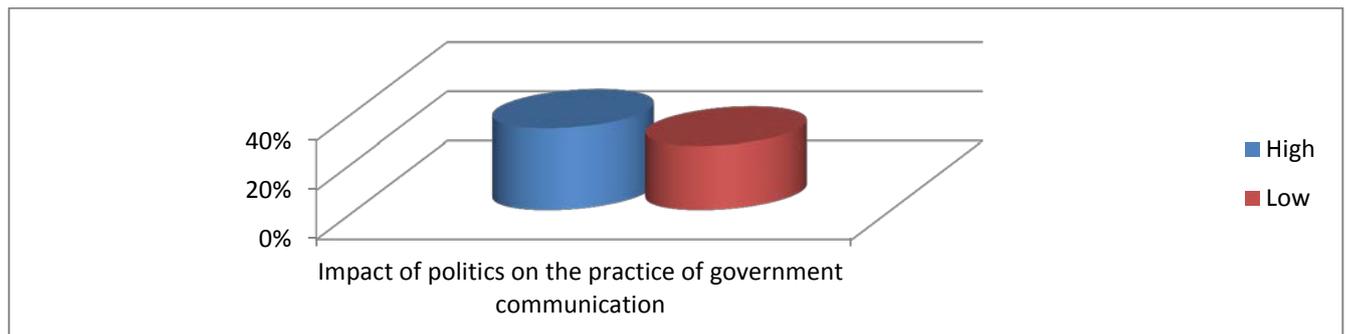
The question asked in the interview session was “*does politics affect your job?*” Out of 30 interviewees, 17 respondents reported that politics had a significant effect on government communication in general and on their daily practices in particular. In contrast, a few ($n=6$) responded that politics did not have a major effect on doing their jobs. Two respondents ($n = 2$) remained neutral (inconclusive) on the matter while the remaining five ($n = 5$) chose not to comment on the question, suggesting rather to skip the question altogether. The results from the survey data demonstrated a 33% positive, indicating that the effect of

politics is high and a 26 % negative, indicating that politics does not have much of an effect on government communication practices. Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate this point visually.

Please rate the following as high or low (Survey data)

		HIGH	LOW
Politics	Rate the impact of politics on your job	33%	26%

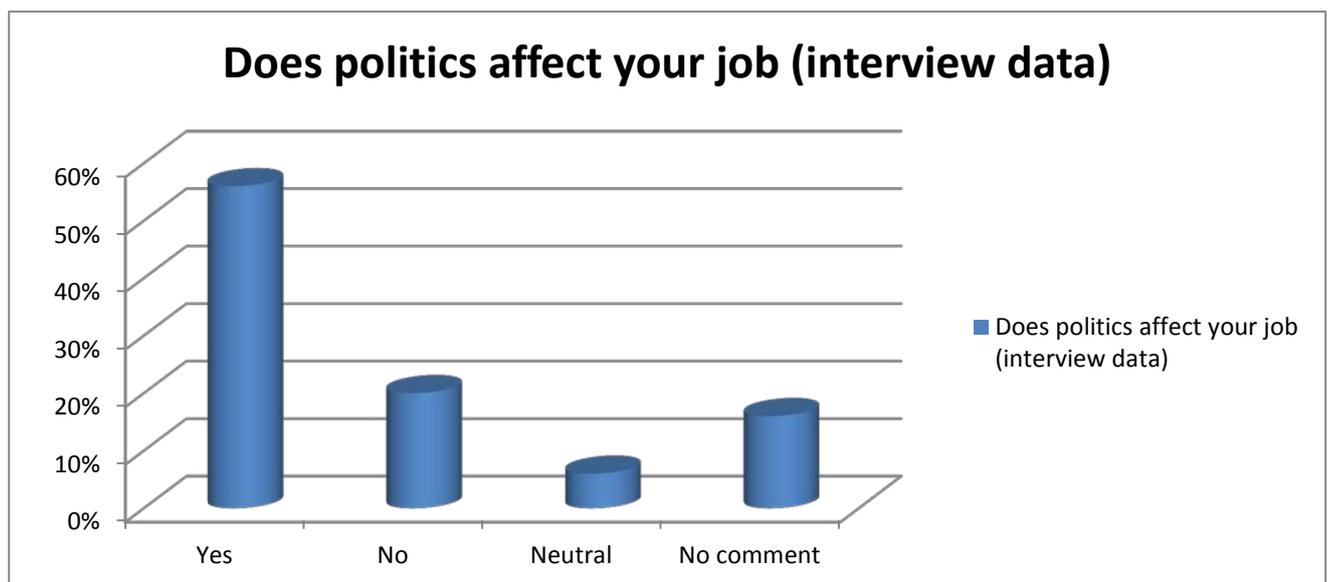
Figure 4: Survey data –impact of politics on government communication



Does Politics affect your job? (Interview data)

Yes	No	Neutral	No Comment
56%	20%	6%	16%

Figure 5: Interview data - impact of politics on government communication



9.4.1 THE EFFECTS OF POLITICS ON THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The follow-up question was finding out how politics actually affected the daily practices of government communication. Six elements appeared to be the most affected by politics. In order of their importance or intensity, they are as follows: (a) politics sets the agenda for government communication (b) politics drives outreach programs (c) politics influences communication content both, direct and mediated. (d) Politics influences appointments and promotions in government communication positions. (e) Politics demands more energy, resources and urgency towards the promotion of the MEC office, which is the political arm of government. Lastly, (f) politics influences self-censorship for government communicators not to appear aligned or unaligned to any fraction of political incumbents. Each point is discussed next.

The majority claimed that *politics sets the agenda* for government communication. By setting the agenda, we mean influencing government communication practices in terms of what is said and done, when it is said and done, how and when it is said and done. Some respondent claim: “*Politics does affect what we do. Our work is dependent on the political drive at the time*” (R7). For example, another communication officer mentioned that: “*Politics does affect my job because ... every time there are elections, the pattern of our work changes, there is more campaigning, more events, more work. Even after elections, there might be a reshuffling of cabinet. And maybe I have branding with a certain MEC’s face; I will have to change them.*” (R19). In support to this point, a senior communication manager had stated that “*politicians drives the agenda, ours is to implement*” (R4). A further comment, also from a very senior communication manager illustrates this point: “*We are manifesting the ruling party. Politics sets the agenda - the key is that it should get to the point of service delivery structure*” (R1).

Contrasting this sentiment were some senior managers who opine that, “*opposition parties are setting the agenda*” (R16). This is slightly different from what was argued by the majority of participants regarding this issue. Whilst others see the ruling party setting the agenda for government communication in terms of what should be done, these respondents believe that government communication is responding to the agenda set by

the opposition parties through the media. A small minority also highlighted a similar point, hinting that government communication is somewhat responsive to the media and its politics (external pressure). This resonates with the feature of *permeability*, meaning, public organisations are considered ‘open systems’ that are easily influenced by external events (Rainey, 2009, 75-76).

The second element in which politics affect government communication is by *driving outreach programmes*. A fraction of respondents pointed out that politics drives outreach programmes or the areas in which they communicate. For example, one participant eloquently articulated that “*political pressure determines where we communicate; it is as blatant as to which district we communicate*” (R13). Another participant posits that, “*All imbizo’s are made at black communities*” (R6). Within those outreach programmes, politics may affect the nature of the activity and even the content of the message. “*It depends on the place, if it is politically driven. For example, if it is an IFP dominant, then communication will be made political. If the MEC knows if it is an ANC area, they push their agenda. But if they do not know, they try not to make it political*” (R10).

The third element emerging from the data was that *politics influences communication content* both direct and mediated. A significant number of respondents mentioned this point. One senior respondent revealed, “*It was only in 2009 that we had a one party government in KZN. This ensured coherent and constant messages*” (R4). As declared by several participants, content is the most affected by politics: “*It (politics) only affects me when I have to communicate decisions taken by political leadership. Otherwise, I am treated like any other official*” (R29). One highly experienced mid-manager cautioned that, “*I can’t go and communicate what I want, it comes from the cabinet*” (R3). As mentioned by some respondents, government communication is inherently political because it communicates about matters that are inherently political. For example, one participant states that “*programmes and policies come from the politicians (MEC cabinet) and these are the issues or content on which we communicate*”. Further emphasising this point is an explanation that:

“Whatever is being communicated in government is actually reflective of the political positions that have been taken by government through its diverse political positions”. For me, the issue is that you have to reflect the policy position. That policy position has a political content in it. So, in a way, it (politics) does (affect me), but in the same time, one has to maintain an impartial position. The communication practitioners must retain an impartial position. Their role is to provide a professional support to a political incumbent who has to communicate a wide range of policy position with regard to his portfolio which also takes a cue from the provincial or national government” (R26).

The following quotations from participants, with the title Head of Communication, illustrate the influence of the MEC office (the political arm of government) on the content of government communication:

“The key messenger is the MEC; the MEC goes out there himself. The spokesperson in the office of the premier communicates about cabinet decisions” (R1).

The MEC is directly involved in all communication efforts, contributing ideas on how communication can be improved, (R9)”.

“I had a four hour session with the MEC telling me his vision for communication” (R21)

Regarding the fourth element, only a few respondents mentioned the point that politics influences appointments and promotions to government communication positions. The insinuation is that, *“all appointments are political in nature, the MEC can appoint of people she wants to work with. In practice, education and qualifications have little impact because appointment and promotions are politically motivated” (R6).* Based on in-depth interviews, the researcher can attest to two communication personnel appointed at senior levels because the MEC indorsed their appointment. Those communication personnel had no communication background but they carried with them functional knowledge of the

portfolio of the department. Such appointments are against the principles of the excellence theory, which requires communication units to appoint professionals with a specialised body of knowledge in the field of communication management (Grunig, 2007:45).

Technically, only communication personnel working in MEC offices, the political arm of government, are handpicked and linked to the term of office (and the satisfaction) of the MEC, whereas government communicators in general are government employees and not particularly linked to the term of the MEC. *“The MEC has his own media liaison officer, who speaks on his behalf. The appointee is politically motivated, because his/her contract is linked to the term of office of the MEC. Unlike me, if the MEC goes, the other MEC will have to decide whether he likes to keep me on or not. If He or she prefers to bring someone else in the department, they will deploy me to another section or directorate, which will not change my salary level or benefits”* (R21).

With reference to the fifth element, a significant number of respondents declared that politics demanded more energy, resources and urgency to be deployed towards the promotion of the MEC office, which is the political arm of government. The reason is that *the panic levels of the MEC and the HOD are not the same. “The MEC has a particular period in office. The MEC must actually perform; (otherwise) they are reshuffled. The HOD is more secure as he/she is protected by labour laws. Thus, the pace at which both will want things done will depend on their panic levels. For the MEC, what is in the media can cause the premier to remove him”* (21). This point is later expounded when discussing the perceived value of communication between the HOD group (administration) and the MEC group (politics).

The last point (sixth) is that *politics influences self-censorship on government communicators* not to appear aligned or unaligned to any fraction of the political incumbents. A sizable minority mentioned this point under the context of discussing politics while others made reference to this point in passing when discussing other matters. Some government communicators expressed the pressure of expectant partisanship to various structures and individuals within opposing political camps of one ruling party. *“You must always speak positively about them. You cannot speak negatively. Sometimes you feel*

deceitful in attempt to protect your political leader by making a positive story” (R23). “The current challenge (partisanship) is as solid as structures and camps, even within one political party. As communication, you feel compelled to choose sides” (R5). In addition, “Politics affect what we do. I cannot mention so and so because they are a part of which camp. You never know, who is who in the zoo” (R10).

9.4.2 IS POLITICS INTRINSIC TO GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION?

Another point emanating from the data was how accepting or unaccepting respondents (government communicators) are of the effect of politics on their jobs. A sizable majority (20) of respondents were accepting of politics being part of government, and hence, an inherent part of government communication. However, they did not essentially judge the desirability or distress about this matter; they merely mentioned politics as something which is there. One respondent for example stated, *“Politics sets the agenda - the key is that it should get to the point of service-delivery”*. This insinuates that politics is okay as long as it leads to service-delivery or at least it should not destruct from service-delivery. What was surprising however was that even those who said that politics had no influence on their job ($n=6$), did not automatically deny the inherent effects of politics on government communication. They contended rather that they knew how to insulate politics from their jobs. For example, *“I don’t feel that politics affects my job at all. Every organisation has its own internal politics. It depends on whether you are able to adapt” (R14).*

A small quantity of respondents highlighted their attempts to separate politics from government communication. Practitioners mentioned some of the methods they use to insulate the effects of politics on government communication:

- **Government branding** - no party branding especially for outreach events like *imbizos* and project *Sukuma Sakhe*, which may be mistaken by rural publics as an ANC’s (ruling-party) visit. There should be a separation between party politics and government administration. In events, only government branding should be used. *“There is a separation between party politics and government because in events, we only brand in government branding” (R13).*

- **Professionalisation** – A significant number of respondents claimed that being professional translates to being able to insulate the effects of politics from government communication. *“One has to maintain an impartial position. The communication practitioners must retain an impartial position. Their role is to provide a professional support to a political incumbent”* (R26).
- **Work experience** – some participants reported that work experience yield the ability to separate politics from government communication. This follows recognition that government communication is part of government administration, and not part of the political wing of the ruling party. For example, argued the most experienced respondent (in terms of years employed), *“Being someone who has been here for a long time, I know I have to separate politics from administration and if there is a new premier he will do things differently. It doesn’t affect my job at all”* (R3).
- **Being able to adapt** – being able to adapt refers to *acknowledging the nature of politics and being cognisant not to be implicated by it* (R22).

A few respondents denied politics as a unique feature of the communication environment of the public sector (government). They claimed instead that politics was everywhere, in the private sector, in government and in non-governmental bodies: *“politics is in our lives, whether you are in the public sector, there is politics and whether you are in the private sector there is also politics there”* (R14). The effect of politics in one’s job is perhaps a subjective matter as it was found that two government communicators on the same level and working for the same department perceived the effect of politics differently. One found politics influential in her daily operations whilst the other found it insignificant. This was startling.

The effect of politics on government communication depends on the organisational structure of where the communication department is positioned. *“It is a question of structure, of where the communication unit is positioned in the department”* (R2). As established, politics mostly affects practitioners whose communication portfolios fall under the auspices of the MEC. *“By virtue of working in the political office, one deals with it (politics). However professional one can be, it is possible to be unaffected by politics”*

(R20). Another distinctive feature of the public sector communication environment is legal constraints, which are discussed next.

9.5 THE EFFECTS OF LEGAL CONSTRAINTS ON THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The two interview questions covered in this section were: *Are there any laws or legal issues that stifle your ability to communicate? And how affected is government communication by the bureaucracies of government?* A portion of respondents ($n = 10$) claimed that legal constraints limit their ability to communicate freely. In contrast, a minority ($n = 4$) did not perceive much impact. The rest ($n = 16$) did not express an opinion on this matter, commonly stating *“I am not sure”*. The impacts of legal constraints are hereby categorised into four related themes: (1) the protocol of consulting and information gathering, (2) the protocol of consulting and approval, (3) confidentiality and information classification and (4) bureaucracy and red tape. Each is described in further details.

9.5.1 THE PROTOCOL OF CONSULTING AND INFORMATION GATHERING

Those who mentioned the existence of legal constraints on government communication highlighted some of the issues that constrain the nature of their practice. One of the biggest and most cited issue relate to the protocol of consulting and information gathering. Before responding to government issues in the media, social media and anywhere in the public sphere, government communicators are expected to consult with the concerned business unit, directorate or individuals for both research (collating information) and to attain communication directives. Whilst essential, this protocol is said to be a lengthy and time-consuming process. The following quotations express this point:

“For you to communicate something, it has to go through too many steps. By the time it gets approved, the media is no longer interested” (R16).

“With government communication, it does affect it a lot, we are bonded by protocol. The issues of legality, protocol and processes significantly affect the way we

communicate with our stakeholders. It makes things difficult because from the other side of the fence, we are perceived as concealing information. At the end of the day, there is nothing to hide. We are just not able to divulge certain information at certain times” (R15).

The excerpts above regarding the protocol of consultation and information gathering refer to the top-down communication from the government to key external publics including the media. With regard to communicating external feedback from key publics to government, the protocol regarding information flow is similarly too rigid. It takes long for information to move from key stakeholders on the ground to the designated authorities. For example, a respondent illustrates this process on environmental scanning: *“once information is gathered using protocol procedures, information would go from the communication officer, to the supervisor, to senior communication manager, to communication director in a document and e-mails. From the general manager; it will then move outside the communication department to the deputy director general who will then transfer it to the premier”*. This process is excessively long and cumbersome and often distorts the message in the course of its trajectory to reach top management. This is an indicator of a closed system.

The protocol of consultation and information gathering pose an even bigger challenge on social media. The urgency of social media obliterates all lengthy protocols of consultation, research, information verification and acquisition of communication directives. This is often a slippery ground susceptible of content mistakes, misinformation and unapproved information by government. Two respondents entrusted with social media, illustrate this point:

“On some occasion, I take the liberty of responding to certain matters because on social media, you can’t say, we noted your comment and someone will get back to you because that person will think that you deflecting the issue” (R5).

“I would say we working on very slippery grounds, because sometimes someone could mention something on legislation policy or anything related to a political matter and when you respond based on your own understanding of the subject

matter, which is not necessarily wrong, the citizen might not happy about it. Then the government authorities can say, 'I dint say that'. So officially, there is a discrepancy between what is official and what is personal" (R25).

In addition, only selected people have the prerogative to communicate about cabinet issues or to respond to the media. Only media liaison officers, the department's head of communication and MEC spokespeople are permitted to respond to the media.

9.5.2 THE PROTOCOL OF CONSULTING AND APPROVAL

Another protocol or process mentioned by some respondents is that 'communication is *controlled*'. Government communication content, ideas and output are controlled and must be approved before implementation: *"Everything we produce is controlled because it has to go to someone else for approval (R8)". "Everything goes to the higher up – they (management) change it completely – you don't even recognise your own work afterwards. This is a major problem for me because; there are rules in graphic-design within the branding manual" (R7).* Those instructing changes are seldom communication trained, so they may contravene certain communication conventions as set out by the branding manual or contravene journalistic conventions regarding news-values. This means that government communication output may be unpublishable as being devoid of newsworthiness. This may have a negative effect on media relations.

9.5.3 BUREAUCRACY AND RED TAPE

Related to the above theme, other participants mentioned the impact of bureaucracy upon the practice of government communication. *"One of the disadvantages of government is bureaucracy. Government is full of systems" (R20). "The organisation is hierarchical which stifles those who are at the bottom" (R2).* An additional challenge to government communication is the bureaucracy regarding budgeting, timing and planning. It takes time for top management to approve budgets, communication strategies and appointments. It also takes time to conclude planning, which means that events are organised in a rush and invitations to the media and the public are equally rushed: *"bureaucracy affects the quality*

of government communication. If things were better planned, we would not be in a crisis mode all the time. The quality of the practice would be better. Notifications are given on the day before an event that branding and communication support would be required. There is insufficient planning time. At the end of it, the communication department looks incompetent' (R13).

Adding to bureaucracy, the position of director of communication remained vacant for a lengthy period of time in two of the sampled departments. Furthermore, in another set of two departments, communication strategies were not yet approved. Respondents claimed there were no explanations provided by management reflecting the reasons why communication strategies were not approved regardless of repeated revisions made on the documents. There were no explanation either on the reasons delaying the appointment of the Head of Communication (HoD).

9.5.4 CONFIDENTIALITY AND INFORMATION CLASSIFICATION

Figure 6: Survey data – value of transparency in government communication

		HIGH	LOW
Transparency	Rate your personal value to transparency.	60%	0
	Rate the level of transparency in your department.	66%	0
	Rate your support of the information bill	40%	13%
	Rate politicians/management support of transparency.	33%	20%

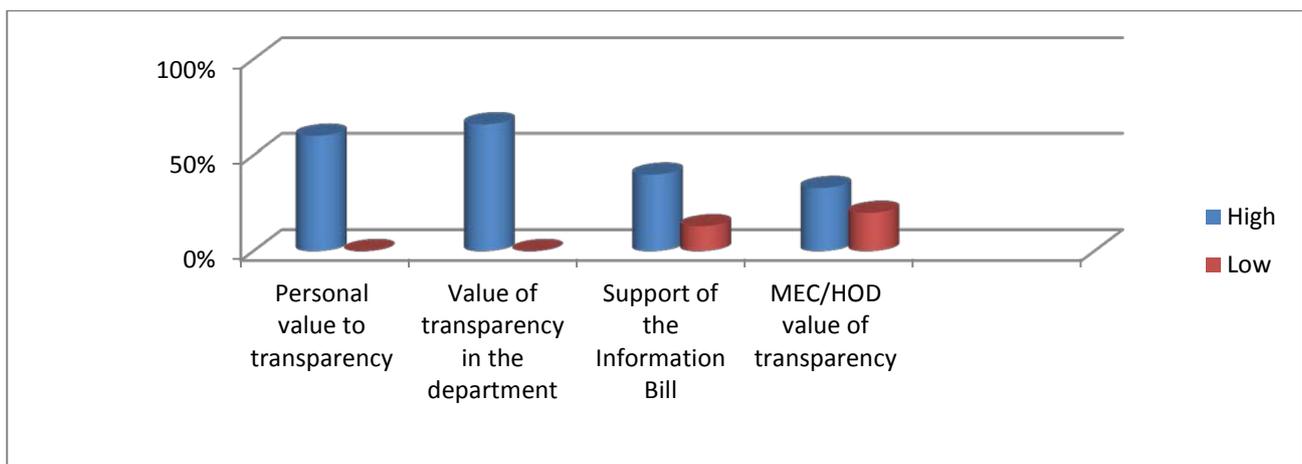


Figure 6 presenting the interview data and the survey data depicts perceptions regarding the value of transparency in government communication. The survey data demonstrates that government communicators perceive a high level of personal value to transparency and an equally high departmental value to transparency. Government management structure such as the MEC and the HOD were similarly ranked high in transparency principles. Conversely and ironically, a high support for the information bill was reflected in the data.

Confidentiality was mentioned as a communication constraint in government. Some respondents noted that they often fail to disclose information because of confidentiality. Two departments in particular mentioned this point. The Department of Health was especially vocal of the challenge of confidentiality. A senior government communicator pointed out that *“we have an obligation of patient confidentiality, and as such, we are not able to release certain information at certain times. We are not able to discuss these matters with the media and without such information, the media merely speculates on issues”* (R15). Explaining further is another respondent, *“In the Department of Health, we are controlled by issues of confidentiality. For example, a person could have died of HIV/AIDS, but we will not be able to disclose this information. Journalists do not understand this”* (R14).

Government has rules and regulations. However, government communicators do not always know what is classified and what is not: *“Sometimes you are not told what is confidential. You have to know the systems of government”* (R15). At an entry level, government communicators might not understand what can and cannot be communicated: *“You learn as you go in government, there is no one to train you”* (R17).

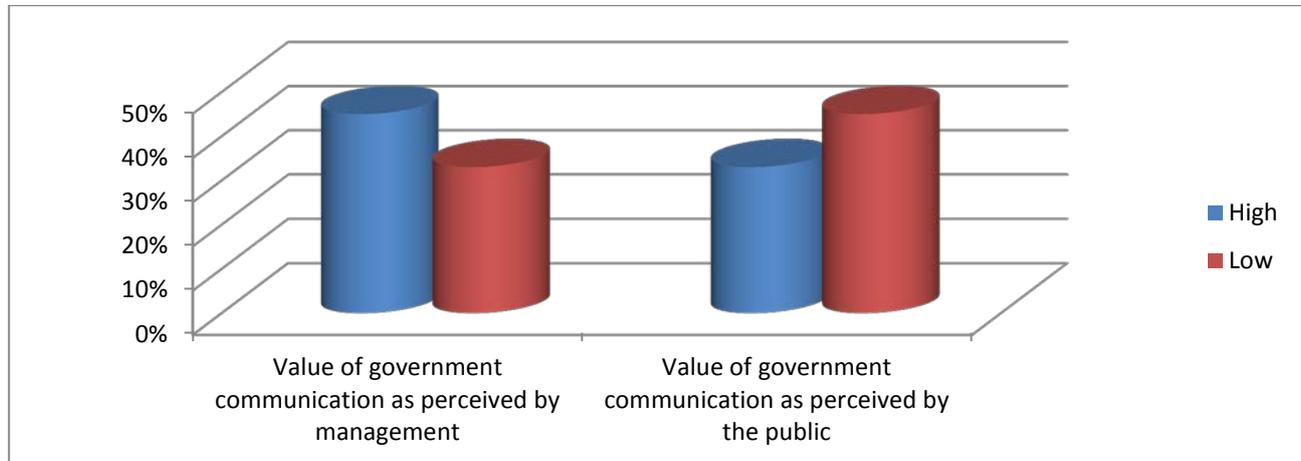
9.6 MANAGEMENT SUPPORT FOR GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The purpose of this theme was to determine the value of government communication attached by the dominant coalition, especially the politicians (MEC group) and the administrators. The key question was, *‘do you feel management appreciate the value of communication?’* Of the 30 respondents, a sizable number ($n=10$) reported that

government communication is valued by management. On the contrary, the majority ($n=15$) claimed that management do not sufficiently value government communication because they do not understand its role. A portion of the respondents ($n=5$) remained neutral, resisting to generalise; claiming rather that in some departments management understood the value of government communication while others did not. It also depended on the business units (directorates) and the individual manager. A respondent noted, “Some managers value communication, some don’t. Some will tell you about communication when it suits them” (R16). The survey data on figure 7 demonstrates that 46 percent of the respondents rated managements’ value of government communication highly while 33 percent rated it poorly.

Figure 7: Survey data- management support for government communication

		HIGH	LOW
Devaluation of Communication by Management	Rate the value of government communication as perceived by management?	46%	33%
	Rate the value of government communication as perceived by the general public?	33%	46%

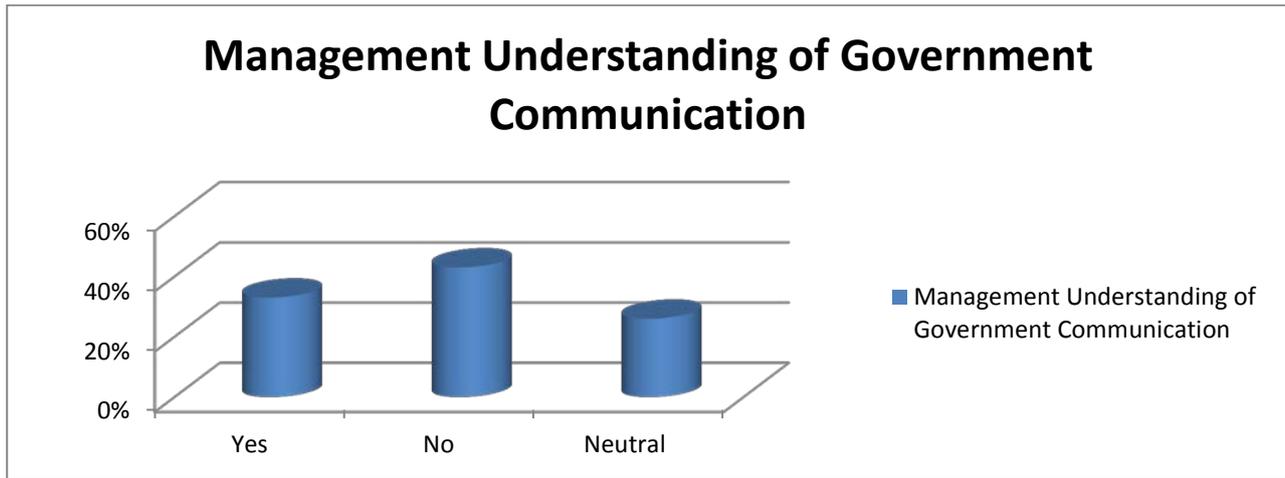


The main reason behind the devaluation of government communication could be ascribed to poor *understanding* of the nature and purpose of the communication unit in government. The majority of respondents suggested that management did not value government communication because they did not understand it. Those managers who understood government communication, also valued it. Figure 8 demonstrates the survey data on the

perceptions held by respondents regarding the value the dominant coalition accords government communication.

Figure 8: Management understanding of government communication

YES	NO	Neutral
33%	43%	26%



In summary, the following are some of the reasons behind the devaluation of government communication. First, managers did not value government communication because they do not understand it. *There is a devaluation of communication because of lack of understanding (R13)*. Secondly, management ascribes their own ideologies concerning the role and purpose of government communication: *I really do not think that our senior management understands exactly what we do. Perhaps they do not understand the value of communication or they have their own ideologies of what communication should be in government* (R2). Thirdly, *“the challenge is that in most departments, people do not take communication seriously”*. Communication is seen as a supporting function or a technical tool. Fourthly, communication is only valued when there is a crises or during outreach programmes for the provision of media coverage and branding. Fifthly, budgets constraint stifles the ability of communication to provide a quality service. Lastly, management do not support communication because they have their own fears. *“Management and politicians do not understand communication. If they do, they disregard it; some people have their*

own fears – fears of the unknown. Communication is undervalued’ (R4). Thus, communication is not valued beyond the provision of technical services.

9.6.1 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION SEEN AS TECHNICAL OR SUPPORTING INSTRUMENT

A significant number of respondents mentioned that management does not value government communication because they perceive it as a technical function, merely a supporting tool: *“Another challenge is a lack of understanding of government communication by management and politicians because they regard it as a technical tool”*. *“Generally government communication is we need banners, flyers and graphic design; beyond that, government communication is not given the adequate recognition it deserves”* (R19). Referring to business units (directorates), some respondents note, *“People have that idea ukuthi (that) we are just taking photos – there is nothing else that we do, even if when there are events, they will say okay you’ll come and take photos? They don’t understand, they think we taking photos and travelling, that is all”* (R20). Speaking of the devaluation of communication, some participants claimed, *“Communication is seen as ‘by the way we need communication”* (R16). *“Managers also think communication is media relations”* (R22). Communication is much more than media-relations.

9.6.2 POOR UNDERSTANDING OF MEDIA RELATIONS

Related to poor understanding of communication, senior administrative managers and politicians furthermore misconstrue the practice of media-relations. Management do not always understand how the media operates. They expect media to be available all the time and for all coverage to be positive. *“They do not understand, politicians want to see media all the time, otherwise, they think we are not doing our job”* (R4). In addition, *“They (management and politicians) don’t understand the news values of the media. One can devote time and money to media relations but achieve no visible results because the rules of the media were contravened”* (R16).

Poor understanding of media-relations, limited understanding of journalistic conversions, compounded with limited newsroom etiquette and a general failure to understand the operations of the media are challenges to the process of information gathering in government communication. Media-liaison officers in various government departments mainly expressed this point: *“In overall, my experience with management is that they don’t really understand. In addition, with senior officials, you have to drill the matter of ‘urgency’ – they do not understand the ins and outs of the newsroom. Their attitude is that you cannot just give this question and demand the answer now. Not realising the implication of when the journalist decides to publish without the response from the department”* (R23).

On average, respondents worry of being devoid a seat in the decision-making table at the Management Committee (Manco) and the Executive Committee (Exco) meetings. In such cases, government communication managers are not accorded the opportunity to convey the value of communication or to represent the needs and contributions of the communication unit to the highest echelon of management (the dominant coalition). One senior communication manager raises this point, *“if I don’t sit at the decision-making table where the MEC sits. How am I supposed to know what the department is doing? Communication managers do not have a say on the departmental strategy”* (R6). Another senior manager added, *“Communication should be a management function. Not in my department, communication is not regarded as a management function”* (R17).

9.6.3 BUDGET CONSTRAINTS

Some respondents argued that even if communication is valued, not enough support is provided. This is one of the effects of the devaluation of communication. All respondents (n =30) complained of budget constraints. They claimed they did not have sufficient budgets for government communication needs. *“Communication budgets are lower than other business unit in the department”* (R1). *“One of the most significant challenges in the public sector is financial restrictions. Communication units receive a tiny budget leading to the near impossibility of reaching external audiences in remote areas* (R13). *“There is a lack of investment in communication. You need the buy-in and the investment from the seniors”* (R5). Government communicators mentioned that budgets constraints affected the quality

of their work: *“Not enough funding is provided for communications. We cannot do enough because we don’t have money. Even with fewer staff, you can do whatever it takes if there is funding”* (R16). *“We mass produce in black and white because there is no money”* (R13). Please see additional comments on the challenges of budget constraints:

I do not think we have enough budgets, because sometimes we want to do something and they say we do not have budget, they keep on reducing the number year after year. We do not have promotional materials (R15).

So when it comes to budgeting, you have to battle to get support because you have to justify each and every submission you make with regard to the allocation of resources for communication even if you provide motivation in terms of market values, you’d have a situation where someone says I did not know that the advert is so expensive. Is there no other way to communicate this issue? (R26).

Most affected by budget constraints are those working on the technical sides of communication and most reliant on high technological equipment in order to perform their jobs. Graphic designers, web managers, photographers, videographers and marketers exemplify this group. These professionals bemoaned budget constraints and its impact on upgrading hardware and software required in their professions: *“I have been requesting upgrade causes in graphic-design, when the private sector is moving somewhere (improving), we are still (left) here”* (R7). Another respondent adds:

“Managers are less interested in the technicalities of communication; they just want to see the end result. However, you do it, as long as it is done despite the technical challenges caused by outdated technologies. They always say there is no budget for it.” (R5).

9.6.4 ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES CAUSED BY THE DEVALUATION OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Additional effects caused by the devaluation of communication relate to poor working conditions, particularly being understaffed: *“We don’t have time. We are understaffed, we are tired, we work under pressure”* (R2). Such devaluation accounts for poor salaries and poor professional development: *“We earn less than private sectors because there is no money”* (R3). Limited professional development is the reason for the exodus to the private sectors and the job-hopping between government departments in search for better salaries, working conditions and career developments: *“There is no skill development or support, I would move to the private sector for job satisfaction and to feel valued”* (R19).

Another challenge related to the devaluation of communication is that politicians and management are not always willing to listen to the advice provided by the communication unit. *“As communicators, we give them advice. However, we have a problem because politicians think they know everything”* (R9). The dominant coalition rather has the media and communications handled according to management directives, not the other way around. *“There could be something in the newspaper and they want us to respond in a certain inappropriate way”* (R12).

Only two respondents acknowledged that communication devaluation in government might be caused by the inability of government communicators to depict its value through constant communication evaluations demonstrating the impact, successes and returns of government communication. Government communication has *“no value because it is not evaluated”* (R13).

When asked whose role it was to educate management of the value of communication, most respondents recommended that the GCIS should step in to perform this task. *“GCIS would do a better job in terms of enforcing the culture of knowing what communication does, and what government departments should do to enhance its function”* (R19). Additionally, *“the GCIS should step in to educate politicians about the role and purpose of government communication and the nature of the media”* (R21). Communication managers were similarly identified in their role to educate the dominant coalition of the purpose,

nature and value of government communication. *“I think we (government communicators) should be doing so with the help of the GCIS, it would be difficult if it is just us, we need support from the GCIS and other senior managers within the department” (R18). The GCIS is there to capacitate communicators, when it comes to educating the administrative structure of the department. However, it is also the HOD’s responsibility unless if he is not getting through to them. In such a case, the GCIS should step in” (R17).*

9.6.5 THE VALUE POLITICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGERS ATTACHED TO GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

It was unanticipated that the administrative and the political managers would be differentiated by government communicators. The researcher had clustered managers into a single group, merely asking if the dominant coalition understood the value of communication. It soon emerged that government communicators viewed the two groups differently. Albeit government communicators provide services to both the HOD group and the MEC group, they perceive the value of communication to be differently exerted by each side. A significant number of respondents indicated that politicians (the MEC group) value government communication more than the administrative side (HOD & directorates). The following quotations express this point:

“One of our greatest challenges is that the politicians understand communication better than the business units. The political principals are much more knowledgeable of communication than your technocrats” (R9).

“I think the MEC groups understand communication better than the administrative side. The administrative side is the worst” (R15).

Politicians tend to be more inclined to understand and to value communication. Even though some administrators appreciate communication, in most cases, line function managers are less likely to have a full view of government communication (R27).

9.6.6 REASONS POLITICAL MANAGERS VALUE COMMUNICATION

Several reasons were offered to explain why political managers (MEC group) valued communication more than administrative managers. The first reason is that politicians are more experienced (from their campaigning days) of media-relations and issues pertaining to public opinion: *“In their political trajectory, politicians become media savvy as they usually started out as activist involved in several campaigns”* (R26). Another respondent added, *“The fortune that I have is that my MEC was a former secretary general of the ANC in the province, so he was dealing much with the media – so he understands the media”* (R21).

The second reason is that politicians (MEC group) are more reliant on the communication unit as they utilise it more: *“The legitimacy of the MEC group is dependent on the communication unit (PR) to make them look good out there. Hence they valued it better because they work with it more”* (R15). The third reason provided was that administrative managers consider government communication only as a support function in the core business of the department such as health, education, social development et cetera. One participant articulates this point further:

“The administrative side is more focused on service-delivery. Communication is just support. Their focus is glued on improving the core. They know that as much as they have to maintain the image of the department in the media and the public, when it come to the assessment of the department, they will not be assessed on that (image), but rather on the core business of the department. They are concerned with the output and the service-delivery, of which they are actually measured on. The department will not be measured by how much media publicity they got” (R10).

A few of the respondents expressed an opinion to the contrary, arguing instead that administrative managers valued communication more than politicians did, whereas, *“political appointees value communication only as far as it markets their policies”* (R21).

A small group of participants claimed that communication was valued by management in two occasions: when there are events in order to do publicity, media coverage and branding (the technicals of communication) and during crises or media scrutiny in order to carry out some spin doctoring. Some respondents declared that those were the only two occasions in which management is willing to listen and comply with communicators' advice. *"Communication is valued in two ways, you find that people value you when they have messed up or when the event they were involved in was successful"* (R26). Another respondent adds to this point. *"Up until there is negativity or a crisis, they tend to think everything is smooth, you do not need to communicate"*. The devaluation of government communication falls short of the requisite strategic communication principles.

9.7 STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

(The role of communication in strategic management)

Literature in both strategic management and strategic communication identify specific elements that must be emplaced for strategic communication to contribute to the effectiveness of the organisation. In the literature review, five elements were indicated as benchmarks for organisational effectiveness. First, government communication should be practiced as a management function. Secondly, there must be a communication manager, at a senior position, to manage government communication strategically. Thirdly, the communication unit should be accommodated at the department's decision-making table, and fourthly, it must exert significant influence over the overall strategic management of the department. Fifthly, and finally yet importantly, strategic government communication should act as a verifying tool through issue management, boundary spanning, and environmental scanning. These components were evaluated in the context of government communication in the KZN provincial government. The following findings emerged from the interview sessions with senior government communicators.

9.7.1 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

Literature impose that government communication should be practiced as a management function. However, half of the participants claimed that government communication was

viewed as a technical function, rather than a strategic one. *“Communication should be a management function” (R17). Moreover, “when communication is considered a technical tool, it becomes very operational; it diminishes its strategic significance” (R26).* This is formidable because a *“lack of policy documentation relegates communication management to a reactionary rather than a proactive function” (R16).*

There are wonderful pocket of excellent in this department that should have gone back to the masses. That is not happening because there are those barriers, those obstacles in between, the red tapes and all of that. This is discouraging. Your initiatives fall apart. Imagine when you introduce initiatives to people who do not take communication as a management function, it seems like you are flogging a dead horse. It is an unfortunate situation (R17).

Some respondents argued that government communication should be a strategic function. It was acknowledged, albeit by a few practitioners, that for government communication to be strategic, it must be elevated from being operational: *“Strategic communication is where you elevate it from being operational. Operational is when you communicate the key element of the strategy, it is about implementation of the strategy. Strategic communication, on the other hand, is about the high level thinking as to say what is it that we want to do and how do we want to do it. Once we have agreed about that we may now start implementing” (R26).* Several government communicators referred to strategic communication management as an act of ‘thinking’. The level of education was perceived as a catalyst to the ‘thinking act’ essential for strategic government communication. *“For one to put together a policy, one must be educated. You can talk, but one must be to think as well” (R11).*

Strategic communication entails thinking about the genesis, the present and the future of the organisation, *“how we think of audiences, what kind of information is being generated and how is it packaged, how is it disseminated, what kind of feedback do we anticipate and how do we respond to that feedback. Government communicators must be cognisant of how these choices affect the organisation” (R8).*

9.7.2 COMMUNICATION MANAGER TO MANAGE GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGICALLY

To manage government communication strategically, a manager at a senior position must be in charge of the communication unit. It is established in literature that a communication manager, at a head of communication level, is essential to represent the communication unit at the management structure of the government department. However, three departments among the sample did not retain a communication manager (during the time of study). The effects of this omission are presented below:

The structure says we should have a senior manager. I we do not even have a senior communication manager. It means that at the higher level, at the executive level, nobody understands the imperatives of communication (R17).

Our problem is that we do not have a manager since 2009. Hence, projects remain incomplete and we fail to archive specific goals. Although managers from other directorship could assist, they do not simply approve certain things because they do not understand their necessity. The situation could improve if there is a permanent communication manager acting as a spokesperson for the unit (R20).

The communication manager should sit in exco, the decision-making table, and offer advice on the direction of the department. If there is no communication representative there, the department is subject to doom and that should not happen” (R17).

9.7.3 INVOLVEMENT IN ORGANISATIONAL DECISION-MAKING

One of the central elements defined in literature as a precondition for strategic communication to work effectively in adding value to the operations of the department is that the communication manager must sit in the management committee and be involved in organisational decision-making. This issue was a serious point of contention in that a

little more than half of the senior management in this study reported to have permanent seats at the decision-making table of exco and manco:

“We have the head of communication sitting in two influential structures. He sits in exco (executive management) and manco (management committees) and has a direct interaction with the MEC” (R1).

Our manager does sit at the decision-making table (R30)

Yes, I sit at Exco. I contribute to all deliberations taking place (R29).

Less than half of the sample reported that they do not have seats in those management committees. For example, an acting head of communication observed that, *“communication managers do not have a seat in the decision-making table. What happens currently is a top-down structure whereby the unit is instructed by the dominant coalition. (R17).*

9.7.4 INFLUENCE ON STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT OF THE DEPARTMENT

Respondents were asked to delineate the extent to which the communication unit exert influence over strategic decisions, programmes, and legislative policies of the government department. Most participants confirmed that *“strategic communication should influence policy directions”* and that *“communication is critical in the policy development process”* (R14). Despite having an average amount of communication managers accommodated at the decision making table, only a few exerted a significant strategic influence over the overall management of the department. Those who claimed to have an influence in strategic management identified the points:

Government communicators influence strategic management on an advisory role:

We offer strategic input. Communication fulfils a strategic advisory role. The MEC office regularly solicits input on communication matters. On that note, we do render that strategic role (R4).

Government communicators influence strategic management decisions by offering intelligence about the environment:

“I am allowed to sit in these strategic meetings; I am able to advice, to throw light on the public opinion that is published by the media” (R9).

“There is no legislation of this department that I do not see. When legislations are drafted, I am part of the process. As communicators, we occupy strategic positions. We draft notes for principals and that allows us to shape direction and influence policies” (R8).

The power of government communication to influence policy-decisions depends on the personality of the head of the communication unit.

“It has to do with the capacity of the head of communication and his/her own individual drive as a leader. People will value managers who make valuable contributions. They listen to them. But if communication managers merely go there to sit and listen, often failing to debate issues, then they are likely to be ignored and excluded in future” (R9).

The majority of respondents claimed that the communication unit did not have much influence over the strategic decisions, programmes, or the legislature policies of the government department. *“Communication doesn’t have a say on what happens,”* claimed a respondent. The major reason given for this is already addressed in the section above; that the communication unit does not have an influence over strategic decision because it is viewed by management as a technical function:

Not only do we communicate, we also offer advice on issues concerning key stakeholders. However, officials are arrogant; they stay in their offices, losing touch with public opinion. This makes it imperative for someone to offer advice on strategy development. On the contrary, the communication unit rarely contribute to

legislation on matters other than media and current affairs. We do sit there just to listen.

The following are additional reasons preventing the communication unit to influence the strategic decisions, programmes or the legislature policies of the government department:

Communication managers may have seats in the decision making table, in exco and manco. However, it seems that they are hardly contributing. Most claimed it was essential to attend those meetings in order to better understand the policies and strategies enough to be able to communicate them in the media and to the public:

We always attend the meetings to understand policies.

I listen to the MEC address people so I could comprehend his approach. I sit in all the strategic meetings of the department when he meets his top management (MMM – MEC Management Meetings). Just sitting in these meetings, you don't have to say anything, just listening on how issues are addressed" (R21).

The third reason given as an explanation why government communication does not have an influence over strategic decisions, programmes, or the legislature policies of the government department is that government is in its nature bureaucratic. There are many processes and people involved at various layers of government (national, provincial and local) in setting goals and in making strategic decisions. Where does government communication start to influence strategy within this process? A respondent questioned:

Government communication does not have influence over policies; health is a dual responsibility at national and provincial level, so policies come from both, we only communicates information that is sent (R16).

Before the policy is implemented, there are processes of engagement and public consultation. It is only once that processes have been done that policies go into effect. I don't foresee any much effect that communication would have on policy (R15).

9.7.5 STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A VERIFYING TOOL

Strategic government communication should act as a verifying tool through issue management, boundary spanning, and environmental scanning. Some head of communication participant spoke in details about the use of strategic communication for monitoring. The respondents mentioned the value of strategic government communication as a verifying tool necessary to combat foul play and corruptions through transparency. This is only made possible by constant environmental monitoring, issue management and boundary spanning between the department and its public. This point is clarified:

The two streams of accountability in government are public (society) and legislation. The department reports to legislature through annual reports on how well the department is doing. Half of things in the annual report are not true. We are doing well in showing legislation that we are doing well, but we are failing in demonstrating successes to the publics (24).

The department like any other suffers from corruption. Strategic communication is able to reduce corruption by strengthening accountability that is only achievable by open communication. For example, by reporting on events and money spent could bring accountability to these events and the usage of taxpayers' money (R6).

Currently, government officials claim to have done such and such for a particular community, when that community knows nothing of the sort. We must use strategic communication to build accountability by tracking and reporting on government behaviour. Communication is a verifying tool – no monitoring, no pictures, and no documentation.

9.8 COMMUNICATION EVALUATIONS

In this section of the interview, government communicators were asked the following question as expressed below:

According to literature, strategic communication involves environmental scanning, compilation of information from the environment and communicating this to management. Management will henceforth consider arising information and make decisions, policies, and legislations in respond to the identified public issues. It becomes an iterative process. How do you see this process working in your department?

The respondents unanimously acknowledged the value of public consent in strategic decisions. It was stated that, “*strategic communicating is a consistent way of inspiring consent to an organisation's strategic direction by its targeted audience*”. The purpose of this section is to explore how feedback from communication evaluations is incorporated into strategic management processes in the department. The identified communication evaluations methods include “consultative forums, stakeholder meetings, and the media analysis”. Most respondents identified media monitoring, informal feedback from the public and evaluations from outreach programmes as key instruments of environmental scanning and issue management. These are explored next.

Communication evaluation from formal research (media analysis):

We do media monitoring for all the departments, encompassing print and electronic media - everyday.

We currently have an agency that checks news report (news clip). That is the only avenue we have so far. One thing we have not done is sending questioners to stakeholders to rate us.

We do statistic reports of social media every three months on the websites. It is working as proved by the increasing number of people who ‘like’ it. The reach itself is consistently expanding. In that sense, we know it is working; people are viewing it (Facebook page).

Communication evaluations from feedback emerging from stakeholders:

We acknowledge the input that come and whenever there is a complaint, an outcry or an appreciation, it is directed to the attention of the management structures of the department. The line functions managers might pick up a vibe in their various sections. We encourage them to notify us in order to avoid a negative public opinion (R20).

During radio shows, we were able to gauge public opinion – it is a good barrow meter. The problem is that it is not official because it is not documented.

Communication evaluation from outreach programmes (*Imbizos*):

It seems this is a preferred way of collecting data about the communities and their needs. Information about the community and its issues is gathered prior to *imbizos*. However, data is seldom captured and when documented, it is only used to draft speeches for the outreach programme to be hosted and it is seldom kept for future use. What is thus lacking is an impact research – after the communication episode (even after the outreach programme).

In our case, the difference is that politicians go out themselves, they get the data themselves.

*on a regular bases, government, MECs and the cabinet as a whole through the previous *imbizos* were able to meet members of the public were they are able to get the sentiment on the ground on whether the programs of government are effective enough or perhaps they need to be refined, and how.*

*People (communicators) go out to events and *imbizos*. For example, people who do videos will do a documentary of the area in which the event is going to take place, take pictures, and speak to the local people on the ground on the day of the *imbizo*. There will be an environmental analysis conducted by community development workers who are paid to collect data as part of project *Sukuma Sakhe*.*

*We do **research** at the place where we are visiting. We have a mini-scanning meeting- we usually put together a report.*

“It is not easy to do the evaluation after the event, but we do try our best”

Before imbizos we have environmental scanning to find out what are the problems and then come with answers for those problems

Communication evaluation from inter-departmental interaction:

Communicators do interact with various stakeholders. We also interact with our own counterparts in the province; they might pick up something to do with our own department, so they would share this information with us. We take the information back to the strategic meetings (R20).

Some respondents reported that there were no serious communication evaluations taking place:

“There are no avenues for evaluation, no formative research, and no monitoring. Even when 50 million Rand is used for communication, there are no evaluations. There are no tools to judge failures or successes. We never certain of success, we never know what to say or do because there is never prior research”.

“I wish I can say we have done it, we haven’t I must be honest with you. Evaluations are critical because that is how you gauge yourself if what you doing is right of wrong”.

“We don’t do any communication evaluations at this point”.

“We don’t collect data about the public, I am being honest”.

9.9 COMMUNICATION STRUCTURES

The issue of where the communication unit should be positioned in the department proved to be contentious one. “There are two lines of reporting. The MEC is the politician and the HOD is the administrator”. There is a contention between those who claim that the communication unit should be incorporated within the MEC office, and those who contend

that it is best served by the HOD office. Currently, “some communication units report to the office of the MEC while others report to the HOD”. The central dispute is that “the communication unit is an important tool at the hands of an elected representative because he must account to the public. Administratively however, politicians do not sign budgets. But programmes and policies come from the politicians (MEC) and those are the content of what is communicated”. *“What compounds the situation is the tension that comes with the division. These are two big equally important offices with powers. The unit must attend to both”*.

Some respondents maintain that the government communication unit should serve both interests and equally be responsive to both the MEC and the HOD office:

It is better to keep it somewhere in the middle. When communication is attached to only one side, it tends to ignore the needs of the other. For example if communication is attached to the MEC, the danger is that it will promote only what the MEC is doing, without emphasising the efforts of the department as a whole. However, if it is attached to the department (HOD), it loses touch with the MEC. The fact that it serves the interest of both becomes the check and balance (R21).

9.9.1 COMMUNICATION UNIT AS ALIGNED TO THE HOD

It was found that the structure of where the communication unit is positioned has a significant impact on how it functions. “The comtask report specifies that communication should report to the HOD and maintain a dotted line of report to the MEC office” (R19). Some respondents opine, *“I would prefer to report to the HOD. Currently we report to the office of the MEC”* (R13). Several reasons were offered to defend why government communication units should be aligned to the HOD office:

1. Government communication is strategic when incorporated within the HOD office: *“The HOD is an administrative office, so everything is strategically planned”* (R18).

“That way government communication could easily exert influence over the enterprise strategy” (R5).

2. Communication budgets

Communicators at lower levels feel that communication should align more strongly to the HOD because that is where money comes from.

3. Government communication must be stable. On the contrary, the MEC office is less stable:

The MEC is only deployed for a specific period; there could be a reshuffling, once this happens what happens to the staff? Therefore, some communicators change with the politicians, and some politicians may want to pick their own communication staff. This would make government communication a disjointed affair (R12).

4. Politically free government communication:

If communication is part of the MEC, it becomes susceptible to political influences and partisanship (R10).

The communication unit should be under the auspices of the HOD. We should be driving the programmes of the department; not selling the policies of the MEC (R17).

9.9.2 COMMUNICATION UNIT AS ALIGNED TO THE MEC

In contrast, the alternative group, mostly a cohort of senior government communicators, contend that the communication unit is best served by the MEC groups. They argue that according to democratic principles and accountability, government communication should be within the MEC office:

Government communication must be aligned to the office of the political head because he/she is the key spokesperson of the portfolio. It is on this basis that the majority of questions are directed to the office of the MEC as

he is the first person to communicate the position of the department. Government communication exist in the political environment, hence it centres on the political captain (R21).

The MEC groups understand communication better than the administrative side: The MEC group needs communication more. Remember that communication will make them look good out there. They utilise it more. So they will understand it better because they work with it more. They have an understanding of its value better than the administrative side (R15).

The chief communicator for the country is president Zuma, and for the province, it will be the premier Mkhize (now Mcunu). The communication unit is an important tool at the hands of an elected representative because he must account to the public (R29).

The first question about the operation of the department are direct at the political head it, makes practical sense to have communication right at the office of the political head whereas if it was at the office of the HOD there would be a delay in terms of responding to the external stakeholders with regard to the key information they inquire about the department (R21).

9.10 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION ROLES

9.10.1 ROLES, FUNCTIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS IN THE DEPARTMENT

9.10.1.1 Government communicators employment titles

In an ascending order, the following are an assortment of government communication employment titles found among the participants: Head of provincial government communication, head of communication (for various departments), acting head of communication, acting deputy manager, deputy manager: communication, deputy

manager: publications and graphic services, deputy director: media relations, deputy director: corporate communication, senior manager, senior manager: external communication, assistant manager, assistant manager: outreach programmes, assistant manager: corporate communication, assistant manager: internal and external communication, media liaison officer, senior communication officer, communication officers, webmaster and graphic designer.

9.10.1.2 Perception of role differentiation

Role differentiation is relatively acknowledged. The majority agree that differentiation exist between various levels of government communication positions: *“There is a vast difference; duties are not the same, for example a communication officer will go to the field, issues out information, create content, do their own research”*. Some noted that *‘communication officers do the technical work’*. But *“there is a lot of overlap, there are many technical things that we do as well”*. On the contrary, some respondents did not perceive role differentiation between the communication officers and a senior management position. For example, one respondent attest that *“now as I am senior management, there is no difference”*. Added another, *“In 2008, I became an assistant manager (media and citizen liaison). I was doing more or less the same thing that I am doing now”*.

9.10.1.3 Expert prescriber (Level D)

This section describes the role of government communicators with the title (HOD) head of communication in provincial government departments. Most heads of communications described the role of an expert prescriber which involves: (1) **integrated communication**, *“aligning different components of directorates in terms of branding so that they may communicate in one voice”*, (2) the **day to day management of the communication unit** in the department: *“I am responsible for the overall day to day activities of this section, including financial management- controlling the budget of the section, managing the team members, writing and editing articles.* (3) **Spokesperson for the department**, becoming the face of the department: *“My roles and responsibility as head of communication is to communicate on the behalf of the ministry and on the behalf of the department”*. A few

respondents (head of communication) noted their roles in **developing communication strategies**: *“my role is develop a communication strategy for the department, managing the directorate, handling media queries, producing educational material and managing the website”*. A head of communication eloquently described his role in government communication:

As an assistant director I was responsible for the communication strategy of the department which included elements of marketing, publication and branding. Now, currently as head of communication my role is to drive the strategic communication approach for the government - Including driving the entire communication strategy so that the department could fulfil its mandate as directed by the electorate. And ensuring that there is a two way process of communication between the people that mandated the government which is the citizens and government is able to account to the electorate on how they have performed including the challenges that they are encountering in terms of executing the mandate. My role is to ensure that we drive the communication strategy by exploiting a number of channels that are available – and by explaining the opportunities, the achievements, as well as the challenges.

Some head of communication noted limitations towards fully assuming a managerial position because of shortage of communication staff in the department. They claimed that managers are expected to perform technical duties at the expense of communication management roles. *“I am supposed to be managing communication staff but there is no one to manage, so I end up doing everything. Between strategizing, implementation and the technical of communication, there is no capacity to do anything more”*. Section 9.10.1.3 demonstrates that as much as head of communication managers describe strategic management functions demarcated in the expert prescriber role, they also identified many assemblages of technical roles in media relations.

9.10.1.4 Problem solving process facilitator (Level C)

A number of respondents mentioned that their roles entailed “providing communication support to the head of department, the MEC, and other business unit”. Some also

mentioned, providing communication support to either, the MEC, other business units or the department. This was the only statement given that seemed befitting to the problem solving process facilitator. However, the construct: 'providing communication support' was never defined or operationalized despite the efforts of the researcher to probe further. A close second was 'supporting other business sectors in terms of communication'. However, after probing, this in many instances meant 'branding, 'events management' and 'media relations' – which are not a true reflection of the problem solving process facilitator. An advisory role could perhaps fall in the problem solving process facilitator. This role was only mentioned in a few instances: *"We are experts in communication and we understand the dynamics of the media so it is our responsibility to advise principals on what is and should not be done, even how to do it. We give them advice on how to get maximum coverage in the media. There was a decision that we should educate the principals on the dynamics of the media"*.

9.10.1.5 Communication facilitator (Level B)/ acceptance legitimizer/ the town crier

The communication facilitator seemed to be a dominant role within the mid-managers and the communication officers. Some participants made the point that our roles as government communicators was "creating the media platform for the MEC and HOD to communicate with the public".

"Government communicators are supposed to be conduits of information, setting the stage for politicians to communicate. However, communicators are getting more popular than the actual politician is. The main communicator for the department is the MEC and the HOD. They should be the faces of the department, not the communicator.

The communication practitioners must retain an impartial position. Their role is to provide a professional support to a political incumbent responsible to communicate a wide range of policy positions from the provincial or national government.

There are different schools of thoughts among the interviewees regarding this very aspect. There are those that see communication as a go between i.e. communicating on the behalf of politicians, and there are those that see themselves mainly as conduits, merely creating a space for politicians to speak or to simply transfer the message of the politician, themselves removed from the process, thus absolutely taking no ownership or questioning what is said.

9.10.1.6 The steward conductor (level C)

The steward conductor describes a role were communication practitioners are most concerned with matters of persuasion, image management and publicity. Broom and Smith (1979) did not account for this role. A significantly large number of practitioners mentioned their role to included ‘branding’, ‘events management’, ‘outreach programmes’, ‘advertising’ and ‘being the face of the department’, ‘promoting government’, ‘marketing the department’ and ‘marketing government service’:

In this sector, I am responsible for marketing the department. We do branding in terms of image for visual unity. Outside the department, branding is related to outreach program and events. When they go out, I must make sure the event looks branded to show that government is there.

We interact with people during this outreach programmes. We educate people about the programmes. My responsibility involves mostly planning and organising events, creating a positive profile for the MEC, supporting other business sectors, exhibitions and putting together branding.

I specialise in outreach programmes. My responsibility involves planning and organising events, creating a positive profile for the MEC, supporting other business sectors, exhibitions and putting together branding.

I am responsible for exhibitions if we have departmental events. We also get invitations from the office of the premier and legislature if they are having events and izimbizo – taking parliament to the people.

I am responsible for corporate identity and for responding to on-going media inquiries, essentially representing the department.

As communication officers, our role is to promote the HOD and the MEC and the programmes of the department. So we perform different roles in web-management, events management, branding and such.

Events managements are the main thing involved in providing communication support to the head of department, the MEC, and other business unit.

9.10.1.7 Media relations (Level B)

Media relations practitioners specialise in external communication, information production, and dissemination. This role falls largely (but not always) on the technical side of communication roles.

In government communication, the role of the media relations officer, which is a technical function as level B, entails the following roles: To “ensure coverage of different activities of the directorate’. In media relations, the role of as a communication officer is media monitoring, media liaison, updating the websites, and preparing articles, press releases and newsletters for publication. For example, “when the MEC is attending an event, we go there and write the story”. “To profile the work of the department and to profile the MEC to the media”, “Once a week we submit an article to *Simama*”. On the technical side of media relations, one respondent describes his role in government media relation:

“I have to handle media queries on behalf of the MEC, solicit his respond, and then report back to the media. I have to issue press statements and speechwriting for the MEC. I am responsible to compile articles to semama the department”.

Other roles include: advertising, media buying, internal communication, video production and photograph, drafting press release, writing stories, graphic

design, publications, writing articles, technical roles, video creation, media monitoring.

9.10.1.8 Media relations (Level C)

Media relation roles at level C are slightly different that those expressed in level B of a technical orientation. Media relations in level C is more strategic in drafting media strategy and thus demand more planning for example in media buying and counselling the dominate coalition on handling the media. However, very few referred to this role except for media relations practitioners at senior management and directorate levels.

9.10.1.9 Communication liaison / the traffic manager

The communication liaison officer specialises in facilitating communication between management and key publics, either through traditional mediate channels or through new media technologies. This role is essentially about information diffusion. Government communicators who mentioned their roles in social networking, web-management, and internal communication fitted this role precisely. In **Social networking**: *“I update social media daily. Messages from the outside come straight to me and I forward them to the relevant section.* In **web-management**: *“I am responsible for updating the websites as a communication officer and writing stories for the department. I am responsible for **internal communication** by sending e-mails to all staff”. I make sure that internal staffs are informed and aware of the programmes that are happening. My task is to ensure that the internal public communicates with itself and to direct information from environment to the relevant clusters.*

9.11 THE OVERALL PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

9.11.1 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION (DEFINITION)

In this section, practitioners were asked to define their own understanding of what government communication is and to identify the overall purpose of government communication. One solid definition from a participant reads:

“Government communication is a kind of a systematic way of expressing, in different forms, the policy, the strategies as well as the programmes which the government designs to meet the expectations of the public. So communication as an instrument provides a kind of a two-way system where the government announces its policy positions and in return members of the public are able to respond, either appreciating or expressing their discontent about those policies and programmes designed by government”.

Another participant was more concerned about e-governance given his role in the social media and website management:

“To me e-governance is making government accessible to all individuals within the community, state, province and country as a whole by using technology as a stepping stone towards achieving the end result of government and making life easier by bringing government services to people’s computer screens”.

What is the purpose of government communication? This was an open-ended question that simply asked *‘what do you think is the main role or purpose of government communication?’* Some roles mentioned were: information diffusion, image building, promoting or marketing of programmes, protecting government and advising principals on communication issues. It was determined which role is deemed imperative by counting the number of people who acknowledged or mentioned each role. “Promoting government services” was mentioned the most and it seemed to be the foundational role underpinning a variety of many other roles such as: information diffusion in order to market government services, events management to promote government services, or media relations to promote government services and image management or branding to promote government services. On the other hand, ‘communicating with the public’ and ‘managing stakeholders’ were the least mentioned roles.

According to government communicators employed at the KwaZulu Natal provincial government, the following is a top ten (10) list of important purposes of government communication. The list is presented in a descending order, starting with the most

mentioned purpose towards the least mentioned purpose. (1) promoting government services through branding, identity management and events management, (2) information diffusion, (3) media relations, (4) two-way communication and feedback, (5) educating the public about government and its services, (6) integrated communication, (7) internal communication, (8) stakeholder management, (9) advising management on communication issues, (10) strategic government communication as a verifying tool. Each is discussed next from section 9.11.2 to section 9.11.11.

9.11.2 PROMOTING GOVERNMENT SERVICES THROUGH BRANDING, IDENTITY MANAGEMENT AND EVENTS MANAGEMENT:

From this data, it seems that government communication is moving from information diffusion to image management. Government communication is not seen so much as 'persuasion' but rather as 'promotion'. The data shows a move from public information model towards an asymmetrical model.

The following will be presented in respondents own words to demonstrate the importance placed on image and identity management: "In government, branding is important". "The role of government communication is to make people aware of government". Government communication is about the positive image of the government we serve" because "communication has an impact to public perception. Government communication serves to show that government is doing well. *But this good is not always emphasised*". "We need to market our services and our programmes to ensure people know what services we render and what assistance we provide. We have an obligation to ensure that the public is informed of our services". "In order to project the image of the department, we need more image management; we do that through publications, branding material, flyers and everything". "In essence our aim is to promote government programmes, create accessibility to the publics; these are our stakeholders such as municipalities, districts, and traditional leaders".

"As communication officers, our role is to promote the HOD and the MEC and the programmes of the department". "As a communicator, I understand the fact that it boils

down to image building, sometime just creating a good image for a department goes a long way. You could have a department that does not function well, but if you promote it well, people think the best of you. I could say here in this department, we do the work and we deliver, but promoting it is not really a priority, and that is the problem”. “I have got basic survival information of what is required of me in terms of how to promote market and defend the department when required”. Event management in outreach programmes and branding are seen as supportive activities or tactics towards image management, identity management, and promotion of government services. Events management in outreach programmes will be discussed in further details on section 9.13.

9.11.3 INFORMATION DIFFUSION

Information diffusion ranked second in the list of vital purposes of government communication. Government communication is about informing the public about the programmes of the department. The purpose is to make sure that the public understand what government does and what services are available. “It defies the very purpose of offering good services if people are oblivious to them”. “The objective is to disseminate information to stakeholders; the public, religious groups, business, NGOs, media and other departments”. “Stakeholders must be kept informed about the department. People need to know what government is doing”. “This demonstrates brevity in taking issues to the public and opening ourselves to public scrutiny”.

9.11.4 MEDIA RELATIONS

Media liaison is one of the most fundamental purposes of government communication identified. A full section on government media relations is addressed in section 9.15. Media relations involves “attracting positive media coverage and responding to media enquiries”. Communicators are supposed to be carriers of information through the media, for that reason, the approach should be about accommodating the media.

9.11.5 TWO-WAY COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Feedback and two-way communication are essential for the values of symmetrical communication to be realised. The majority of the respondents acknowledged the eminence of feedback in strategic communication. However, the degree to which this realisation translates into practice is beyond the scope of this study. Most practitioners observed that communication should be a two way process: “*we listen as much as we communicate*”. “*It is not just listening. Project sukuma sakhe is calling society into action*”. “*As much as we communicate with the public, we need to get feedback from them*”. “*We must not block the external views (feedback) because it is necessary to make government improve its own systems. Only one person identified a relationship management role: “To facilitate the good relationship between the office of the MEC and the public”.*

9.11.6 EDUCATING THE PUBLIC ABOUT GOVERNMENT AND ITS SERVICES

The role of educating the public is congruent to the role of information diffusion. However, the purpose here is not only to disseminate information, but also to educate the public about the public good. Information diffusion, in its purest form, concentrates on one-way flow of information from the perspective and the self-interest of the communicator. On the contrary, information dissemination for educational purpose (social marketing) largely concentrates on the self-interest of the public by communicating for social change and community development. “*We educate people about the programmes, voting right, human rights, water retention, social grants, HiV/Aids, disaster management, and other social issues.* (R19).

9.11.7 INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

A significant number of participants mentioned the purpose of government communication as one of ‘*providing information support to other business units (directorates)*’. This is one of the least identified roles in government communication literature. This role bears similarity to ‘internal communication’. However, this role is explained to be beyond simple information diffusion to internal publics, but an alignment, linkage and synchronising of

communication between the directorates; assisting each directorate to communicate with each other and with its specific stakeholder. For example, one communication manager mentions that the central purpose of the communication unit in government departments is *“aligning different components of directorates in terms of branding so that they communicate in one voice and one identity”*.

9.11.8 MANAGING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

There was very limited data on internal government communication as many respondents stated that this role is now incorporated and managed by the intranet. *“I do internal communication through the e-mail folder that links to all staff. The information will be posted to the website (intranet) as well.*

9.11.9 STAKEHOLDER MANAGEMENT

According to a few participants, the purpose of government communication is to *“inform stakeholders about activities of government”* and *“provide a conducive environment for stakeholders to play their role”*. For example, one respondent illustrates that the KZN provincial government cultivates an effective and efficient communication climate with its external stakeholders. Government has a huge bank of stakeholders like the media, NGOs, community leaders, the public and tertiary institutions, just to mention just a few. Therefore, government communicators are obliged to keep all these stakeholders informed and attended to:

*As a communicator, I have so many clients. I have **internal and external clients** and I have to provide a service to them. I have the **MEC**, who needs to be provided with research information and media services (inquiries and opportunities to respond) she must have unmediated contact with the public. The second part is the **HOD** who will be assisted with similar services. Thirdly, there are line functions and business units (**directorates**) within the department and they need different services such as branding, media liaison and events management. **The media** is a client as well that must be served. Then there are other external clients that are*

specific to the department (**specialised stakeholders**). Included here are **the public R9**).

9.11.10 ADVISING MANAGEMENT OF COMMUNICATION ISSUES

To a lesser extent, an advisory role in government communication was recognised. Some practitioners mentioned that “government communicators must play an advisory role”. “As communicators, we give them advice”. A fraction of practitioners mentioned that they give advice to the dominant coalition about media relations: “you give advice to your principals and to dispel the notion that the media is not out to expose them”. “The media is hostile; we need to advice government to be careful”. On the contrary, other practitioners claimed that “the role of communication as advisory is underestimated (disregarded)”. “We have a problem because politicians think they know everything”.

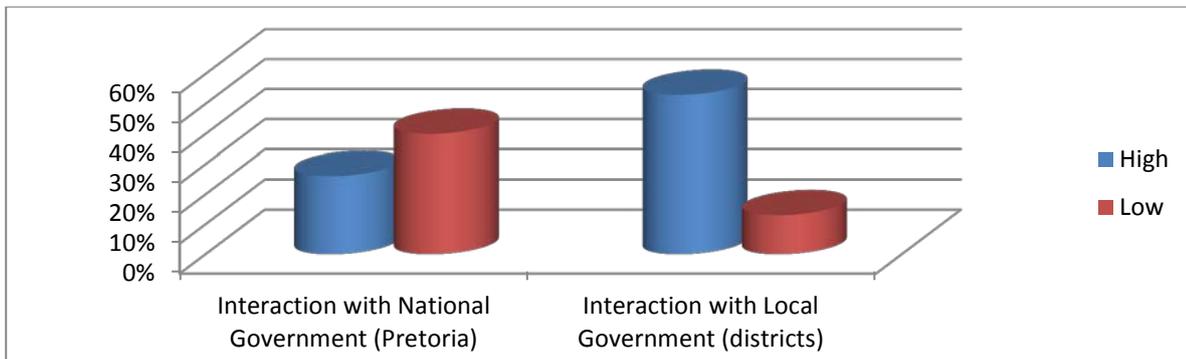
9.11.11 STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A VERIFYING TOOL

Two heads of department, spoke in details about the purpose of strategic government communication in monitoring. This role reinforces the obligation of government communication in creating transparency, building accountability and combating corruption. “Communication is the first and important tool to combat corruption – because transparency builds accountability and transparency is only achievable through open communication”.

9.12 EFFECTS OF CENTRALISATION

Figure 9: Survey data: centralisation

		HIGH	LOW
Centralisation	Rate the frequency in which you interact with the central government department in Pretoria?	26%	40%
	Rate the frequency in which you interact with the districts?	53%	13%



The central purpose of this section was to identify the interrelation between the three levels of the South African government three-tier system. Because the provincial government is at the centre, it was essential to establish its interaction with the other levels of government. The two questions that guided this section are ‘*how often do you interact with your central government departments in Pretoria*’ (national government) and ‘*how often do you interact with local government (municipalities and regional offices)*’. The data results from the survey indicate a high interaction with the national government in Pretoria and a low interaction with local government in districts. Liaison with local government is difficult because there are scarcely any government communicators deployed in districts so communication to districts is usually addressed to administrative and political personnel.

Several respondents reported a functional working relationship with the national department of the ministry: “*We liaise with them. We have a common interest*”. The national ministry liaises with the provincial government department in terms of policies. The policies and some programmes come from above which then becomes the responsibility of the provincial government to disseminate such policies to local government and municipalities: “*It is a necessary relationship. You find that there are national programmes that must be implemented in provinces*”. However, some respondents identified challenges in this relationship with regard to poor understanding of the provincial environment by the central ministry department in Pretoria:

“*One of the challenges is that you find that the national ministry do not understand the provincial dynamics. National will come with ideas, 12345; these are projects that should be done and how. They come with their own ideologies. We are then*

obliged to implement certain projects that are not custom-made for the province. So there are challenges in that regard and it is a common practice. However, we do engage and try making them understand that these are the provincial dynamics and we rather implement things in an alternative way”.

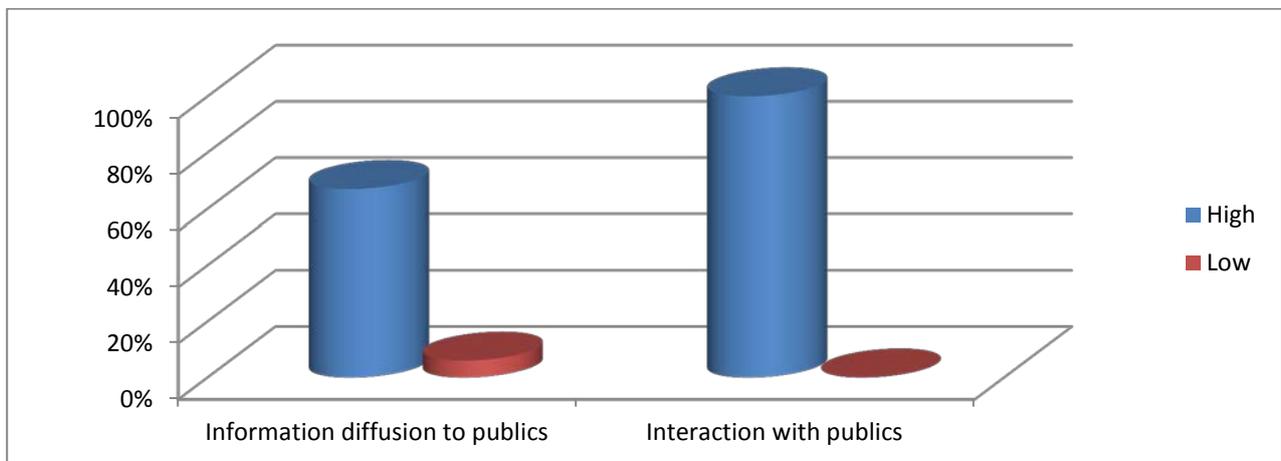
Another challenge identified was the issues of not being informed of events beforehand. The provincial department would be rushed to accommodate and deliver communication support to the central national office, from Pretoria, that is hosting an event in the province. The grievance was that such “*information is sometimes not communicated on time and then the provincial office would have to rush to organise the media, stakeholders, branding and other logistics for the events*”. The outcome is that government communication becomes reactive and unplanned or un-strategized.

9.13 OUTREACH PROGRAMMES AND EVENTS MANAGEMENT

This section discusses the process of promoting government services through branding, identity management and events management.

Figure 10: survey data – relations with the public

		HIGH	LOW
Relationships with Primary Publics	Rate the level of information diffusion to publics?	67%	6%
	Rate the level of interaction with publics?	100%	0%



The communication section of each department is responsible for outreach and events management for all business units and directorates in the department. *Imbizos* are open to the public. Outreach programmes are about “*taking parliament to the public*”. Events and outreach programmes are done on a regular basis. There are always events happening. “*Most of the time we are out on events*” (R8). These are called community outreach programmes. One respondent defined community outreach as “*any activity where specifically government gets in touch with the community and brings resources to them, seeks feedback and reacts to feedback*”.

Apparently the word *imbizo* has fallen out of favour. *Imbizos* no longer take place, they are discontinued in KZN or they happen under a different name. “*They are called project sukuma sakhe now. The practice is however the same whereby government, represented by different departments, goes out to the public to offer services to the community*” (R18).

“Imbizos do happen, but under a different name, we now call them project Sukuma-Sakhe under the auspices of the office of the premier where mainly we target areas that are behind in terms of development. The cabinet as whole would interact with members of the public. It is a one stop shop approach, where each portfolio comes to listen to public demands”.

9.13.1 PROJECT SUKUMA SAKHE

The following comments express the role and purposes of project *Sukuma Sakhe* (rise and build) in KwaZulu Natal:

At this moment in time, we play a critical role as communication because through the sukumasakhe programme, we visit various communities and identify the challenges within those communities. Grievances are recorded in order to ascertain progress on issues identified.

For example in KwaZulu Natal, on a regular bases, government, MECs and the cabinet as a whole are able to meet members of the public to get the sentiments on

the ground, solicit feedback from the public which then influences strategic as well as the policy positions.

9.13.2 INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION FOR OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

When the premier organises an imbizo, all departments must be present: *“When there are imbizos, we call SASA for grants, Home Affairs for identity documents (ID), Health for HIV testing. We are there the whole day. A lot of people come to imbizos, like 5000 people”* (R3). *Imbizos* provide a one stop shop where all government programmes are provided simultaneously. Not only a single department is profiled, we all fall under the auspices of the office of the premier for that purpose. When we take parliament to the people, each and every department’s corporate identity is absorbed by those *imbizos*”.

9.13.3 CRITERIA FOR DECIDING AREAS FOR OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

The two questions asked in this section were as follows: *Who sets the agenda for outreach programmes? What is the criterion on deciding which areas to visit?* From these question, respondents provided a number of reasons and criterions used to decide upon the times and areas visited for outreach programmes, imbizo or project sukama sakhe. Some of these reasons are identified below:

Very few practitioners noted that *“environmental scanning earmarks a certain area or region to visit”* (CN). The majority however declared that outreach programmes depended on the issue of the month like women’s month, youth month and special days: *“Our work is dynamic so it depends on what is happening, on the theme of that month or the legislation theme”*.

Every department has a calendar of events. This makes planning easier because communicators are able to plan media and branding ahead of time: *“We have an annual calendar that directs where the MEC is going. The whole year we know what is happening but this is subject to changes. The diary of the MEC and the cabinet diary will influence our responsibilities”*. However, there are many occasion where outreach programmes are

carried out on an ad-hock bases. This may happen when and if the central office is coming or if the president is visiting an area. The president may request the department to attend the event. Sometimes, events are decided upon by cabinet. Others are selected by directorates or business units within the government department. *‘We get approached by business units to plan an event after they have identified the need area’*. Sometimes, but rarely the communication unit identifies an outreach programme.

Some respondents noted that *‘it is the office of the premier that drives outreach programmers of the province. If there are specific programmes that the department is supposed to run, that is done in liaison with the office of the premier’*. On the other hand, some respondents declared that the areas selected for outreach programmes are occasionally politically motivated; *‘Political pressure determines where we communicate, it as blatant as to which district we communicate’*. In addition, a few respondents claimed that *‘all imbizo’s are made at black communities’* (R6).

9.13.4 PROCEDURES AND RESEARCH PRIOR IMBIZOS

If the department decides on a specific event, an events committee is created. The communication unit also sits on it, because *‘there is no event without communication’*. Team leaders would brief everyone (communication staff) about key issues of the community. In some departments, a strategy document is compiled as part of the planning committee which will be chaired by a person tasked to organise the event: *‘We draft a strategy which will consist of the aim and objective for the particular events, there will be an environmental analysis collected from community development workers (DCW). District communicators become part of the planning meetings for events taking place in their districts.’*

Government communicators write a letter asking for the date in which government could visit the community. Before the visit, government communicators engage leaders of the community to explain the purpose of the event (*imbizo*). *‘Formal visits are conducted to the area where they meet the elders of the community, councillors and inform them that the premier or the MEC of a particular department is coming’*. Team leaders will brief

everyone including communication staff about key issues of the community. The speech of the premier will be released to the press.

According to the respondents, prior research is conducted in order to better understand the dynamics of the area visited and to understand the key issues of the area. This information is essential in integrated communication as needed in *Project Sukuma Sakhe*. In understanding the key issues of the area, departments responsible for the identified issues in the community are invited to offer services and to redress those issues. However, this pre-scanning is not always benevolent as much of its data is designed to protect the MEC and the government departments visiting the community in the form of a pre-emptive information strike. The information is used to guide the speech of the MEC.

“When we go to outreach events, we go for the scanning purposes first, to do mini consultations, to understand the politics of the place – understand who is who, how they feel about the department, or how they feel about government in general and all issues they might have as a community. So that when the MEC goes there, he knows what kind of people he will be dealing with and what issues concern them. The speech of the MEC is informed by this pre-scanning episode (the information is used to draft the MEC speech). It is a pre-emptive strike so that the community does not pound the MEC on issues that does not concern his department. He must just mention that something is being done. Then he can go on with his business like opening a school or something” (R22).

9.13.5 ROLE OF COMMUNICATORS IN OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

Communication practitioners have many roles to play during outreach programmes and *imbizos*. *“People (communicators) go out to events and imbizos. For example, people who do videos will do a documentary of the area in which the event is going to take place, take pictures, and speak to the local people on the ground on the day of the imbizo” (R3).*

Government communicators are responsible for branding in those events: *“I am responsible for exhibitions, branding and taking photographs”*. *“We activate media, do a*

media alert, and we then have to take all those programmes, promote them and make them known by the public”.

The role of social media in managing outreach programmes was described: *“If there is an event you post it, you don’t want only the older guys, you want the young guys to be part of those imbizos. Users can also interact, discussing where the outreach programme is going to be and what time. In Facebook, you can also put in the venue and the time so people can make themselves available to attend”.*

9.13.6 CHALLENGES OF OUTREACH PROGRAMMES

Provincial government communicators are unable to attend all government related events taking place in districts, so they rely on district communicators to send them information and images that can be published in the departmental website and other departmental and media publications. This process is a challenge because there are often no dedicated communicators in districts to perform this role: *“Because districts do not always have communication officers, we don’t know what is happening there. We are not able to attend every event. They must send photos and information”.* Another challenge arises when *“districts have to handle events and put in the branding, (because) sometimes and in most cases, they lose these branding in districts and new ones must be bought to replace”.*

Several respondents complained that the communication unit does not have a say on events and outreach management in terms of deciding where and when and why outreach programmes take place: *“The agenda of where we going is set up there. We don’t speak to that. We are only called when the plenary session is on board, that is when communication is invited. From communication we want abcd, they don’t ask us what we can offer; they tell us what they want”.*

Some respondents referred to the challenge involved in managing outreach programmes. Generally, they complained of poor planning of these outreaches programmes, particularly that information is communicated late. *“We don’t plan events, it is difficult because some people don’t tell you on time – they just tell you that we are in Newcastle and we don’t see*

media here". "If things were better planned, we wouldn't be in crisis mode all the time. The quality of our work would be better". At the end of the day, the communication department looks incompetent". Another issue emerging from the data is that there are limited post evaluations or impact evaluations of outreach programmes after they are conducted.

9.14 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION: ADVOCACY, INFORMATION DIFFUSION OR BOUNDARY SPANNING?

On the question, "to what extent is government communication advocacy, information diffusion, or boundary spanning? Responses were categories into three groups, one that projected government communication as both advocacy and boundary spanning (liaison), another group that claimed that government communication should mainly be advocacy and the last group, that identified other values beyond advocacy and boundary spanning.

A majority of interviewees responded that government communication should be both advocacy and boundary spanning (liaison): respondents illustrate this position: "we are caught between the two, we do a lot of advocacy and we do also boundary spanning". "Government communication is both liaison and advocacy because, before imbizos, we have environmental scanning to find out what are the problems and then come up with solutions to those problems". "I think it should be in-between to make sure that both parties are actually served". "It's a bit of both; the nature of life detects the need of both". It was suggested that "government communication is not supposed to be about the department only, because we also interact with the community. We not supposed to just protect the department. "We also have to look at the needs of the community". In that regard, the value of external feedback in government communication was advanced.

Another group argued that "government communication should always advocate for government". For instance, one participant illustrates this point: "you must always speak positive about them. So basically you can't speak negative, you must attempt to protect your political leader".

Only one person mentioned that government communication should purely be liaison, with no element of advocacy in it. The rest of the participants identified the importance of advocacy in government communication. *“Government communication must be in between the government and the community”*. Another participant emphasised that government communication should mainly be “information dissemination”. On the contrary, some participants argued that government communication in a developmental state like South Africa should be about ‘*development communication*’, not advocacy or boundary spanning: *“we as government of the day we are employed as developmental communication; we inform the public about the programme and projects that are available to assist communities”*. It should be developmental communication, not advocacy, something in between.

9.15 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AND MEDIA RELATIONS

Figure 11 and figure 12 demonstrate the survey data regarding various media relation activities on which government communicators dominantly engage.

Question: *how frequently do you engage in the following media relations’ activity?*

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = “never engage in activity” and 5= “engage in activity daily”.

Figure 11: Survey data- media relation activities (roles)

	Never engage in activity	Rarely engage	Engage sometimes	Usually engage	Engage in activity daily
Responding to media inquiries	46%	13%	13%	6%	13%
Contribute to/edit Website	20%	20%	13%	20%	20%
Media release	40%	13%	13%	6%	20%
Track media clips	26%	13%	6%	20%	26%
Social Network fb, Twitter...	26%	20%	20%	13%	13%
Brochures	65%	13%	20%	6%	46%
Fliers	20%		26%	0	46%
Pitch stories to media	33%	20%	20%	13%	13%
Newsletters	20%	13%	20%	13%	26%
Media interviews	46%	13%	26%	6%	6%
Strategic plans	33%	6%	40%	0	13%
Fact sheet	46%	6%	20%	20%	65

Guides	46%	20%	33%	6%	0
Train leadership for interviews	53%	26%	1%	13%	0
Crisis communication plans	26%	26%	20%	13%	6%
Print advertising	13%	6%	33%	0	40%
Community meetings	13%	6%	13%	13%	46%
Primary research	53%	13%	13%	0	13%
Radio or TV	46%	6%	13%	13%	13%
News conference	33%	13%	46%	0	0
Broadcast advertising	33%	0	26%	6%	20%
Blog	66%	6%	13%	0	6%

9.15.1 HIGH MEDIA SCRUTINY

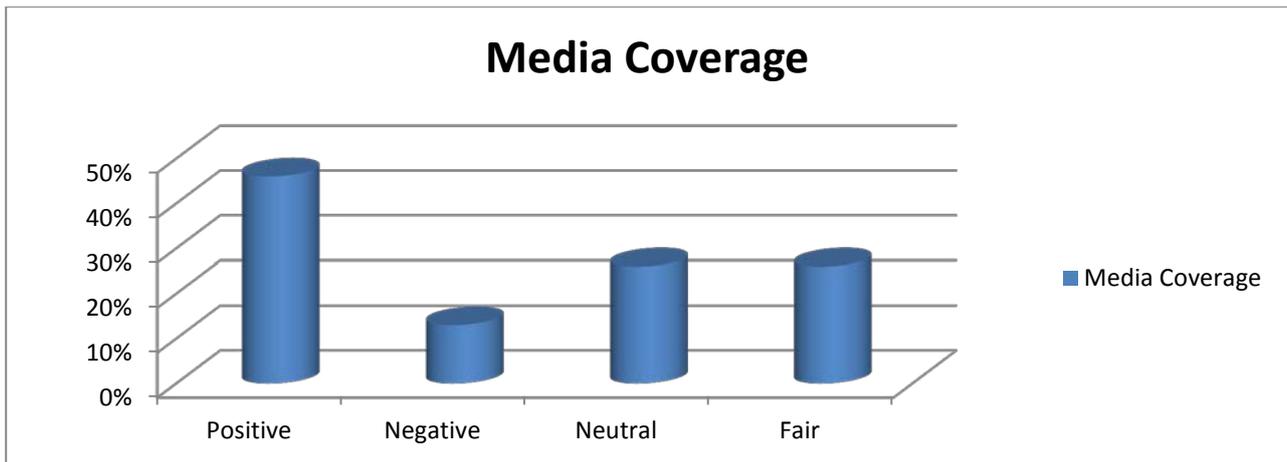
Some participants observed that the media treated the public and the private sector differently. There was a strong consensus that the government sector was characterised by high media and public scrutiny. Some respondents observed that media does not respond in the same way: *“For the fact that we work in the public sectors, every member of the public has an interest, there is higher media scrutiny in education because government uses tax payers’ money. Therefore, they (citizens) have the right to know what you doing with their money”* (R7). Another participant remarks that *“maybe the media feels they have rights to do so and they do take any government communication as propaganda”* (R18). *“Government is the driver of news, for example, in December, when government shuts down, there is no news”* (R20).

9.15.2 NEGATIVE COVERAGE

Figure 12: Survey data- perceptions on tone of media coverage

How would you rate the level of coverage?

Media coverage evaluation	Positive	46%
	Negative	13%
	Neutral	26%
	Fair	26%



Three groups emerged among the participants on perceptions regarding the tone of media coverage of government in general and their own departments in particular. The large majority perceived media coverage of government to be quiet negative. The remaining two groups seemed equal in weight. One group saw media coverage as neither positive nor negative, but neutral depending on the story at hand. The other group reported that media coverage were largely positive of their department and of government at large.

A significantly large majority reported that media coverage was inherently negative of government and its various departments: *“When media realises that among the stakeholders, there is one who is not happy. They will start reporting on the conflict that is not even there”* (R9). Respondents commented that when it comes to government, the media is crisis driven and primarily inclined towards parachute journalism while predominated by the negatives: *“Media is more interested in conflict and the negative and this is the reason they (government) came up with Simama as a form of communication to the public”*. (R21) *“The media comes because they want to write a story. They are crisis driven”* (R2). *“The nature of coverage is criticism of government. We have an antagonistic press which means we have to advice government to be careful”*.

Because of the perceived media negativity, most government communicators worry of misquotation and misrepresentation by the media:

As a spokesperson, you have to be careful of what you say because it can be turned against you. Government communicators are worried of being misquoted

and misrepresented in the media. Sometimes it is better not to say anything at all out of fear of being quoted out of context. (R22)

Others argued that the media approaches government with its own defined agenda and all responses from the government communicators will be manipulated or constructed to portray the agenda or angle of the media: *“The media want to communicate what they want to communicate, even if you befriend them. They drive their own news agenda” (R4).* *“Reporters don’t give a balanced story” (R2).*

A few respondents pointed out that media coverage was negative because it was often shallow, personified, and inclined towards the human interest genre. Some government communicators alleged that the media seem to cover events and people rather than issues and processes. *“Currently what is covered is what seems to be scandalous. For example, a headline would say, a woman has been chased away from hospital with a child in her uterus, but there is an educational value behind this story that the media will not explore” (R1).* The way media operates, they report on the story; their focus is to get the story published. Most of the stories are event based, in most cases; they do this without a background story”. (R15)

Another group of participants saw media coverage as neither positive nor negative, whilst this was a small group. *“Media coverage is both positive and negative” (R26).* The media is our critical tool for accountability. They are not biased against government in my perspective. They provide service to the government (R6). When some of us sit in management, we actually highlight to them that the media is not always negative, they can only become negative if they do not get information (playing an advisory role) (R20).

The other group perceive media coverage as positive towards their department and to government in general. A head of a government department had boasted, *“we are enjoying the positive coverage of the media because when we provide information” (R21).* A small number believed that media coverage of government was positive towards developmental issues. As long as the issue was not political a positive or neutral coverage is likely: *“There are positive stories on the government on issues that are not too political.*

There are times (rightly so) when they have to start a conversation. But there are times where media has to stir a dialog to get the public talking. I can't say it is negative or positive, it is fruitful. But, media usually reports at a time when we haven't caught up with the strategy or the solution" (R9).

9.15.3 MEDIA UNDERSTANDING OF THE INTRICACIES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The question that guided this section was, “*do you feel that media understands the complexities of your department?*”? Only a few participants responded that the media understood the complexities of their department and the intricacies of government as a whole. A large majority claimed that the media do not understand the complexities of their department and did not understand the intricacies of government itself.

It was stated that the media often do not understand the processes and procedures of government. The media misconstrue government processes underlining when and how media issues are commented upon and by whom in government those issues are to be directed. The perception of several government communicators is that media seem oblivious to the consultative nature of information provision that accompanies each media enquiry about government. For example, there are legal constraints regarding whether or not certain information can be released: “*We have an obligation of patient confidentiality, and as such, we are not able to release certain information at certain times. Unfortunately, without information, the media merely speculates on issues*” (15).

You may find that a journalist does not understand how government communication works. They may give you a question and expect to get responses now, and they will be telling you about their deadlines, I always tell them that I wish I could help you. I do not want to be part of a disaster because I will help you meet the deadline by giving you wrong information. So please bear with me when I say we need to research. The information will be coming. In most cases, they will be frustrated with you. However, as they grow, they understand, a seasoned journalist will tell you ahead of time that they are doing a story on you so that you can prepare on time.

The media in general does not understand the key issues and complexity of government. The two reasons perceived as primary reasons for poor understanding of government by the media are commercialisation of the media and the juniorisation of the newsroom:

It is juniorisation of the newsroom. These young journalists do not fully understand key issues. They don't even stay long enough in one beat to develop a specialisation on it. Journalists do not understand the difference between legislature and cabinet. Media do not understand the structure of government. They should educate themselves about the fields they are dealing with. However, we facilitate access through our openness. It is in the interest of government for the media to understand the nature of government (R1).

The media does understand the procedures, but soft news does not sell, that's number one. Second, is the way the media is structured. When you have journalists particularly freelancers who wants to get the story first (to sell to different newspapers), they want responses quickly. They do not have time to wait.

I think they (media) understand, but they work under pressure so they do not have time to wait. They (media) also think that if they give you more time, then you will have time to cook/spin the story to protect the image of the department. There is distrust between the media and government (R9).

Another reason given for poor understanding of government or departmental issues by the media is a lack of beat reporters who would remain in the field long enough to understand its intricacies. Even when government departments initiate educational seminars or workshops, it is always different reporters in attendance. There is little progression: *"We don't have journalist who are interested in health. They don't stay in the area of this specialisation; they lose interest quickly before they learn the technicalities and the terminology of health communication"* (R1). *"I do not think the media understands the complexities of government except for political reporters. However, they are not even interested. For them, if it bleeds it leads – that is the mantra in journalism"* (R20).

Among the participants, there is also a perception that some portfolios are more difficult than others and consequently the media will struggle with them differently: *“I can assure you, health is the most difficult department. I have been a government communicator for 15 years, and I have worked in a variety of departments, but I can assure you that health is the most difficult and the most complex. Issues of health are complex”*. (R15) The media does not understand health issues. The media does not have a clear understanding of the complexities (R16).

Some respondents commented that media journalists think that government communication is purely media relations so they expect government communicators to be constantly available and to drop everything in order to attend to their queries. *“They (media) think communication is only media relations. If I do not comment, they think I am not doing my job. They think there is nothing else I am doing”* (R6). *“In government communication, there is a lot more being done beside media relations, such as events management, research, branding, feature writing, internal communication and so on... media relations is just one of the aspects we do”* (R18).

The other reason behind poor understanding of government issues, structures and intricacies is due to the practice in which government-media workshops and other initiatives are reserved for senior media workers like editors and sub-editors, people who are not writers of government stories, instead of the normal day-to-day journalist who is responsible for the actual writing of the story: *“People like editors understand because they attend conferences and seminars where the department will inform the media of policies and legislations of the department, but the ordinary journalist and freelancers who are chasing the story don’t understand. They want something that they can see, like hard news!”* (R9). Only four out of thirty participants responded that media actually understood the intricacies of government and their individual departments.

9.15.4 TRAINING MEDIA ABOUT GOVERNMENT ISSUES, STRUCTURES AND PROCEDURES

Some former journalist reported that they did not understand the complexities of government when they were still practicing as journalists. They advised that media liaison officers of each government department should do more to achieve a better understanding of government by the media sector. Several respondents recommended that once a month each department should organise briefing sessions with key media. Nonetheless, such initiatives often failed due to time constraints from both the media and the government side.

There is a consideration that government has the responsibility to educate the media about issues of each ministerial department: *“And government is starting to do that. For instance, there is a workshop at Nkosi Albert Luthuli Hospital for half a day. The invitation has been sent to beat reporters that specialise in health communication. The aim is to inquire what the media needs in order to cover the department better”* (R16). *“Although, the media’s role is educating the public, we still have to define what is newsworthy is in our department”*.

The question that emerged on education and training was *‘Whose responsibility it was to educate and train the media about government (department) issues, structures, and processes?’* A number of respondents recorded that it was a shared responsibility between the government and the media itself: *“Both the department and the media houses have a responsibility to understand the issues around the department. For example, you find a journalist reporting on a certain topic of which you can see that this person is clueless of what he/she is talking about, having done no prior research”*(R15). Another remarked, *“We both at fault because we need one another. In our department, there are no specific workshops where we could sit and discuss issues of mutual interests”* (R23).

A few other respondents identified the GCIS as primarily responsible for bridging the knowledge gap between the media and government: *“The GCIS should take the responsibility, but the communicators themselves must take the initiative too”* (R9). Only a minority reported that media educational initiatives were already taking place in various

departments through media briefings and press conferences and thus there was no need to further augment these initiatives: *“When new legislation comes into place, media briefing meetings take place. That proves that there is information sharing between government and the media”*. (R16)

9.15.5 MEDIA – GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP

It seems an interdependent relationship is acknowledged by most government communicators and therefore a harmonious relationship is sought imperative and invaluable: *“I will say we are two separate entities (government and media), both of us have to provide different services. We have the content and the information and they have the platform. So we need each other. It is up to both of us to create that conducive working environment in which we can respect each other. If both of us make an effort to understand each other, we work better. Otherwise, naturally, these are two competing entities”* (R21). *“We are the needed devils of each other”* (R11).

The provincial GCIS commented that there is good relationship with the media in KwaZulu Natal: *“We conduct good media engagement because the GCIS convenes meetings with community media four times per year. “It is important to build good relations with the media”* (R13) The media is a voice close to the people. Another senior respondent confirms that, *“the relationship with the media is good, but there is a lot to be done”* (R4).

The value of the media is acknowledged and the need to build relationships identified: *it is very important to build media relations as it improves their understanding of the department and its initiatives”* (R14). *“The media is our critical tool for accountability. They are not biased against government in my perspective. They provide service to the government”* (R6). Indeed, there is a perception that the media always takes what government say with a pinch of salt. But it is important for us to enhance relationships with the media (R29).

Most government communicators conveyed a willingness to accommodate the media. *“We work very hard to meet journalists’ needs”* (R1). *“We use mass media to get access to the*

public, thus, we need to have good relations with beat reporters”. “Our department initiate communication with the media all the time” (R23)

Instead of being a spin-doctor, let us adopt an approach of acknowledging the challenge and initiate intervention steps to improve those challenges. Out of that, there could be a positive spin off. In other words, surprise the journalist with new information. Meaning, government communication should not only be responsive, the approach should be of accommodating of the media (R16).

The sentiment among participants was that it is the prerogative of each department to create a favourable relationship with the key media with whom they work. *“When it comes to government communication and media relations, we cannot say there is a standard strategy for cultivating profound partnership with the media. It is the prerogative of each department” (R17).*

9.15.6 DOMINANT COALITION’S UNDERSTANDING OF THE MEDIA

The issue of whether the dominant coalition, politicians and management structures understand media relations or how the media works was comprehensively addressed in the previous sections. The findings in this section was that politicians (MEC group) had more understanding and respect for the media than did administrative managers such as the HOD division. It was recommended that senior communication managers should uptake the role of educating the dominant coalition about media relation issues.

The following quotation should serve as reminder:

Overall, my experience with politicians is that they do really understand. However, with senior officials, you have to drill the matter of the urgency. They do not understand the ins and outs of the newsroom. Their attitude is that you can’t just give this question and demand the answer now. Not realising the implication of when the journalist decides to publish without the response from the department (R20). Naturally some principals get disappointed of non-coverage and negative

stories from the media. Some of the disappointment is based on ignorance of what is newsworthy (R18).

9.15.7 MEDIA CHANNELS

Government uses a range of media platforms (R3). However, “the choice of media will depend on the issue to be communicated’ and ‘the nature of the target audiences’. Local provincial mass media is dominant, followed by community media and direct communication respectively: *“What is in use for example is community radio and newspapers like ilanga and isolezwe, including the local newspapers in the area you are targeting”*.

Media channel choices are determined by the peculiarities of the programmes and target audiences: *“The media channels depend on the issue. For you to communicate, you need to gauge your target audience”* (R16). For instance, *“in my department, we deal with the LSM such as traditional leaders and councillors and so forth. They are of a different LSM with that of the department of economic development who interacts with captains of industry, entrepreneurs, and so forth. So the nature of the media will be influenced by that LSM. These are some of the peculiarities that differentiate a media strategy from another”* (R9).

Most government departments use a diversity of media platforms; *“Awareness campaigns, media briefings, media statements, stakeholders meetings, outreach programmes and external websites. We use a lot of vehicles to communicate with the public”*. A respondent reported, *“According to our latest statistics, we seem more prevalent on print and online”*. *“We use a lot of provincial media. Mostly we do well in KZN media coverage”*. *The types of media predominately targeted by the department are newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the internet (our website), main stream radio, community newspapers, community radio, television”* (R11).

9.15.8 EX-JOURNALIST GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS (EXPERIENCES FROM THE OTHER SIDE)

What emerged from the interviews was the fact that most respondents were ex-journalists, having completed their training in journalism and worked for several years in the news media as journalists. This group of respondents were therefore required to report upon their perceptions of government before they were co-opted into government and after they were inside the system of government. The idea was for them to explain the perception of government communication from inside and outside the system. For most of them, their perceptions of government have changed:

The first few months were difficult because at first, I was balanced (as a news reporter) and now I have to represent government (R4).

I did not understand the complexities of government as a journalist...

While I was a journalist, I use to be frustrated with government, but now I am inside, I know the processes pertaining to communicating the messages of government, I know the challenges as well (R1).

"In the newsroom, you think of government communication as spin. When you enter government, you understand that it is not like that" (R30)

Many ex-journalist government communicators claimed to be sympathetic to the needs of the media:

My perception of government communication before joining the system was that, in government, there was a lot of rigidity, there was no flexibility. The turnaround time was very long, even when information was not damning. Your story will be delayed because you do not have comments from the other side. Government appeared to have limited understanding of how media works. As someone who is inside now, my perception has changed. I think those of us, who are here, are supposed to change the system to the benefit of our colleagues who are left in the mass media. If a journalist calls me now, I drop everything to attend to him because I know how it works (R22).

A majority of such respondent identified their journalistic background as a major advantage in government communication: *“It helps for someone who has worked in the newsroom like me. Some government communicators do not understand the process of news gathering”* (R20). Another ex-journalist advises, *“We are dealing with a limited reservoir of media space. That demands creativity. It helps if you were a journalist because you can do a good write-up. You can influence the agenda and frame it in a newsworthy way”* (R20).

9.16 DIRECT COMMUNICATION

9.16.1 DIRECT COMMUNICATION IN THE KZN PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT

The KZN provincial government seems to be moving increasingly towards direct communication with the public as external stakeholders: *“Direct reporting is an excellent way to access the public. Government should communicate unmediated as much as possible”*. The reason provided is that direct communication is essential in an uncertain environment of the mass media that has the propensity of being drawn towards the negative: *“Media is more interested in conflict and the negative and this is the reason they (government) came up with Simama as a form of communication to the public”* (R8). The other reason was that direct communication is more effective and universal because it is free to the public: *we do direct communication with the public because it is more effective. You get responses and results”* (R4). Reaching specialised audiences is another advantage of direct government communication: *“With own publications (direct communication), the advantage is that they are specialised and directed at targeted audience who get direct information sent by the relevant section”*. Another participant clarifies the motivation behind direct communication:

One of the reasons behind the establishment of publications like Simama and vukuzienzele is because government felt that information about government programmes are not adequately covered in mainstream media. Moreover, people who are disadvantaged in the rural areas do not have access to a variety of mainstream media whereas those in urban places suffer an information overload. They can choose which newspaper to buy, but those in rural areas do not even

have a disposable income. For them, it is a choice between buying bread and buying a newspaper. This meant that government publications have to be free. There must be a distribution strategy so that it reaches everybody. Simama used to be inserted in several magazines such as ilanga, isolezwe and others, but not anymore. Right now, each department must pick up copies from the office of the premier.

9.16.2 SIMAMA

Simama is produced by the office of the premier with Mr Madlala as the chief editor of the newspaper. All departments contribute to Simama. Government “publishes about 400 thousand copies of *Semama* each week”. However, the challenge of government’s own publication is the distribution strategy. “Right now, each departments must pick up copies from the office of the premier”. In addition, “*districts officers (at local government) are supposed to diffuse the newspaper, but they don’t they don’t always comply. Simama is not marketed. Our own people in districts don’t know what is happening*”. Simama is an initiative welcome by most participants, but there are very small dissenting views of those concerned with ‘centralisation’ of government communication:

Each provincial department previously had their own publication. However, they were stopped, abrogated. There is a provincial newspaper now (Simama) and we spend a huge amount of money for Simama. There is interference there. The aim of this centralisation is to control information.

9.16.3 DEPARTMENTAL PUBLICATIONS

Some provincial departments have their own publication running, while others rely on the publication of the national office and others on the communal KZN provincial government publication (*Simama*). The trend seems to be moving towards a greater dependency on *Simama*. Nonetheless, there are initiatives to establish or resuscitate departmental publications:

Now we are working on a newsletter that is supposed to be out in December, we were not doing any publications, we submitted articles to Simama (Public Works). We are working on that, we do not have a publication of our own besides Simama and the publication that comes from our national office (Education).

Magazines and newsletters are longer produced because we not getting information (from districts). Therefore, there is nothing to report (Sports and Recreation).

We have Ezomnotho (DEDT)

9.16.4 OTHER FORMS OF DIRECT COMMUNICATION

Direct walk-ins: *More than 50 people per day would visit a government department seeking information; some take publications, job circulars, acts and bills of rights, contact details.*

Websites and social media as direct communication: *What we trying to achieve is that if someone is looking for anything with regard to the province of KwaZulu Natal, the first point of contact should be the kznonline government. Even if you looking for the department of arts and culture, you just go to the website. There are also social media of each department.*

Annual reports: *The two streams of accountability in government are public (society) and legislation. The department reports to legislature through annual reports on how well the department is doing. We are doing well in showing legislation that we are doing well, but we are failing in demonstrating successes to the publics.*

Events and outreach programmes; *we do not have much direct communication with the public except during events. We interact with people during these outreach programmes such as imbizos and project sukuma sakhe.*

Controlled media: *There are promotional material for the department, exhibitions, banners, posters, and pamphlets.*

9.17 SOCIAL MEDIA AS FORM OF DIRECT COMMUNICATION

9.17.1 SOCIAL MEDIA IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

A number of webmasters and communicators involved with social media were included for the interviews. However, this tended to be a smaller group because not all surveyed departments had webmasters and certainly not all surveyed departments were using social media. For that matter, only four participants responded to questions concerning the uses of social media for government communication.

One participant defined e-governance as follows: *“e-governance is making government accessible to all forms of individuals within the community, province, and country as a whole and using technology as a stepping stone towards achieving the end result of government. E-governance makes life easier to achieve certain services such as paying your water and lights”*.

For social media purposes, some government departments engage both *Facebook* and *Twitter*. For example, one participant illustrates the uses of social media in his department, *“There are two Facebook pages, one is for the office of the premier and the other one is public – all you can do is like it, whereas on the official Facebook page, you have to send a friend invite”*. Another remarked that *“both Facebook, Twitter, we felt that is good for us to have a presence on both mediums”*. *“Social media can be used for attaining votes and service delivery as well as the general dissemination of information”*.

9.17.2 INTEGRATED COMMUNICATION

Respondents identified some form of integrated communication between the departmental websites, Facebook, and Twitter sites. There are *Facebook* and *Twitter* links on the websites: *“You more likely to get people looking at what the department is doing in Facebook than in the websites. But communication is integrated”*:

“When I update the website, I simultaneously update Facebook with more or less the same content”. “Every status on the webpage, I post it to Facebook and most people will comment on it, respond or send inquiries about it or refer to other issues”. (R25). “On the social networks, we try our level best to focus people back to the website, because Twitter is short. We can simply say that the premier was in such and such event, for more information and images go to our website” (R5).

Some respondents spoke of the future of the mass media in the age of social media as direct communication. The consensus here was that both social and mass media would coexist side by side in government communication, rather than one would substitute the other. A respondent explains:

I believe that both forms of media should harmoniously coexist, side by side. There are certain things that social media may not be able to satisfy. For example, in relaxed spaces, the traditional mass media such as newspapers & broadcast are more stronger as people are relaxed enough to be more acceptable of information. Whereas with social media, there is limited time and airtime to thoroughly engage with information.

9.17.3 INTRODUCING SOCIAL MEDIA IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Respondents commented that one of the most difficult things to do was motivating and encouraging their seniors to consider social media as part of their integrated government communication. Fear was seen as a formidable challenge against adoption of social media in many government departments. What follow are some explanations of processes of encouraging managers to adopt social media:

The way Facebook or social media started here “ammm...iyoh, I would say hukuthanda izinto”. Our communication bosses actually believe in creativity, so they motivated us to be creative. In one of those meetings, they said we should do things that would put our department in the map. Hence, I asked them, if we could introduce Facebook for the department. Initially, they did not buy into it since they

were worried about controlling criticism and insults. I assured them that I would try to manage that (R25).

9.17.4 ADVANTAGES AND USES OF SOCIAL MEDIA IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The digital divide was acknowledged as a significant challenge: *South Africa access to the internet is limited in terms of the number of households that have access to it. However, the majority of South Africans have cell phones. And with the advent of mobile internet on your handset, you have access to everything that is available on the internet. Even though everyone has technology and cell phone, many people are still not computer literate". I think more needs to be done in making people more computer savvy. Come 2015, if someone is not computer literate; they are going to be on par with being fully illiterate".*

The main aim of social media is to engage the youth as the primary target audience. After all, it is generally the younger generation that is on Facebook and on Twitter. They are the main seekers of government communication: *"The outcomes are excellent because you get to communicate with young people of which are the targets audience of almost everyone, government, and businesses; and most businesses are headed by them". "By using that platform, government is thus able to communicate with the youth on their own level". The youth are the primary market for government communication because in the next coming election, they are the ones who will be voting. "So by using social media, because they are the predominant users of it, we now have direct access to them".*

Social media can be used for attaining votes and service delivery as well as the general dissemination of information. A participant reminisced of one person who mentioned that, *"previously we use to hear about service delivery and now we see it on Facebook and Instagram". Whenever there is an event taking place, the public will get the date as well as what happened in that event in social media platforms. In this case, Facebook is said to work as a verifying tool and an accountability tool as one participant had already specified: I feel that social media does contribute to trust because everything that happens is now in the public domain where everyone can see it in Facebook. For example, a picture paints a*

thousand words". Pictures could verify if, and how an event took place. *"The mass media also sources their pictures from these social sites"*.

Social media can be used for accessing information. *"The dissemination of information in itself is service delivery,"* said a respondent. *"It is one thing building houses and putting infrastructure, it is of no use if the public is not aware of what you are doing. So part of that service delivery is informing the public of what we are doing with taxpayers' money"*.

All the participants in this study identified the uses of social media in events management: *"People could inquire about events because we post where the department is going and provide details about such an events. People will inquire for more information about the events such as direction or an agenda. They may even comment about the events while they are attending it. Another respondent added, "If there is an event you post it, to invite those who want to be at the event, you don't want only the older guys, you want the young guys to be part of those imbizos. They can also interact, discussing where it is and what time, immediately in Facebook you would mention the venue and the time of the event so that people can make themselves available to attend"*. One of the identified key values of social media is the timely response to any queries, comments, and feedback.

9.17.5 DISADVANTAGES AND FEARS OF SOCIAL MEDIA

There is still a major fear of social media among government in general *"everyone is afraid of it"*. All participants identified this as a formidable challenge stalling the adoption of social media for government communication in many departments: *"I believe that all government departments should start using social media in a responsible manner. I know it is a scary trend because it is something new in South Africa"*. Some respondents were concerned about the misconception of which society may see social media as a platform for complaints and the susceptibility to which issues may easily be misconstrued:

You suddenly now opened up a new communication channel, even on Facebook or Twitter, whatever is posted can be misconstrued or misinterpreted. It can open up a can of worms, things that were not even an issue suddenly become an issue.

This thing is not for addressing individual issues. It is for us to demonstrate what the department is doing. It needs you to be responsive (reciprocity). It does not need to be an avenue for complains. Most people go there to seek help – not to attack.

Several respondents claimed that social media demanded an intensive dedication that often goes beyond the calls and the hours of duty because it is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week and 375 days a year: *“Any other person may say social media is work intensive. However, because I am so passionate about it and I love the job that I do, I find it as all in a days’ job. However, it goes outside of my working hours and it can affect my family time and my relaxation times. But it’s part of the game”.*

9.17.6 RESPONDING TO SOCIAL MEDIA QUERIES

Some participants advised that “government communicators using social media need to be cautious of how they say certain matters to avoid offending a particular segment of society: *“It has happened on a few occasions, where certain things said by certain politicians on their Twitter or Facebook accounts had been misconstrued and it created an issue”.*

Most of these participants complained of the volatility of social media and the lack of procedures and guidelines on responding to enquiries. For the mass media, there are structured procedures of consultation and a timeframe to research information and seek confirmation from principals on how to respond to enquiries and specific questions. The procedure of consultation is not present for social media and there is often no time to research, verify fact or consult for guidance. Once government communicators respond on their own accord, there is often no support or protection from the principals because they did not ordain the response:

You have to respond then and there, but, if I say something on Facebook and Twitter, it can be misconstrued, so you have to look at it in every direction.

On some occasion I take the liberty of responding to certain matters because on social media, you cannot say, we noted your comment and someone will get back to you because that person will think that you deflecting the issue.

On social media, you working on very slippery grounds, because sometimes you could say something about legislative policy or whatever political matter and the managers would say I did not say that. So officially, there is a discrepancy between what is official and what is personal.

9.17.7 EVALUATING SOCIAL MEDIA

Some participants outlined the evaluations processes used to gauge the successes and failures of the social media platforms. The dominant way in which social media are evaluated is through quantitative 'hits statistics' that gauge how many people are 'liking' the Facebook page. No qualitative evaluations were identified. It could perhaps be worthwhile to analyse the comments sections and what type of information is generally sought by the public.

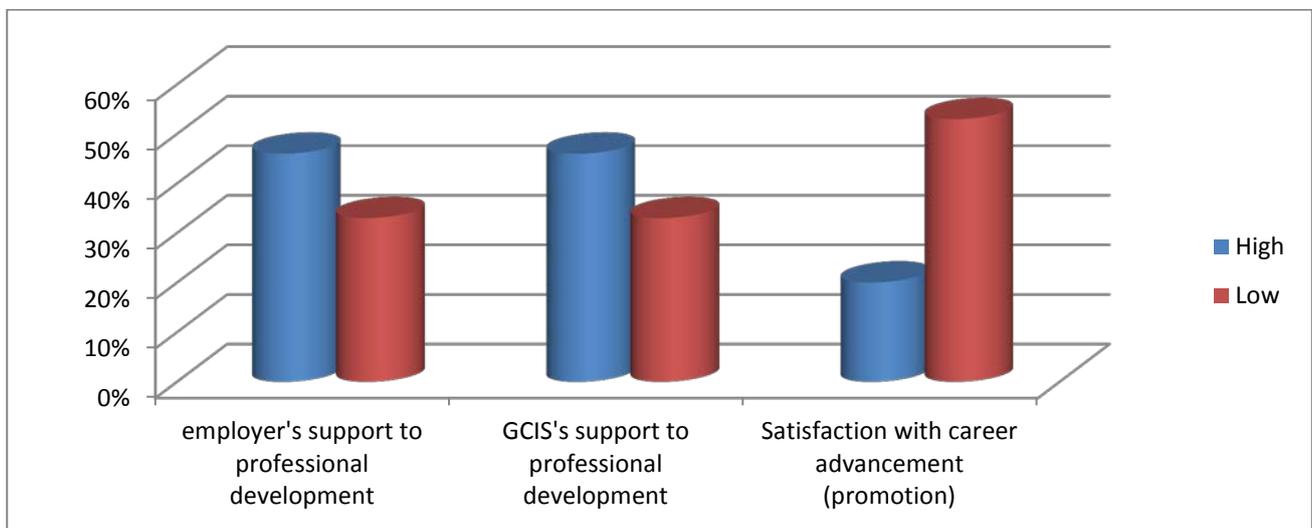
Currently there are 166 likes, in just a few months, the advantage we have with this design is that if you like the page, all our post will appear in your Facebook page. You can then forward it on or whatever. So the reach is growing on a daily bases. What is happening now is that they have given us statistics to see how many people have seen the site, how many people clicked on that particular post, how many people have 'liked it' and what they have commented on.

One participant acknowledged the efforts on the GCIS in standardising and helping bridge the knowledge gap on the uses of social media among government communicators: *I have attended a few seminars on web-development in January 2012. In those **GCIS** workshops, the focus was on identifying who responds, how and what they say. The comment that came out of the GCIS was that this is a new territory so it is going to be a trial and error. However, there is a document released about the guidelines of using social media.*

9.18 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Figure 13: Survey data- perceptions on professional development

		HIGH	LOW
Professional Development	How satisfied are you with your <u>employer's</u> support to your professional development?	46%	33%
	How satisfied are you with the <u>GCIS's</u> support to your professional development?	46%	33%
	Rate your satisfaction of <u>promotion</u> and advancement opportunities within your organisation?	20%	53%



The objective of this theme is to explore the perception held by government communicators regarding their professional development prospects. Figure 13 of the survey data demonstrates that 46 percent of the respondents are satisfied with their employers' (government department) support to their professional development. 46 percent also reported to be satisfied with the GCIS's support on professional development. However, 53 percent reported dissatisfactions with promotions and advancement opportunities in government communication. The interview data demonstrate that a majority of midlevel communication managers reported a slow growth rate pattern of professional development within the public sector. The senior managers were less optimistic of further professional growth while communication officers were the most optimistic about professional development prospects in government communication.

Most midlevel communicators see prospects of growth in other departments away from the department they were currently employed: *'I think there is (growth), I started in 2009 and I am still a communication officer, but I know one day I will be a senior communication officer, the deputy director... It is not easy to apply for promotions, I am telling you. The growth I was talking about is not here in the department, it is in other departments. But vacancies in government communication are very seldom and far in between to come by'*.

It was mentioned that promotions are a rare occurrence in government and this was a reason for job hopping as communicators found it easier to apply for senior level jobs at a different department than to await the resignation or retirement of an existing senior manager in the department of their current occupancy. *"Promotions are not something you see every day. They are rare. They may do it if you say you are leaving, they might try to give you a counter offer. People job-hop, even in the same level, for a possibility of growth"* (R12). *"It is a small environment, you move sideways. Once you are in there for a while, there is no opportunity for promotion unless if someone resigns"* (R25). On the contrary, some respondents argued, *"Job hopping is not generic to government"*. Although small in quantity, there are those who were optimistic: *"Currently I am very optimistic, I think there is room for growth definitely"*. *"I think there is a bit of a promise, and I feel that I can grow"*.

The mid managers were generally hopeful of professional development even though they noted the sluggishness of career growth and promotions within one department. The senior managers were less optimistic of further professional growth in their careers in government communication: *"I think I have reached a ceiling"*. *"In terms of career development, I feel stagnated"*. Most head of communication managers in various government departments expressed this point. Some noted the only growth beyond the position of head of communication is to diversify into other avenues of government or other directorates within their department. *"There scope of growth with regard to communication is very strange; it is reflective of what is happening in the newsroom. Until an editor dies or retires, you will always remain in the same position because you hardly have a massive workforce in communication or in the newsroom. If someone is really ambitious, they will grow outside of communication"*.

9.18.1 LIMITED SPECIALISATION OF COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONAL ROLES

One element that emerged from the data was the comparison of activities in the public and the private sector. It was revealed that there is no specialisation of responsibilities, roles and tasks in government as they case may be in the private sector: “*Communication management in the private sector is different, the private sectors is more glamorous, more specialised than the public sector*”. There is little distinction between public relations, marketing and advertising: “*You end up doing everything. I do a lot of media work, writing speeches, organising media briefings, events management, marketing, act as a spokesperson of the department, draft speeches for the MEC and the HOD,*” said a medial liaison officer. One of the recurring reasons provided for a lack of specialisation in provincial government communication is the shortage of communication staff members. Most departments are understaffed, so resident staff members must be adept in interchanging between various roles, from branding, marketing, advertising, events management et cetera. Poor budget also contribute to this as in most cases only one or two people are sent out into community outreach programmes, *imbizos* or any other stakeholder engagement. The person who is sent is expected to put together the branding, take photos and a video were necessary, write the story about the event and liaise with media if present.

Three communicators noted that national departments were more specialised than the provincial departments are. One is able to specialise in one area of communication in the national departments: “*There are specialised components in national departments, whatever component you are in, you have to be a specialist in that portfolio. When you come to the province, your job description becomes congested in that you have to do everything under the communication umbrella*”.

Lack of specialisation was not particularly considered a professional disadvantage. A group of communicators noted this phenomenon as an advantage. Being adept in a variety of roles was considered a career advantage that may set one on a career growth path both within and outside the public sector: “*I feel there is a growth opportunity, there is*

a potential for people in government communication to grow”. “Because we do everything ourselves, there is a bigger scope for people to grow”.

Some respondents expressed a desire to work for the private sector: *“There is little opportunity for growth in government. I would go to the private sector”.* *“I would work for the private sector if I had an opportunity. I feel like I still have a lot to learn. I think it is very different, in the private sector, there are more targets, and you work harder. Although, I am learning in government, I need a bit of both”.*

There was a great contrast between two groups of communicators. One group complained of being overworked due to understaffing and another group of communicators who complained of being under-utilised, generally idling and therefore feeling undervalued. For example, *“I am idling now. I am redundant”.* *“In government, we have experienced people, but you get in then you are underutilised”.* Mostly those in mid-management reported feeling underutilised. They mentioned that they were not particularly sure what their roles were. A gap was identified between the responsibilities of a communication officer beneath them and a senior manager above them. In the contrary, those at the bottom performing technical roles, reported to be overworked. The senior managers in contrast did not mention anything regarding being overworked or feeling underutilised.

9.18.2 EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIP AFFILIATION

Higher qualifications and further studies are recognised as catalyst for professional growth. In this case, the value of education is upheld. Communication qualifications are a requirement for promotions in government communication positions. Underqualified people see no prospects for career growth regardless of the number of years or experience they have as government communicators. This sentiment is held for example by one highly experienced government communicator as measured by the years of service in government: *“There is enough growth potential in government for new people, not for me because I don’t have the qualification”.* Several communicators mentioned that they were currently registered students in various higher education institutions. Four are in communication related studies while two are in the general management field, and one is

in public administration. Eight other respondents expressed an interest to study further in communication related studies: *“I do want to do a degree; it will be able to move me away from what I am doing now”*.

All 30 participants were asked about their professional affiliation to any professional fraternity in South Africa or abroad. None of the participants are affiliated to any South African or international professional fraternity. Two respondents noted the desire to join Prisa someday: *“If there was one for government communication, I probably would join”*.

Several training needs were identified. The training needs identified were as diverse as the communicators themselves. It was however possible to categorise the needs according to job responsibilities. For example, most senior communicators spoke of needing assistance with drafting communication strategy documents while very few others mentioned training on communication evaluations. Media liaison officers and communication officers generally referred to technical skills in writing, media monitoring and web-management: *I think I still need to learn more, whether it is improving writing skills, events management or photography. I do not think I have learnt enough.*

No senior manager complained of limited leadership opportunities. Only some head of communication complained of having to perform technical roles because the department are understaffed: *I am supposed to be managing communication staff but there is no one to manage.*

It was imperative to ask how new government communicators are inducted into government communication and how they acquire knowledge about the intricacies of government systems and the role of communication within that system. It was established from 10 communicators that there is a general induction programme designed to educate all staff members about the system of government in general and the working of the specific department in particular. Upon the question: *“did you have any induction programme?”* Communication officers responded:

“Yes, the first one was with the department of transport – they were just telling us about the department things such as objectives, policies, and HR. issues – different section of the department would present on different aspects. In Agriculture, there was an induction as well. It was also about the department”.

“They have one for all staff members so it is not only just communication. It is useful for someone who doesn’t have a clue of how government works; it does give insight on how government operates”.

The induction themselves are not communication specific. There is however, an *intern* system that seems to be working well. 60 percent of government communicator at various levels started off as interns in government communication and worked their ways up. A number of respondents displayed excitement of overseeing interns as a form of leadership or mentorship role.

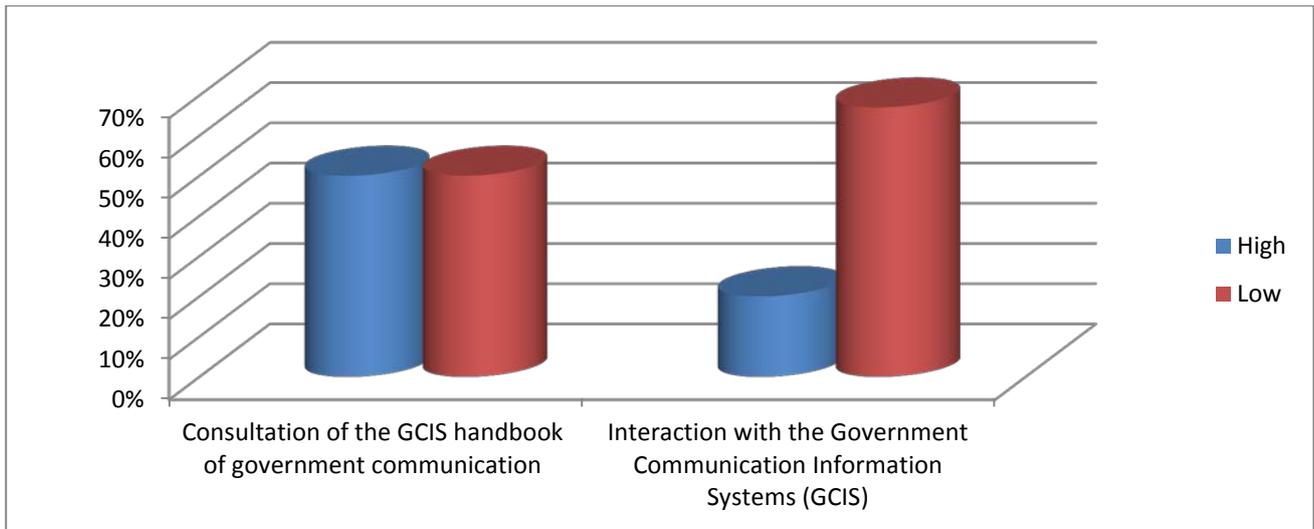
9.19 THE ROLE OF THE PROVINCIAL GCIS IN STANDARDISING AND PROFESSIONALISING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The major focus of this section was to rate the usefulness of the GCIS in terms of practical communication support, standardisation and professional development support as measured by the perceptions of government communicators who partook in this research. It was similarly necessary to investigate the level of attendance and interaction between the GCIS and government communicators. The use of the *government communicators’ handbook* as a standardisation tool for government communication practice was also evaluated by asking practitioners how often they consulted the tool kit and how useful they found it to be.

9.19.1 RATING THE USEFULNESS OF THE PROVINCIAL GCIS IN KZN

Figure 14: Survey data- survey data- interaction with the GCIS

		HIGH	LOW
GCIS	Rate the level in which you consult the handbook?	50%	50%
	Rate the level in which you interact with GCIS?	20%	67%



Communicators' perceptions of the GCIS are as divided as the communicators themselves. The direct question that was asked in the interview was *how useful do you find the GCIS in terms of professionalising and standardising government communication in the province?* Of the 30 respondents who answered question, the majority (n =16) rated the provincial GCIS high in its performance, role and purpose. A number of nine (n=9) respondents rated it low, noting that the GCIS was not sufficiently visible in the KZN province. Two respondents (n=3) mentioned the good and the bad of the GCIS in the province thus recording their response as neutral. On the other hand, the survey data (67%) in figure 14 demonstrated that the level of interaction between government communicators and the provincial GCIS is low.

Another group commended the improvement heralded by the provincial GCIS in both communication support and professional development since the appointment of the new communication head in KwaZulu Natal: *"The current GCIS is different from the previous years". "I think of late, they are very active. In the past, I did not know whether they were under resourced or not stable enough to perform any profound role in the province"*. This sentiment is added by another respondent, *"In the past, there wasn't enough training, but now, with the new head of GCIS in KZN, we are much close"*. Respondents acknowledged a greater visibility and appreciated assistance received on daily professional practices such as media buying, advice on advertising procurement and pictures et cetera.

9.19.2 INTERACTION BETWEEN THE GCIS AND GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS IN KZN

Government communicators at midlevel and lower entry level reported not having much interaction with the GCIS except for occasional GCIS training attended. This group claimed that the provincial GCIS is not sufficiently visible. They report having not had frequent contact with the GCIS both in communication practical support and in professional development. The comments from the following communicators illustrate this point: *“I won’t lie, I haven’t had much interaction with GCIS, and yes here and there we have inquired for their expertise. But other than that, I think they should do more, you know” (R19)*. *“We don’t interact, the only time I hear of GCIS is when it is about media buying” (DH)*. *“I think I understand what they do. I don’t interact with them very often” (R9)*. Three communicators midlevel confessed having no knowledge of the GCIS’s purpose and role. They also claimed not having sufficient knowledge of the existence of the GCIS communicators’ handbook: *“The GCIS? I don’t interact with them and I don’t know about the handbook (R17)”*. *“I barely understand the role of the GCIS” (R25)*.

Whereas, government communicators reported having low interactions with the provincial GCIS, senior government communication managers enjoyed high interactions with the provincial GCIS. These senior level communicators mostly interacted with the GCIS at the Provincial Communicators Forum (PCF): *“We invite them to the PCF; we talk about communication related issues. We must complement each other so that we can establish if there are contradictions in government communication”*. *“GCIS has a critical role to play, when you interact with them you get expert advice. We liaise with them on regular bases at the PCF”*. *“Interaction with the GCIS is facilitated through provincial communicators’ forums”*. A few communicators noted a limitation in this dispensation: *“If we don’t interact with them at the PCF level (meetings), you don’t interact with them at all”*. *“We only interact with them through the above mentioned forum of the PCF”*.

9.19.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS' COMPLIANCE TO GCIS INITIATIVES

The GCIS complained mostly of low attendance in workshops, seminars and other initiatives developed for the standardisation and professionalization of government communication. However, many respondents mentioned that they have not attended any GCIS training because they have never received any information from the GCIS regarding any invitation for GCIS initiatives of any sort. Lack of information was the major reason provided for poor attendance to GCIS initiatives, training and projects. The issue regarding insufficient information about GCIS projects did not emerge as directly questioned about reasons for low attendance. This issue emerged elsewhere in the interviews as the GCIS was mentioned. The following comments illustrate this point:

"I am still yet to hear what they offer! I do not know what training they offer. I don't think they communicate well" (1).

Nothing has come to me (information). I do not know whether my bosses have received anything. (R25)

"I have never been approached by GCIS or any course or programme" (R11)

"I haven't heard much about career development" (R13).

The GCIS is currently a regular member of the PCF meetings that are held at the office of the premier once a month. All government communication heads are supposed to be in attendance. This is one avenue where most practitioners from various departments and municipalities interact with the GCIS. In many respect, this group that interacts with the GCIS at the PCF meetings, rated the GCIS high in terms of usefulness in practical communication assistance, standardisation and in professional development in KZN. Practitioners, who seldom interact with the GCIS at any level, rated its professionalising role low depending on whether they had attended any workshops previously or not. It seemed that those who had attended some workshops in the past were more lenient and more approving of the GCIS. They generally offered recommendations and suggestions for improvements on areas that they were dissatisfied. Those communicators, who had no previous experience with the GCIS and having had less contact with them, were less lenient. They rated the GCIS low in terms of usefulness regarding practical support and

professional development. The following quotation succinctly recapitulates some of the recommendations:

“They come in with a lot of information about new ways of doing things. For me it was useful. It was like an induction programme. For older people, it is not useful. Therefore, it should be according to different ranks of specialisation. They did a fancy presentation but it was not emailed to us. That was the last I heard from them. We forget about it and we forget about them” (R10).

9.19.4 THE ROLE OF THE GCIS IN STANDARDISING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

A significant number of respondents frequently noted the role of the GCIS in standardising government communication: *“The GCIS is a critical tool for government because it can create standardisation in communication”*. *“They are useful because overall they are the custodians of government communication”*. Some respondents mentioned the value of the GCIS in sharing good practice in government communication: *“GCIS organises workshops, they bring people who deal with specialist communication to explain good practice”*. Several respondents referred to the need for GCIS to assist in both guiding and standardising government communication uses of social media.

Only about a fraction of the respondents reported having attended a GCIS training, seminar or workshop at least once in their professional lives. Almost all who attended some GCIS initiated workshops judge them as useful and worthwhile: *“The GCIS workshop was useful. For me it was the first time I was coming to government. I found a lot of information about the department” (R10)*. *“I attended three training sessions provided by the GCIS and they were very beneficial for me” (R18)*. *I have attended a few of their training on developing communication strategies and on branding” (R21)*.

Some respondents mentioned the role of the GCIS in integrating the provincial government communication strategy with the local communication strategy and the national communication strategy. This would strengthen the relationship between the three tiers of government: *“We are not islands as provinces. Our strategies, programmes and*

actions are supposed to align with that of the national government in terms of the theme or plan of action. The GCIS helps us to stay on course, that we do not go astray and that we do not lose sight of the communication strategy (R20). The role of the GCIS in standardising provincial communication strategies of different departments was also recognised. It was however cautioned by some participants that although there must be uniformity of communication strategies in various departments in KZN, there must be room left to accommodate the unique environment of each department.

9.19.5 THE ROLE OF THE GCIS IN PROVIDING PRACTICAL COMMUNICATION SUPPORT

Some respondents acknowledged the role of the GCIS in providing practical communication support. In this category, communicators mentioned assistance provided by the GCIS in conducting their daily practice. GCIS is needed for bulk media buying, *“for example if you need to communicate with a number of radio stations, they have a hub where the information is recorded at once and then distributed. It is cost effective”*. GCIS is useful for archive material, *“for example if we need photos of our departments’ heads; we get those photos from them”*. The GCIS is present at some outreach programmes: *“We interact with them when we have events, we always invite them and sometimes they come”*. *“They are always supportive of government initiatives”*. Moreover, they (GCIS) assist with other practical communication support, for instance, *“we consult them for logos. We consulted the GCIS to give us direction to prepare the communication strategy”*. This seems to be the most popular service that most government communicators make use of and value.

9.19.6 THE ROLE OF THE GCIS IN PROFESSIONALISING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The lesser understood role of the GCIS is one of professionalising government communication. Nevertheless, there are a few who comprehended this role: *“GCIS has a critical role to play in training communicators. It has a number of good programmes and strategies to make you grow as a communicator”*. *“In terms of training, it helps. I think*

continuous training is important”. However, some respondents were not impressed with professional development support provided by the GCIS: “*I haven’t heard much about career development*” said one respondent. “*I did my own training, not paid for by anyone. There is no skill development or support*”.

9.19.7 ADDITIONAL ROLES OF THE GCIS

Respondents recommended a number of other avenues where the GCIS may be of assistance. They mentioned that the GCIS should take a stronger lead in educating principals (the dominant coalition), politicians and administrative management about the role, purpose and value of government communication: “*The GCIS should step in to educate politicians about the role and purpose of government communication and the nature of the media*”. A similar view was shared by other communication officers: “*I think the GCIS should be the ones bringing in certain programmes or making more efforts to teach people in government (managers/employees) on the important in communication. That way, it will make it easier for us when people know what we all about*”. The second role mentioned is that of advising government communicators who may seek expert advice on practical, policy or strategic government communication issues. A new HOD of government communication in a certain department best expresses this point:

“GCIS helps because when you hit the ground running, you immediately have guidance about the dos and don’ts. There is a government communication handbook, it helped me a lot, and it precipitated my knowledge of communication”.

A few respondents mentioned the role of the GCIS in capacitating government communicators. One respondent stated that “*They (GCIS) are making a mark in terms of capacitating government communication*”. In addition, “*It (GCIS) should concentrate on ensuring that all departments have all necessary tools such as communication policy, strategy and capacity. Currently these are lacking*”

some experienced government communicators mentioned that there was generally more training in the 1990s than the case is in recent years: “*There was more training in the*

1990s, it was the beginning of government communication and the transformation of government in South Africa". One respondent noted that *"the GCIS does not have a final word. So its impact is very limited"*. Another participant made view of the point that *"In overall, operationally, things are going well. GCIS is very good, but they are very slow"*.

9.19.8 USES OF THE GCIS GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS HANDBOOK

A large majority of respondents reported that they consulted the GCIS government communication handbook. Four communicators from various departments went to the extent of calling it 'the bible': *"yes I use it, it is useful. It's our bible"* (R2). *"I have used it, I call it a bible"* (R17). Although most communicators make use of the handbook, the frequency of use is different among the participants. For example, there are those who use it frequently: *"I use it extensively, it is very useful"* (R15), *"I have the government communication handbook – I have downloaded that thing. I look at it every day"* (R8), *"I consult it constantly"*. *"It is very helpful and every government communicator should have one and consult it all the time"* (26). Then there are those who use it occasionally: *"I use it, but I read it once a year. I refer to it now and then. The old stuff I already know"*. Others refer to it *"from time to time"* (SM). Others *"use the manual as a reference if we have to justify anything internally"*.

A few respondents (n=6) reported never to have used the *government communicators handbook*. Several respondents said they did not use it frequently because they did not have time to do so. *"I don't use it much – because with other work, I don't have time to look at the book"*. Another respondent stated that the handbook was used *"not often as it rarely translates to the direct working environment we face at department level"*. Some respondents did not use it completely because they did not know about it: *"I don't interact with them and I don't know about the handbook"*. Two other respondents acknowledged the book even though they themselves never use it: *"I will be honest, I have never used it, but I know about it"* (R6). One participant argued to have never used the handbook because they were never *'workshopped'* (trained) to use the book:

“No, I don’t use it! I do know about it. It is very difficult to use a manual that was never workshopped (trained). For example, when the branding manual was issued, we were called and we were introduced to it, and it was explained to us how to use it. It might be wrong professionally not to use the manual but what is the point of using a manual that you were never been trained to use. I believe that when you issue a manual, you must train people”.

9.19.9 CONVERSATIONS WITH THE GCIS

This section describes the conversation held with the leadership of the GCIS, most particularly the chief managing director of the GCIS in KwaZulu Natal. The role of the GCIS is one of custodianship, providing leadership for government communication at national, provincial and local levels and integrating the three tiers of government. The GCIS provincial manager noted that *“We are a custodian for a system that is complex”*. *“Our role is setting the standard for professional government communication”*.

One of the challenges that were noted by the provincial GCIS is that of implementation: *“setting communication policies at the national level is easier than implementing those policies at a provincial and district level”*.

Among the biggest challenge faced by the provincial office are those of monitoring and compliance. The GCIS manager details this point, *“We set the standards and develop guidelines, but we do not have any legal mandate, hence we face challenges of monitoring, compliance and implementation at all levels of government”*. It was mentioned that *“other departments are responsible for enforcement”*. Those departments form the provincial core team. The provincial core team is made up of Cogta, Salga, office of the Premier and GCIS. The core team shapes the provincial communication strategy. The core team in KZN meets on a monthly basis while other provinces only manage four annual meetings. The GCIS felt that *“the core team is not very functional”* because sometimes there are disagreements and is bureaucratic in that decisions are taken gradually.

The office of the premier is the unit responsible for provincial government communication such as publications, engagement meetings, media briefings and the entire provincial government communication support.

GCIS conducts alignment workshops once a year where heads of communication in government departments must bring their communication strategies so that they could be aligned to both provincial and national communication strategies. All communication strategies must express the core message of government which is “*working together we can do more*”. The national communication strategy stays in existence for about five years. The provincial GCIS claims to have a presence in the districts: “*We have to make sure that provincial communication system is functioning and that it is healthy and the government communication system includes the provincial and local level*”. At all districts the GCIS provincial role is to make sure that the system is functioning at the local level. It is reported that “*they (municipalities) have a core team at the local level which meets once a month in which heads of communication at regional levels (municipalities) are supposed to attended*”. The provincial communication strategy has to be communicated at the local level. “The NCS (National Communication Strategy) is diffused at a local level” said the provincial GCIS managing director. Whether this is happening in practice is beyond the scope of this study and perhaps a good recommendation for future studies in this area.

9.19.10 CHALLENGES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION IN KZN THE PROVINCE

The following are identified challenges of government communication according to the respondents of this study. It is important to note that some of these problems are related and intertwined with each other. The data is presented in a point form because all of the issues identified here were already addressed. This section will thus serve as a summary for the chapter. The discussions and conclusions of the study are offered in the next and final chapter.

- Lack of budget / financial constraints.
- Communication devaluation, limited seats as department decision making table, government communication seen as a technical tool.

- Information gathering processes and the culture of consultation (bureaucracy).
- The position of communication within the departmental structure (where communication is placed between the HOD and the MEC).
- Poor understanding of government communication by principals (business units' directorates).
- Poor understanding of the complexities, structures and processes of government (department) by the media.
- Negative public perception, Poor professional development.
- No communication managers in some departments
- Feeling understaffed and overworked.
- Feeling underutilized and obsolete.
- No specialisation in government communication roles (this was noted without any feelings involved, it was not seen as a negative feature but rather a unique feature).
- Limited communication evaluations (no qualitative evaluations at all).
- Fear of social media
- GCIS lack of monitoring and compliance
- Limited training attendance and uses for GCIS guideline policies

CHAPTER 10: DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector affects the practice of communication management in government departments within the KwaZulu Natal provincial government. In addition, the study examined the extent to which government communication can be strategic, ethical, and distinctive.

This chapter contains both the discussion segment and the conclusion segment. This is bearing in mind that the discussion section could easily retain a chapter of its own. However, because the findings have already consumed two chapters (8 and 9), the discussion, and the conclusions are consolidated here in chapter 10. The discussion section synthesises the two results chapters with the literature and theoretical chapters. This chapter is structured as follows:

First, the distinctiveness of the public sector and its impacts on the practice of government communication in the KZN provincial government is discussed. It should be noted that because these distinctive features affect various elements of government communication, they are dispersed and incorporated within a theme of practice wherein their impacts are felt most.

Secondly, strategic government communication is discussed inclusive of its inherent two principles of 'excellence' and 'effectiveness'. For *strategic* communication management to be achieved, these two principles must be fulfilled. The excellence theory provides essential elements for the measuring of *excellence* in communication management while the Pretoria School of Thought contributes essential elements for the evaluation of *effectiveness* in communication management.

The issue concerning professionalization of government communication in KZN and the role of the provincial GCIS in standardising and professionalising government

communication is discussed third. This is followed by exploring the question of *ethics* in government communication by reviewing the external rhetorical theory. Once this is done, conclusions about research propositions and objectives are offered. The distinctive, strategic and ethical framework of government communication is proposed. This is followed by conferring the research implications for theory, methodology, policy, and practice. Future research recommendations are then suggested. The research completes by briefly summarising conclusions on the research problem.

10.2 THE DISTINCTIVENESS OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Chapter 2 argued that government communications is theoretically haunted by debates between scholars of traditional public administration (public policy) and scholars of the New Public Management (government as business). Each side pulls government communication into differing perspectives, objectives, and purposes. Such competing movements in public administration seem to have a significant impact on both the practice and the theorising of government communication. The New Public Management advises government to run more like a business (Beckett, 2000 & Box 1999). It procures business models as the standard for measuring government success (Morgan & Cook, 2014:3). However, performance of the public sector when judged with models developed in the private sector is likely to be found inadequate.

The public sector distinctiveness theory on the contrary argues that government should run like a democracy, not a business. The starting point towards achieving objective one (1) was to investigate if government communication in the KZN provincial government is indeed as distinctive as predicted by literature presented in chapter 2. In so doing, chapter 2 responded to objective one by describing the scholarship surrounding the public sector distinctiveness theory and its recent incorporation to communication management.

- **Objective 1:** *To identify distinctive features of the public sector communication environment and to explore their impacts on strategic government communication in provincial government departments.*

Chapter 2 began by outlining a comprehensive list of assertions about the distinctive *features* of public organisations as described by Allison (1983), Boyne (2002:100), Rainey (2009, 75-76), Ring and Perry (1985), and Rainey (2003 - 2009). These studies identified several features of the external circumstances and the internal characteristics of public organisations that proponents of the public sector distinctiveness theory suggest are distinctive and different about the managerial environment of the public sector as compared to the private sector.

The public sector distinctiveness theory describes internal features of public organisations that are distinctive to the public sector. Those are outlined as follows: More bureaucracy (Boyne, 2002:101), more red tape (Rainey & Bozeman, 2000:453), lower managerial autonomy (Allison, 1979:462; Boyne, 2002:101) and personnel constraints (Allison, 1983:19), policy and goal ambiguity and the sheer size of public institutions. The external features characterising public organisation external environment are outlined as follows: Complexity, permeability, instability, absence of competition, publicness and severe media and public scrutiny.

By studying the communication environment of the public sector, communication management scholars have recently joined in on the debate regarding the public-private sector distinction. However, significantly little literature was found on this considerably under-researched area. In addition, no such studies were found in reference to South Africa and Africa at large. The only study that evaluated the impacts of the distinctive communication environment of the public sector was Liu and Levenshus (2010) who interviewed 49 government communicators in the United States. In order to illustrate further developments and for the purpose of comparison, the present study will refer to Liu and Levenshus (2010) more pronouncedly.

Liu and Levenshus's study (2010) found 13 attributes that are distinctive about communication management in the public sector. The first nine features were identified by Liu and Horsely (2007) are as follows: politics, public good, media scrutiny, lack of managerial support for communication practitioners, poor perception of government communication, lagging professional development and federalism (Liu & Horsley, 2007).

With subsequent research, additional features were added: limited leadership opportunities, internal vs external communication, limited financial resources, poor communication evaluations and multiple communication responsibilities (Liu & Levenshus, 2008; Liu, Horsley & Levenshus, 2010b). Each feature of distinctiveness was investigated one by one and its impact on government communication evaluated.

Prior to evaluating features of the distinctiveness of government communication as advanced in extant literature, respondents were asked to explain what they considered distinctive about government communication. None of the participants disputed that communication in the public sector was different from communication in the private sector. The emerging data reflected a robust confirmation of the existence of distinctive features of 'politics', 'public good', 'high media scrutiny' and 'more stakeholders' in the KZN provincial government. The issue that government communication is not profit making (public good), political and in the public eye were already identified in literature (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010:34; Liu & Horsley, 2007:379. What was unexpected were claims among respondents that there was less work to do in government and that government communicators were not always certain of what they are supposed to be promoting, either the MEC, HOD, policies, ruling party or services. Added to these unexpected findings, is the perception that there are no specialisations of roles in government communication. In no account, did the policy documents and communication strategy documents of KZN provincial government make any acknowledgment of the public sector communication environment. However, the following issues, synonymous of features of the public sector communication environment were identified: high media and public scrutiny, budget constraints, legal constraints, centralisation, and poor public perceptions. These issues were mentioned as challenges of communication management in various departments. Each feature of distinctiveness will now be interrogated, one by one, starting with how media scrutiny affects the practice of government communication.

10.2.1 EFFECTS OF HIGH MEDIA SCRUTINY ON THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The relationship between government and the media has been a subject of a plethora of studies for years (Person & Patching, 2008:4). However, only a few of these studies investigated this relationship from the practitioners' point of view. The present study has now approached this relationship from the perspective of the practitioners (government communicators). This section also discusses the effects of high media scrutiny on the practice of government communication and other media relations issues that emerged from the data and the literature.

The *publicness* of government processes was perceived and confirmed in the data. Government communicators confirmed that government management processes tended to be exposed to public scrutiny. The *role of the media* was indeed cited frequently as one of the major differences in the working environment of the public sector. There was a strong consensus that the government sector was characterised by both high media scrutiny and public scrutiny.

The survey data pertaining to the perceptions of government communicators with regard to the tone of media coverage demonstrated a 46% positive, 13% negative, 26% neutral and 26% fair. These results were contrary to literature projection that media coverage of government communication was generally negative (Edes, 2000:458; Lattimore *et al.*, 2009:173; Lee, 2000:454). On the other hand, the interview data confirmed extant literature on the projection that the coverage of government was generally negative. It was observed that when it comes to government, the media is crisis driven. It is however difficult to expound on the discrepancy between the interview and the survey data.

The data results regarding the effects of media scrutiny on the practice of government communication demonstrate the following findings: It was perceived that the media treated the public and the private sector differently. In addition, media seemed to cover events and people rather than issues and processes. Coverage is personified on prominent politicians and inclined towards the human-interest genre. The media is crisis driven and primarily inclined towards parachute journalism while predominated by the negatives. However, it

was observed that media is less likely to be negative when sufficient information is provided, constantly.

A large majority of government communicators reported that the media does not understand the intricacies of government and the complexities of each department. Media seem oblivious to the consultative nature of information provision that accompanies each media enquiry about government. Commercialisation of the media and the juniorisation of the newsroom were perceived as primary reasons for the poor understanding of the complexities and processes of government communication by the media. An additional factor is that government often extended educational invites to senior media workers such as editors to the exclusion of junior journalists who actually write government related stories.

There is a perception that some portfolios are more difficult than others are and consequently, the media would struggle with them differently. Department of Health and the Department of Economics and Tourism Development claimed to be most poorly served by the media. In addition, it was perceived that the media considers government communication as purely media relations and so expected government communicators to be constantly available for interviews.

Government communicators often face an 'immature media', one that lacks professionalism and ethics required for a balanced and objective coverage of government and its proceedings (Edes, 2000:463). On the question of whose responsibility it is to educate the media on government (department) issues, structures and processes? The data demonstrates that that the majority of respondents recommended a dual-shared responsibility between the government and the media.

Most government communicators acknowledged an interdependent relationship and therefore a harmonious relationship was considered imperative and invaluable. Most government communicators conveyed a willingness to accommodate the media. What emerged from the interviews was the fact that most respondent were ex-journalists, having completed their training in journalism and worked for several years in the news media as

journalists. A majority of such respondents identified their journalistic background as a major advantage in government communication because they were sympathetic to the media; they understood newsroom processes, comprehended newsworthiness and retained many media contacts.

All of the analysed communication strategy documents acclaimed the importance of good media relations between the department and the media and identified some proactive efforts in media engagement. For example, media relations in the Department of Health consisted of managing mutually beneficial relations with various media houses in order to ensure that information needs are addressed appropriately. The communication strategy document of KZN Public Works aims to enhance positive media relations to encourage accurate and fair reporting. The Department of Economic Development and Tourism communication strategy envisage a relationship between the government communication unit and the media based on professionalism and mutual respect. The KZN provincial government media strategy aims at establishing a rapid response unit responsible for maintaining a media database for all departments, providing proactive media coverage and promoting the image of the KZN provincial government.

In order to overcome the impasse of media disinterest, government communication must invest in direct reporting (Lee, 2000:454). Whereas indirect reporting refers to communicating efforts through the intermediary institutions of the news media, direct reporting focuses on non-mediated communications from the agency to the public at large (Lee, 2008:145). As a way of dealing with uncertainties emanating from a reliance on the mass media, the KZN provincial government seems to be moving increasingly towards direct communication with the public as external stakeholders.

Reasons behind a move towards direct communication are provided in section 9.16.1. Most departmental publications have been discontinued in favour of more centralised publications. *Vukuzienzele* is a national government newspaper while *Simama* is a KZN government newspaper produced by the office of the premier. However, challenges of government publications were apparent in the form of distribution and marketing strategies. Additional forms of direct communication employed by the KZN provincial department are specified in section 9.16.4.

Social media are used in KZN as additional forms of direct communication. Web 2.0, in government, demonstrates the potency of internet-based tools in enhancing digital democracy and public diplomacy (Sadeghi, 2012:127). The data findings identified the utility of social media in attaining votes, communicating service delivery as well as in information diffusion. The ability of social media in engaging the youth and in outreach management was acknowledged. Fears that social media may be misconstrued as a platform for complaints and criticism was seen as a formidable challenge against the adoption of social media in many government departments. Additional advantages and challenges of using social media as a form of direct government communication are outlined in section 9.17.4.

For web 2.0 to add significant value to government communication, communication policies and strategies should outline guidelines for utilisation standards and recommend directives on how government communicators should respond to negative comments, inaccuracy of information and misrepresentation of information online. The next section addresses the effects of politics in government communication.

10.2.2 THE EFFECTS OF POLITICS TO THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

It is only the provincial communication strategy document of the office of the premier that made any reference to politics and the ruling party. All other communication strategy documents remained silent about politics and its effects on government communication. On the contrary, the interviews and survey data had plenty to say about the effects of politics in government communication.

The majority of interviewees reported that politics had a significant effect on government communication in general and on their daily practices in particular. The results from the survey data demonstrated a 33% percent positive, indicating that the effect of politics is high and a 26% percent negative, reflecting that politics do not have much of an effect on government communication. This result concurred with extant literature. However, no the literature addressed the effects of 'politics' on the practice of government communication.

The following six elements appeared most affected by politics. They are hereby outlined in order of their importance or intensity: (a) politics sets the agenda for government communication. By setting the agenda, we mean influencing government communication practice in terms of what is said and done, when and how it is said and done. (b) Politics drives outreach programmes. Respondents claimed that politics drove outreach programmes inclusive of areas in which they communicate. (c) Politics influences communication content, both direct and indirect. (d) Politics influences appointments and promotions of government communication positions. (e) Politics demanded more energy, resources and urgency towards the promotion of the MEC office, which is the political arm of government. Lastly, (f) politics influences self-censorship on government communicators not to appear aligned or unaligned to any fraction of political incumbents. Section 9.4.1 discussed these factors in more details.

Another point emanating from the data was how accepting or unaccepting government communicators were of politics being part of their jobs. A sizable majority of respondents accepted politics as part of government, and hence an inherent part of government communication. Politics was not seen as having a positive or negative effect on the practice; it was just something that was inherent of government communication. However, it was seen as something that could be managed. Practitioners mentioned some of the methods they use to insulate the effects of politics from government communication: professionalism, work experience, adapting to changing dynamics of politics and separating government from ruling-party through visual branding. Section 9.4.2 explored these strategies in detail. Closely related to politics are legal constraints discussed next.

10.2.3 EFFECTS OF LEGAL CONSTRAINTS TO THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The purpose of this section was to evaluate if and how legal constraints affected the practice of government communication. The existence of legal constraints was confirmed. The data findings furthermore validated literature assumption that legal constraints often reduce the capacity of government communicators to communicate freely and openly (Liu & Horsley, 2007:379; Liu *et al.*, 2010:191). The impacts of legal constraints are hereby

categorised into four related themes: (1) the protocol of consulting and information gathering, (2) the protocol of consulting and approval, (3) confidentiality and information classification and (4) bureaucracy and red tape. Section 9.5 describes these effects in further details. They are briefly summarised here.

The protocol of consulting and information gathering insinuates that before responding to government issues in the public sphere, government communicators are expected to consult with the concerned business units in order to ascertain communication directives. This process is lengthy and time consuming. In addition, the protocol regarding information movement of external feedback into government is too rigid and passes through too many phases to a point of distorted by the time it reaches top management. The protocol of consultation and information gathering pose an even bigger challenge in social media. Also identified are the volatility of social media and the lack of procedures and guidelines on responding to enquiries. The urgency of social media obliterates all lengthy protocol of consultation.

The protocol of consulting and approval infers that the content of government communication, ideas, and output are controlled and must be approved before use or implementation. Those instructing changes are seldom communication trained, thus likely to contravene journalistic conventions, which would engender negative effects on media relations.

The effects of bureaucracy and red tape regarding budgeting, timing, and planning were mentioned as significant challenges to government communication. It takes time for budgets, communication strategies, and employment appointments to be approved. In certain departments, communication managers were not appointed and communication strategy documents were not approved. It also takes time for planning to be concluded, which means that events are occasionally organised in a rush.

Confidentiality and information classification were mentioned as formidable communication constraints in government. Government communication is guided by rules and regulations. However, government communicators do not always know those rules or have a full

comprehension regarding classification of information. The finding in this section corresponds to assumption that communication managers in public institutions have less freedom to react as they see fit to the circumstances that they face (Boyne, 2002:101; Allison, 1979:462).

Government is often criticised for a lack of transparency, falsification of information, secrecy, and spin. These are formidable limitations to government communication (Gelders & Oyvind, 2010:34; Edes, 2000:463). On the contrary, the data demonstrated a high-level rating of personal values towards transparency complemented by a corresponding high rating of departmental values towards transparency. Similarly, departmental management committees such as the MEC and HOD were also ranked high in transparency principles. Transparency was considered an essential element in achieving a legitimate government communication. These findings corroborate with Fairbanks *et al.*, 2007:28; Liu and Levenshus, 2010:9; Vos, 2006:252; Vos and Westerhoudt, 2008:22-23 who found that transparency is rated high among government communicators even if it is a concept difficult to materialise in government. None of the communication strategy documents identified how transparency should be materialised in government, although its importance of was specified.

10.2.4 EFFECTS OF CENTRALISATION ON THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Because the provincial government is at the centre of the three-tier system, it was essential to establish the nature and frequency of its interaction with the other levels of government. Whist the data from the surveys indicated a higher interaction with the national government in Pretoria, a lower interaction with local government in districts was reflected in the data. Provincial government communicators identified challenges in their interactions with national government. They referred to the poor understanding of the provincial environment by the central ministry department in Pretoria.

The provincial communication strategy document of 2012 recognises a “need for co-ordination of communication efforts in the province to ensure consistency and coherence”.

A few examples of this are the adoption and implementation of uniform branding guidelines, the consolidation of various departmental newsletters into a single weekly newspaper (*Simama*) and an effective media monitoring system for all departments. Therefore, there is a notable move towards centralisation in the form of integrated communication. The following section evaluates the perceived value of the communication unit in government departments.

10.2.5 EFFECTS OF THE DEVALUATION OF COMMUNICATION TO THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The purpose of this theme was to determine the value management attach to the communication unit in government. This entailed the evaluation of government communicators' perceptions pertaining to the value of government communication as viewed by the dominant coalition (MEC and HOD groups). The data results from this section were rather tentative. On the one hand, the results confirmed literature projection regarding the devaluation of communication in government as measured by the majority of respondents who rated management's support of government communication poorly. On the other hand, a significant number of government communicators felt that the communication unit was sufficiently supported and valued in government departments. The standard answer however was that it differs from department to department, some dominant coalitions valued communication, while others did not.

This result reaffirms Killingsworth's (2009:62) findings that the perception and value of communication varies according on the individual and his experiences and expertise in communications as a profession. The majority of respondents reported that management did not value government communication because they did not understand it at all. It was conclusive that managers who understood government communication also valued it. Additional reasons for the devaluation of communication in government are discussed in section 9.6. Next, the impacts of the devaluation of government communication are presented.

Some respondents argued that even if communication is valued, not enough support is provided. The majority of government communicators complained about budget constraints. It was mentioned that communication budgets are extremely limited as opposed to other business units in the department. Budget constraints affected the quality of work. Most affected by budget constraints are practitioners working on the technical sides of communication and most reliant on high technological equipment in order to perform their jobs. Graphic designers, web managers, photographers, videographers and marketers exemplify this group.

The provincial government communication strategy document acknowledged challenges perpetuated by budget constraints in KwaZulu Natal. All other communication strategies similarly identified budgets constraints and challenges imposed by budget restrictions towards the attainment of excellence in communication management. It was observed that the strength of any communication strategy document is in its implementation based on the budget available, and without which, objectives of communication strategies become unattainable.

These additional effects caused by the devaluation of communication were mentioned: respondents complained of poor working conditions, being understaffed, poor salaries, and poor professional developments. Another challenge related to the devaluation of communication is that politicians and management are not always willing to listen to the advice provided by the communication unit. This threatens the most critical boundary-spanning role of the communication unit as the voice of the public and a conscience of the government department.

The findings illustrate a challenge related to poor understanding of communication by the dominant coalition and other business units. Government communicators claimed that management do not always understand how the media operates. Management demands the constant presence of positive media, timeously. Poor understanding of media relations, compounded by limited understanding of journalistic conversions, poor comprehension of newsroom etiquette and a general failure to understand the operations of the media

proved challenging to the process of information gathering. The urgency of responding to the media was not realised and this precipitated problems for media relations.

The results indicate that government communication is not valued because management perceive it as a technical tool or merely a support function. Communication is therefore relegated to a technical tool rather than elevated to a management function. Being devoid of a seat in the management structure of government decision-making at the Management Committee (Manco) and the Executive Committee (Exco) meetings suggests that communication managers are not sufficiently accorded the opportunity to convey the value of communication or to represent the needs of communication at the highest echelon of management. Senior communication managers acknowledged that government communication should be a management function with a permanent seat in the decision-making table of the departmental management structure.

What was surprising from this data was the distinction made between administrative managers and political managers. Government communicators mentioned that politicians (the MEC group) better understood and valued communication more than administrative managers (the HOD group) and directorates. The reasons provided were that politicians were more experienced (from their campaign days) of media relations and in matters of public opinion. Moreover, politicians are more reliant on communication support and they utilise it more. An additional reason is that the administrative side is more focused on service delivery. For them, communication is just support. They are concerned with output and service delivery of which they are primarily measured.

The devaluation of government communication is further perpetuated by the inability of government communicators to depict their contribution through constant communication evaluations that demonstrate the impacts, successes, and returns of government communication. Communication evaluations conducted in government are sporadic, inadequate, and insufficient. This steered a failure in demonstrating the contributions of government communication towards the success of the core business of the government, which is essentially the main contribution to organisational effectiveness. This debate is further explored in the next section.

10.3 STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

According to Grunig (2007:29), the principle of strategic communication management is based on the idea that communication management should be planned, managed by objectives, evaluated, and connected in some way to organisational objectives. Grunig and Jaatinen (1998:220) had previously argued that government departments were moving towards a strategic, managerial and symmetrical form of communication even though they were not quite there yet. For the purpose of this study, it was therefore imperative to evaluate the extent to which government communication in the KZN province was congruous to strategic communication. The following study objectives are fulfilled in this section.

- **Objective 3:** To investigate the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of communication management in provincial government departments.
- **Objective 4:** To examine the link between government communication strategies and government communication practices.

10.3.1 EFFECTIVENESS IN STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Literature in both strategic management and strategic communication indicate certain elements that must be put in place for strategic communication to be able to contribute to organisational effectiveness. For *strategic* communication management to be possible, both *excellence* and *effectiveness* in communication management must be achieved. The excellence theory offered **14 principles of excellence** that are fundamental in strategic communication management. The extents to which they are fulfilled in the KZN provincial government are summarised in section 10.3.5. The reason to which they are delayed in analysis is that they consist of many practices of communication management (such as roles, evaluations, planning, organisational structure *et cetera*) which are discussed throughout this section. In that way, section 10.3.5 will serve as a check box, identifying the degree to which excellence is attained by the KZN provincial.

Following an explanation of what makes communication *excellent* (as described in the 14 features), it become imperative to elaborate upon the elements of the *effectiveness* principle in communication management. This discussion was explored thoroughly in chapter 4. To recap, the following five (5) aspects are characteristics of the *effectiveness* of communication management: In addition to the ***excellence principle***, Grunig and Repper (1992:117) described the strategic role of communication management as that of building long-term relationships with organisational stakeholders (***symmetrical communication***). Moss and Warnaby (1998:136) accent the point that strategic communication entails diagnoses of the environment (***environmental scanning***). Strategic communication contributes to organisational effectiveness by making the organisation aware of stakeholders, public and issues as they evolve leading to the development of programmes that can help resolve the identified issues (***contributing to enterprise strategy***). Steyn (2004) added that strategic communication is based on a premise of **communication management as a management function** (Steyn, 2004). Now that the five (5) elements of effectiveness in communicating management have been outlined, the discussion will now focus on each of the elements of effectiveness in communication management, starting with communication as a management function,

10.3.1.1 Effectiveness feature 1: Communication as a management function

Literature describes the principles of strategic communication as only attainable when the communication manager retains a permanent seat in the management committee and is indefinitely involved in organisational decision-making. The six KZN departments, among the sample, retained the services of communication managers with the title: Head of Communication. However, the two remaining departments did not have a permanent communication manager. This contributed to the poor comprehension of the imperatives of communication by the executive administrative management at senior levels.

Both the KZN Cabinet Resolution No 1 of 31 January 2007 and the Public Finance Management Act, legislatively provide for the strategic position and strategic role of the communication manager in KZN government departments. Together, the documents stipulate that: (1) The general manager for corporate communication shall be responsible for the day-to-day activities of corporate communications and stakeholder relations, (2)

The general manager for communication shall be the official spokesperson for the ministry and the department, (3) *The general manager for communication shall be a member of both management and executive committees* (abbreviated as Manco and Exco respectively). In terms of policy articulation, the KZN provincial government appreciate government communication as a management function.

More than half of senior government communication managers in KZN reported to have permanent seats in the decision-making table at exco and manco while a little less than a half reported that they did not have seats in the mentioned management committees. For simplicity, it can be said that only half of the respondents in senior communication management (Head of Communication) retained a permanent seat at various government management structures. This affirms that despite policy, government communication is not practiced sufficiently as a management function in some KZN government departments.

The majority of government communicators claimed that government communication was viewed as a technical function, rather than a strategic one. It was confirmed that lack of communication policy (strategies) led to the problem of communication being relegated to technical roles. For government communication to be strategic, it must be elevated from being operational by incorporating it into cognitive planning. Strategic communication is about a high-level of thinking. Thus, education is perceived as a catalyst for the 'thinking act', which is essential to strategic government communication. ***The hypothesis is that the more educated government communicators are, strategic they become.***

10.3.1.2 Effectiveness feature 2: Contribution to enterprise strategy

In accordance to the Pretoria School of Thought, strategic government communication is only possible when the communication unit succeed in making inputs to the enterprise strategy at top management level (the role of the strategist); developing communication strategies at the middle management level (the role of the manager), and developing operational strategy at the implementation level (the role of the technician) (de Beer, Steyn & Rensburg, 2013:310).

With reference to the Pretoria School of Thought, it was essential to determine the extent to which the government communication unit contributes to various strategic decisions, programmes or legislature policies of the government department. Although it was recommended in various government communication policy documents for communication managers to retain seats in the management table, and it was confirmed in the data that half of those seats are indeed occupied, it was surprising to note that only a few reported to exert a considerable influence to strategic management and policy legislation of the government department. Several reasons were enlisted to explain the poor contribution of the communication unit to the enterprise strategy: Firstly, it was emphasised that management views government communication as a technical function. Secondly, government by its nature is bureaucratic. Hartle (1985:350) suggested that the sheer size and complexity of the federal government create managerial and leadership problems. Taking into account the many processes and layers in government decision-making, the communication unit in provincial departments would barely make a significant impact on the higher-end of decision-making. Thirdly, most communication managers only attended Manco and Exco meetings in order to adequately understand the policies and strategies of the department enough to communicate them better in the media, and not necessarily to provide input in those meetings. Hence, they are there to consume information than to impart it. This behaviour serves no strategic purpose.

Moss and Warnaby (1998:315) are of the opinion that “communication has been treated primarily as an enabling function, facilitating the successful implementation of strategic decisions, but it is not in itself seen as a key element in the strategic decision making process”. Paul (2012) mentions that the biggest challenge in government communication is that “strategic communication is often an afterthought. Concentrated strategic efforts seem relatively rare in government communication (Mertinelli, 2012:144).

The communication strategy document of the KZN provincial government acknowledge that the success and the realisation of the impact of communication strategies and their implementation plans can only be achieved through the support of the MEC, HOD and senior management. Only through this support will the communication unit be able to contribute aptly to the enterprise strategy. Most of the analysed communication strategy

documents concur with the above postulation. It is therefore conclusive that the success of the communication efforts is dependent on the support from the department's executive and management committees. The communication unit could encourage and enhance this level of support by demonstrating proof of its contribution to the running of the department (the enterprise strategy) and by validating the success of government communication through consistent communication evaluation research and environmental scanning that reduce a crisis in legitimacy.

All the strategic documents recommend for government communication units to regularly assess the communication environment, identify communication gaps, and be proactive in identifying opportunities created by interacting with the public. The next section outlines the extent to which this recommendation is implemented in practice.

10.3.1.3 Effectiveness feature 3: Environmental scanning and communication evaluations

Permeability as a feature of the public sector distinctiveness, suggests that public organisations are considered 'open systems' that are easily influenced by external events. Strategic communication literature conceptualise the organisational environment as a source of competitive advantage. The environment is not considered static, but open to negotiations, persuasion, accommodation and alterations (Grunig & Repper, 1992:123). Thus, the pivotal role of communication in strategic management is in defining and understanding the organisation's environment through environmental scanning and issue management (Grunig & Repper, 1992).

The *strategizing for communication guideline* document (2007) recommends that research should inform communication strategies because it gives insight to the dynamics of the environment and the challenges it brings. The communication strategy document of the KZN department of Sports and Recreation opines that "the concept of monitoring the effectiveness of the communication service is crucial to the success of the component". Public Works' strategy concurs, "The success of any strategy or campaign is dependent on the continuous monitoring and evaluation to test its validity and value for money". This

infers that communication evaluations are held in high regard in the KZN provincial government (at least in policy articulation).

With the above said, it is paradoxical that none of the communication strategy documents outline the procedure in which environmental scanning would be conducted in practice. The methodologies for communication evaluations are also unarticulated. There was no mention of formative and summative communication evaluations or strategies to conduct environmental scanning beyond media analysis. Consequently, even though the media environment may come to be comprehended, the public and their issues remain unidentified.

In reference to the interview data, it was essential to explore how communications evaluations are used to impart information into strategic government communication and therefore inform the policies and strategies of the department as a whole, thereby contribution to organisational effectiveness. Most government communicators acknowledged the value of communication evaluations and expressed a desire to have them conducted. On the other hand, they also confirmed that little evaluations were taking place in their various departments.

Environmental scanning and issue management in the KZN provincial government are composed of: media monitoring and informal feedback from outreach programmes. Communication evaluations from outreach programmes were identified as the most preferred method of pre-environmental scanning prior to outreach programmes (*imbizos*). However, limited impact-research was conducted post outreach programmes. Employee progress reports were used to gauge the performance of individual government communicators. This means that there are limited strategies and efforts to evaluate the performance of the entire communication unit and its contribution to organisational effectiveness.

The results from this study concurs with Hiebert and Devine's (1985:46) research which found that government information officers almost universally proclaim the importance of research and evaluation to their work. However, there was a huge gap between the

admission of importance and the actual conducting of communication evaluation. Most strategy document noted the limitation of communication evaluations and promised to make efforts towards improving communication evaluation in government. Hiebert and Devine (1985:46) identified the following barriers preventing the uptake of communication evaluations in government: lack of budget, lack of time, lack of knowledge and qualification to conduct communication evaluations. All of these elements appear to have played a part in impeding communication evaluations in the KZN provincial government.

Research on the efficacy of communication management is essential to identify the contribution of communication management to an organisation itself. Communication management attains value only by helping an organisation achieve its goals. Practitioners are however slow in adopting evaluation research to prove their worth in the department (Dozier, 1992:336). This seems to be the case in the KZN provincial government.

In summary, three features of effectiveness in communication management have been discussed in this section. Namely: communication as a management function, contribution to the enterprise strategy, and environmental scanning plus communication evaluations. Feature 4, symmetrical communication, will be discussed in the ethics segment in section 10.5.5 while feature 5, excellence in communication management, will be discussed in section 10.3.4. The excellence theory will form the conclusion of the discussion on strategic communication management.

10.3.2 ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNICATION UNIT

On the subject of communication structures, opinions of where the communication unit should be designated in the department proved contentious. Allison (1983:19) annotated that the government sector is comprised of two groups of management fraternities that are occasionally hostile to each other: the civil servant (executive, administrators, Office of Head of Departments) and the political appointees (Office of the MEC).

Some government communicators in this study advocated for the communication unit to be incorporated within the MEC office, while others contended that the communication unit

is best served by the HOD office. The latter group argued that government communication should be aligned with the HOD (administrative group) for the following reasons. First, government communication becomes more strategic when incorporated within the HOD office. Secondly, it is easier to attain augmented communication budgets since the administration side is the custodian of government finances. Thirdly, the MEC office is less stable whereas government communication must be steady. Fourthly, the HOD office accounts for a politically free government communication because they are concerned with public administration and service delivery. In contrast, the main argument of the former group was that in terms of communicating for democracy and accountability, government communication is best served by the MEC office. Moreover, the MEC group understands communication better than the administrative side and utilises it more.

Gregory (2009:27) illuminates that the position of the most senior communication manager within the organisation provides a good indication of how the communication function is valued within the organisation. An optimal structure is one that permits direct access to top management; wherein such access is used to exert influence in the planning of the enterprise strategy (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005:873). For that reason, it is essential to determine the roles of communicators within an organisation. The roles of government communicators are discussed next.

10.3.3 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION ROLES

Broom and Smith (1979) operationalized five conceptual roles in communication management: the expert prescriber, technical service provider, communication process facilitator, problem-solving process facilitator, and the acceptant legitimizer. The Pretoria School of Thought (PST) identified three South African communication management roles: the strategist, the manager and the technician.

Most head of communication in provincial government departments identified with the role of an *expert prescriber* (level D). This role entails managing integrated communication between various business units (directorates), day-to-day management of the communication unit, and developing communication strategies. However, section 9.10.1.3

demonstrated that as much as head of communication managers describe strategic management functions demarcated in the expert prescriber role, they also performed a consortium of technical roles in media relations.

With reference to the *problem solving process facilitator*, a number of respondents mentioned that their roles entailed providing communication support to the head of department, the MEC, and other business units. The support described were 'branding, 'events management' and 'media relations' which are not a true reflection of the problem solving process facilitator as they do not involve problem solving and problem identification thorough environmental scanning and issue management. An advisory function would have resonated better with the *problem solving process facilitator* role. However, an advisory function was mentioned very minimally in the data.

The *communication facilitator* seemed to have been a dominant role within the mid-managers and the communication officers. This entailed creating media platforms for the MEC and HOD to communicate with the public. This role brought into question the proper function of government communication. The debate was polarised between practitioners who argued that government communicators were *advocates* who must communicate on the behalf of politicians. In the contrast, are government communicators who regarded themselves as *conduits*, merely creating a space for politicians to speak or simply transferring the message of their principals. They sought themselves removed from the process and absolutely taking no ownership or questioning what is said.

The data demonstrated a significantly large number of practitioners whose key roles included 'branding', 'events management', 'outreach programmes', 'advertising' and 'becoming the face of the department', 'promoting government', 'marketing the department' and 'marketing government service'. These functions are not accounted for by the traditional roles of public relations described by Broom and Smith (1979), Broom (1982) and Dozier (1992). In performing these functions, government communication practitioners are more concerned with issues of persuasion, image management and publicity. These roles are therefore closely aligned with the press agency model described by Grunig (1992, 2007). However, it included more than just media relations. A clearer description of

this role is in Van Ruler's interpretation of the *steward* (public relations is pampering) and the *conductor* (public relations is harmonic performance). Both these roles view public relations as persuasion.

Media relations practitioners specialise in external communication, external organisational rhetoric, information production and dissemination. Media relations falls largely (but not always) on the technical side of communication management. The data reported a distinction between media relations on level B and media relations on level C. Media relations roles at level C are slightly different from those expressed in level B that tended to be technically orientated. Media relations in level C is more of a strategic role in drafting media strategy. This role involves planning and strategizing in media buying and liaison with the dominate coalition of the department (management) on how to deal with media related issues. However, very few respondents referred to this role.

The *communication liaison officer* specialises in aligning communication between management and key publics, either through traditional mediated channels or through new media technologies. This role is essentially about information diffusion. Government communicators whose responsibilities included level B media relations, social networking, web-management, and internal communication fitted this role precisely.

10.3.4 THE ALIGNMENT BETWEEN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION STRATEGY DOCUMENTS AND THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Moss and Warnaby (1998) distinguish between strategy communication and communication strategy. While *strategy communication* entails the role of communication in facilitating the strategy-making process (such as described in effectiveness feature 2: contribution to organisational effectiveness), *communication strategy* is concerned about the nature and focus of communication strategy itself. The focus here is on government-communication strategy documents and their application to the practice of government communication.

The *strategizing for communication guideline* document (2007) provides that government communication strategy documents becomes a guide for future actions, the standard against which the success or failure of communication is measured. The value of government communication strategy documents were identified by government communicators as follows. Firstly, government communication strategy documents can be used to enforce accountability to the communication unit. Secondly, government communication strategy documents are essential to move government communication from a reactive, towards a proactive practice. Thirdly, government communication strategy documents set the tone for the practice regarding what is communicated, to whom and how it is communicated. Fourthly, government communication strategy documents (especially a collection of them) recounts a history of the communication unit in the department. They narrate details of past successes, failures and past programmes. In that way, they usher a direction for the future of the communication unit. Section 9.1.3 in page 322 describes these values in more details.

In spite of the availability of excellent government communication strategy documents, the results from this study confirmed Grunig and Jaatinen's (1998:229-230) findings reflecting a challenge in the implementation of government communication strategies. Communication strategy documents are not sufficiently translated into practice. The impediment could be ascribed to a lack of budget necessary to bring into life the often-exorbitant communications strategies or due to negligence of the document once created and filled. This segment on strategic government communication concludes by evaluating the extent to which the KZN provincial government is upholding the *excellence* principle in communication management.

10.3.5 EXCELLENCE IN STRATEGIC GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

This section deliberates on the relationship between the excellence principle in communication management and the attainment of a strategic government communication. It is already established that *strategic* communication is strongly linked to the principle of effectiveness and excellence in communication management. The effectiveness principle has already been delineated in the previous sections of the chapter.

The excellence theory identifies 14 key features that are fundamental to the enactment of the excellence principle in communication management. These features are summarised next and the extent to which they are fulfilled by the KZN provincial government is appraised:

1. **Strategic management is the interlink that integrates excellence and effectiveness in communication management.** Government communication in the KZN provincial government department may be excellent, but it does not yet contribute to effectiveness. This is because the excellence principle is only one of the five elements that must be present for the attainment of *effectiveness* in communication management.
2. **Excellent communication departments engage in environmental scanning.** Very few environmental scanning are being conducted formally. There are some data captured from outreach programmes and continuous media analyses.
3. **Excellent public relations departments contribute to decisions made by the dominant coalition of senior management by providing information to that coalition about the environment of the organisation.** Very few environmental scanning are currently conducted, formally. However, there are unconventional methods of data capturing about the environment. For example, a lot of data is being captured during outreach programmes (*imbizos*) and media analysis through newlink. The preliminary data captured from outreach programmes are usually used to inform communication strategies for *imbizos*. However, it is not clear whether this data is captured formally and saved for any use. A follow up question was whether the communication unit delegated this research data to top management for strategic planning. The answer to this question is *not really*. However, there is an acknowledgement that data should be fed to strategic planning but government communication units have not yet reached this point beyond providing intelligence or data about media relations to the dominant coalition.
4. **Organisations with high environmental turbulences are more likely to engage in environmental scanning; often leading to excellent communication management.** Several departments' communication strategies identified their

external environment as turbulent, particularly denoting the attitude of the media. Nevertheless, no communication evaluations were offered as solutions to further understand and engage with the identified turbulent environment.

5. ***Communication must be a management function if it is to contribute excellently to organisational effectiveness.*** For government communication to be a management function, it must have a senior manager who manages communication strategically. The results indicate that there are communication managers in various government departments with the title *head of communication*, whose role is not technical but strategic. Their functions are to facilitate integrated communication between various business units (directorates), manage the day-to-day practice of the communication unit and to develop communication strategies.
6. ***Excellent communication department must have access to the dominant coalition.*** The results demonstrate that most senior communication managers retain seats in the dominant coalition, in EXCO and MANCO which are the highest management structures in provincial government departments. However, not all communication managers are accorded those seats in the decision-making table, and certainly not all use these seats to effect the strategic management of the department by imparting intelligence about the environment, issues and publics to the enterprise strategy. These seats are dominantly used to comprehend information about strategic management, legislation, and policies in order to regurgitate them to the public sphere and the media.
7. ***Integrate all public relations functions in a single department.*** All communication management efforts have been integrated in a single communication unit in most government departments. There were two instances where the corporate communication function was separated from the media relation function. However, the norm is one communication unit with a few additional communicators delegated to the MEC group.
8. ***Separate from other functions such as marketing departments.*** The communication unit is not separated from the marketing function. This has not particularly contributed to the sublimation of the communication management function, but it has to a certain degree co-opted government communication into marketing terminologies and objectives in promotion, brand awareness, visual

branding, identity management and various other advocacy roles performed by marketing.

9. **Enactment of the two-way symmetrical model.** The two-way symmetrical model is based on research. It seems that the KZN provincial government is moving towards the asymmetrical model wherein attempts are made to improve the image of the government department and promote the values of the department without changing or significantly incorporating the input of the public.
10. **Design and manage communication programmes strategically.** no data was found. The present study focused predominantly on the meso level (departmental) of communication management. Hence, communication programmes (at the micro level) were excluded from the study.
11. **Diversity is essential for excellent communication management.** Diversity of communication practitioners in terms of race, gender and ethnicity is essential for excellent communication management (Likely, 2013; Grunig, 2002:19). However, the sample as depicted in section 9.2 does not reflect such diversity and therefore fails to uphold this principle of the excellence theory.
12. **Excellent communication management does not exist in isolation; it is a characteristic of an excellent organisation.** No data was found since the study only focused on the perspectives of government communication practitioners and their strategy documents to the exclusion of the overall department management fraternity and their strategic documents. It is therefore impossible to judge whether any of the government departments are in themselves excellent.
13. **Participative rather than authoritarian organisational culture.** The results found that rigid control of information, a culture of consultations and bureaucracy (what has been termed legal constraints) hamper the freedom, participation and responsiveness of communications professionals.
14. **Employ communicators with specialised body of knowledge in the field, professionalism.** This study found that 95 percent of government communicators employed in the KZN provincial government have a communication educational background. Of this, about 40 percent of senior managers have practical journalistic backgrounds. With the auspices of the GCIS, government communication in KZN is moving towards professionalism although there is still much to be improved in this

area. The issue of professionalism in government communication and its impacts on strategic communication is discussed further in the next section.

10.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THE ROLE OF THE GCIS

- **Objective 4:** To explore the role of the GCIS in standardising and professionalising the practice of government communication at a provisional-departmental level.

It was essential to explore at which stage of professionalization the KZN provincial government was designated. The purpose is to understand the impacts of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment upon the *professional* practice of government communication. Although there are various measures in which professionalism can be gauged, this study only considered four measures: (1) fraternity membership in strong professional organisations, (2) education and training, (3) role of the GCIS, and (4) alignment of the practice with government communication guidelines and policies. Each of this is discussed below.

10.4.1 EFFECT OF (POOR) PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ON THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Literature on the distinctiveness of the communication environment of the public sector projected that there is poor professional development in the government communication profession (Liu and Levenshus, 2010). It was therefore critical to explore the perceptions held by government communicators regarding their professional development prospects. A majority of midlevel communication managers reported a sluggish progress pattern of professional development within the public sector. Senior managers were less optimistic of further professional growth while communication officers were the most optimistic about professional development prospects in government communication.

In their South African research on professional fraternity membership, Meintjes and Niemann-Struweg (2009:9) found that although an overwhelming support exists for a professional body, very few practitioners register for professional associations such as

PRISA. Similarly, of all 35 government communicators who participated in this study, none of them mentioned an affiliation to any South African or international professional fraternity. Most argued that none of the professional bodies contributed value on their roles as government communicators because a distinction of practice is seldom recognised.

Elmer's (2000:192) and Gregory (2006:200) demonstrated that education and training were crucial for professionalism. Government communicators in KZN confirmed that further qualifications were recognised as catalyst for professional growth. Without differential education, especially focused on government communication in South Africa, it was imperative to inquire how new government communicators were inducted into the profession of government communication and how they acquired the prerequisite knowledge about the intricacies of government systems and the role of communication within that system. It was established that there were induction programmes but these induction programmes were general and not communication specific. The GCIS is thus recommended to provide these induction programmes. It is ultimately the role of the GCIS to standardise and professionalise government communication in South Africa. The next section discusses the role of the provincial GCIS in standardising and professionalising government communication in KwaZulu Natal.

10.4.2 THE ROLE OF THE GCIS IN STANDARDISING GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Sanders *et al.* (2011:15) documented the professionalising and standardising roles of government institutional bodies such as the German Federal Press and Information Office (Germany), the British Government Communication Network (UK) and the Government Communication and Information Systems (GCIS) in South Africa. It is therefore critical to rate the usefulness of the GCIS in terms of practical communication support provided to government communicators, standardisation of practice, and professional development support in the KZN provincial government. For that matter, only efforts of the provincial KZN GCIS were considered.

The data demonstrated that the majority of government communicators rated the provincial GCIS high with regard to its performance, role and purpose. However, the survey data (67%) demonstrated that the level of interaction between government communicators and the provincial GCIS was low. Government communicators at midlevel and lower entry-levels reported not having much interaction with the GCIS except for occasional GCIS training that they have attended. Conversely, senior government communication managers noted high interactions with the provincial GCIS in the KZN Provincial Communicators Forum (PCF) hosted by the office of the premier.

In an effort to formalise, professionalise and depoliticise government communication, the development of formal rules governing the practice and the structures of government communication are essential (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:15). To this end, the GCIS has produced a long list of government communication guideline documents in attempt to *standardise* the practice. This study was only able to evaluate the practical use of only one of the guiding document called *the handbook of government communication*. A significant majority of respondents declared the use the GCIS government communication handbook. A significant number of respondents acknowledged the role of the GCIS in standardising government communication. However, only a margin of the respondents had attended GCIS training, seminar, or workshop at least once in their professional lives. The findings demonstrate that the most popular GCIS role among government communicators in KZN is in providing practical communication support such as in media buying and sourcing archive material. In addition, the GCIS was sometimes consulted to provide expert advice on practical, policy or strategic government communication issues and in capacitating government communicators with additional resources. The GCIS was encouraged (by practitioners) to step in and educate politicians about the role and purpose of government communication.

The role of the GCIS is one of custodianship, providing leadership for government communication within the three tiers of government. Some government communicators indicated that the GCIS did not have a final word and thus only had a limited impact on the practice of government communication. The conversation with the provincial GCIS confirmed challenges in the implementation of government communication policies at

provincial and district level. Additional challenges faced by the provincial office involve monitoring and compliance.

10.5 THE QUESTION OF ETHICS IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

- **Objective 6:** To investigate whether the practice of government communication in the KZN provincial government is moving towards the dialogic or the self-advocacy rhetoric (reputation)?

10.5.1 THE PURPOSE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

It was essential to establish which function was considered the most fundamental to government communication. The following functions were mentioned: information diffusion, image building, promoting and marketing of programmes, protecting government and advising principals on communication matters. The function deemed imperative was determined by counting the number of people who mentioned each function. “Promoting government services” was found to be the most dominant function. Conversely, ‘communicating with the public’ and ‘managing stakeholders’ were the least mentioned roles. The data demonstrates that government communication is moving from ‘information diffusion’ to ‘image management’. Government communication is not seen so much as ‘persuasion’ but rather as ‘promotion’. The results project a move from the public information model towards an asymmetrical model.

The following is a top ten (10) list of important government communication functions in accordance to the perceptions of government communicators employed at the KwaZulu Natal provincial government. The list is presented in a descending order, starting with the most mentioned function towards the least mentioned function. (1) Promoting government services through branding, identity management and events management, (2) information diffusion, (3) media relations, (4) two-way communication and feedback, (5) educating the public about government and its services, (6) integrated communication, (7) internal communication, (8) stakeholder management, (9) advising management on

communication issues, (10) strategic government communication as a verifying tool. Each of these roles is discussed in further details in section 9.11 of this document. The following unexpected results demanded further analysis:

- *The advisory role:* To a lesser extent, an advisory role in government communication was recognised. It was claimed that the role of communication as advisory is disregarded by the dominant coalition (the management structure of the government department) as they do not always listen to the communication unit.
- *Integrated communication:* One of the least identified roles in government communication literature is integrated communication, which involves providing communication support to the head of department, the MEC, and other business units. This role bears similarity to internal communication. However, this role is explained beyond the simple information diffusion to internal publics. The role facilitates an alignment, linkage and synchronising of communication between the MEC and the department, among directorates in the department, and within the three tiers of government (Intergovernmental relations).
- *The monitoring role:* The purpose of government communication in creating transparency, building accountability, and combating corruption was identified. This function is not evident in extant literature. The proposal is that communication is an important tool to combat corruption because transparency builds accountability and transparency is only achievable through open communication.

10.5.2 ADVOCACY AND IDENTITY MANAGEMENT IN GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

It was imperative to explore the extent to which government communication was perceived to be advocacy, information diffusion, or boundary spanning. The majority claimed that government communication is a fusion of advocacy and boundary spanning (liaison). Another group indicated that government communication is primarily advocacy and the least group argued that government communication in a developmental state like South

Africa should be about 'development communication', not advocacy, or boundary spanning.

Matters of corporate image, reputation, perception, and stakeholder relations have become increasingly crucial to the success or failure of any administration, particularly government. According to the Department of KZN Health, the corporate brand refers to the corporate identity of the department. It includes the image and the marketing strategies adopted to ensure maximum visibility. A clear and consistent corporate identity is required to assist the public in recognising, accessing, and assessing government and government services. According to the KZN provincial communication strategy document, fundamental corporate identity activities include the production of promotional material and exhibitions to profile the image of government departments and their various programmes. All other communication strategy documents reflected a strong need towards identity management through various forms of visual branding that included adequate internal (inside the building structures) and external (outdoor) branding. No other elements of the identity mix (communication and behaviour) were mentioned beyond visual branding. Perhaps outreach programmes could act as the communication element in the identity management mix.

The KZN provincial communication strategy document states that outreach programmes to communities are central to the government communication strategy. Outreach programmes include, periodic izimbizo to raise awareness and receive feedback on key provincial issues. All analysed communication strategies reflected a need to ensure departmental representation in interdepartmental, provincial government, and intergovernmental community outreach programmes and events.

Outreach programmes are about taking parliament to the public. Imbizos are open to the public. Apparently, the word imbizo has falls out of favour in KZN. They are now called outreach programmes or Project Sukuma-Sakhe under the auspices of the office of the premier. Imbizos provide a one-stop shop where all government services are delivered in one area. This epitomises an effort towards integrated government communication. The communication section of each department is responsible for outreach and events

management for all business units and directorates in the department. From the interviews, it was established that (in summary) outreach programmes are decided upon based on the following criterion: (1) they are decided upon by the office of the premier, (2) There is a calendar of events, (3) Events are decided by cabinet, (3) Requests come from directorates and their business unites, (4) they are based on presidential requests when visiting KZN, (5) Outreach programmes and events depend on themes of the month such as women's day and lastly,(6) they are politically motivated.

Several respondents complained that the communication unit does not have a say on events and outreach management in terms of deciding where, when and why outreach programmes took place. If government communicators were conducting rigorous environmental scanning, they would be able to identify where and when and what issues to address in various outreach programmes. In this way, outreach programmes would be managed strategically. The success of identity management through outreach programmes depends on exceptional external communications.

10.5.3 EFFECTS OF INTERNAL VS EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION ON THE PRACTICE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Liu and Levenshus (2008:9) found that most public organisations, particularly in government valued external communication than internal communication. The present study in KZN found very limited data on internal government communication as many respondents stated that internal communication was now incorporated and managed by the intranet (ICT department). For that reason, practitioners delegated to internal communication also retained responsibilities in other elements of external communication.

With government communication moving towards advocacy, marketing, identity management, and reputation management within the asymmetrical model, internal communication seems to be falling out of the wagon. One of the distinctive features of government communication is that it is a *public good*. This feature of distinctiveness connects government communication with issues of advocacy, strategic management, and ethics. This discussion is explored next.

10.5.4 GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION AS A PUBLIC GOOD

The issue that government communication is a public good dictates that it cannot be left at only being strategic in terms of the excellence theory. Government communication can be practiced excellently to benefit the organisation, but that would not fulfil the distinctive feature of government communication being a public good. In order for government communication to be a valuable public good contributing to democracy, it must have an impact on organisational effectiveness. It is already established that government communication can contribute to organisational effectiveness by assessing thoroughly the needs of the citizens and not only communicating those needs to the dominant coalition, but also advising on how the public can better be served. This act would thus influence service-delivery, legislations, and policies. Government communicators in various departments acknowledged the importance of the communication unit to contribute to organisational effectiveness. However, there was despondency in how this can be achieved in practice.

The argument in this study is that it is improbable for government communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness if it is still practiced within the press-agentry and the public-information model. As noted from the interviews, communication strategy documents and surveys, improving media relations and publicity were considered the most vital functions of government communication in KZN. This insinuates the press-agentry model. In addition, the public information model which emphasise information dissemination is enacted correctly, if not impressively, through direct and indirect communication avenues such as *imbizos*, social media and own publication like *Simama*. The combination of the press-agentry and the public information model with minimum evaluations added with promotional tactics coalesce into the asymmetrical communication model. This is where government communication in KZN seems to be moving. The public good argument brings into question the issue of advocacy in communication management. The subject of advocacy is particularly relevant to 'ethical' government communication, which is discussed next.

10.5.5 EXTERNAL RHETORICAL THEORY IN ETHICAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

Scholars such as Hamalink (2007) and Wring (2005) distress over the professionalisation of government communication as they see it as causing disempowerment to citizens and further contributing to a situation of democracy without citizens (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:20). The argument heralded is that “the professionalisation of political communication further widens the inequality between politicians and citizens because of the former’s ability to control messages and perception” (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:20). Simply put, the professionalisation of government communicators is dangerous in the hands of a manipulative government that masters the art of advocacy and persuasion for the purpose of propaganda (spin).

Scholars have begun observing the abuse of communication management in government. For example, Glenn (2014) interrogated the abuse of communications in the Canadian government while Mabelebele (2007) evaluated the abuse of *Imbizos* as a form of government communication by the ruling ANC in South Africa. Glenn (2008) on the other hand investigated the role of government communication in Australia, probing the extent to which government communication is intended to persuade or to engage the public. These studies bring issues of advocacy and ethics to the fore of government communication research and theory. These studies also demonstrate the ‘outcome’ or perceived role of government communication could be used to gauge its ethical value.

External organisation rhetorical theory is critical to the study and the theorising of government communication because in practice most types of external communication are in fact advocacy. For example, Gelders and Ihlen (2009:2) concluded that government communication about potential policies was both governmental PR and propaganda. The present study has revealed that advocacy communication is indeed present in external government communication as documented by the findings that there is an increased focus on identity management, branding and image management in the KZN provincial government.

Self-interest communication cannot be ignored in the theorising of government communication purely because it is not supposed to be there. In practice, government communication can be advocacy, and therefore theorising must be cognisant of this reality. Advocacy communication has been poorly reflected in government communication theories and literature because it was historically associated with propaganda and spin. These two words have been excluded in communication management literature because it is assumed that to be *strategic* is to be devoid of self-interest (example being the excellence theory, the system theory, symmetrical and the stakeholder theory).

Rhetoric argues that effective symmetrical communication is only achieved by the dialogic form. However, unlike, the excellence theory, rhetoric does not assume that such communication between the public and the government will naturally be equitable as projected in the excellence theory. Rhetoric argues instead that communication management has to be dialogic in order to be ethical, but being ethical is not innate for organisations so they must consciously make the effort (Heath, 2011:415). External organisational rhetoric is meant to serve two purposes: first, to improve an organisation's ethical practices by paying attention to external perception (public opinion), and secondly, to improve an organisation's self-interest communication by responding appropriately to that public opinion (Boyd & Waymer, 2011). This leads to organisational effectiveness as reflected in communication management literature.

The second point of contribution is that the rhetoric approach provides the base necessary to understand the self-presentation motives and tactics through which organisations and governments attract legitimacy and reputation. The first purpose of external organisational rhetoric is the establishment and maintenance of credibility, reputation, and legitimacy. The '*good organisation communicating well*' analogy emphasises the character of the organisation as the basis for, and the result of its communication management (Heath, 2007:58). This means that primarily, external organisational rhetoric serves its own interest (Palenchar, 2011:571). It is essential to understand that external organisational rhetoric is itself partisan, and therefore external government communication will relatively be partisan.

Not all advocacy communication is appalling, argues Heath (2007:43). Good advocacy is one that is comfortable with counterarguments and debates in the public sphere. According to this thesis, government communication can afford to be persuasive as long as such persuasive discourse is met by other counter-discourses emerging from the public itself, the media, opposition parties, and so forth. Again, government communication can afford to be persuasive as long as such persuasion is ethical and considerate of counter views. The weakness of this thesis however that that it is not always the case that the rhetorical battles are equitable, balanced and open for all. In a rhetorical battle where there are fewer voices, and imbalances of contributions, then dialectic is set to fail in guiding enlightened choices.

Sanders *et al.* (2011) noted that “because there are few opportunities to address the people directly, (government) communication activities are mostly oriented towards the media, which plays an intervening variable”. What does this now mean for government communication which is moving robustly towards direct communication (controlled media through social media, *imbizos* and own publications) with the public, away from the gaze and ‘intervention’ of the media which provided possible counter-dialogue? This phenomenon further proves the need for government communication scholarship to incorporate advocacy and other ethical issues in the theorising of government communication.

Relationship management (symmetrical communication) is the third principle of external organisational rhetoric. The end goal of relationship management is ethics, morality, and social capital (credibility, reputation, and legitimacy) (Kent & Taylor, 2002:22). Heath (2007:42) argues that advocacy is not inherently contradictory to symmetry. Rhetoric presumes that all parties are symmetrical in terms of the right to speak. The challenge arises when bias and self-interest distort communication. The process of co-creation of meaning (dialectics) requires recognition of self-interest and the interests of others to take place (Edwards, 2011:534). Symmetrical communication is one of the features of *effectiveness* in communication management as discussed in section 10.3.1. It can be argued that external organisation rhetoric best serves the enactment of this principle.

The fourth function of external organisational rhetoric is the facilitation of dialogue. Herein, the underlying paradigm is about multiple voices engaged in battles within the public sphere. However, it should be noted that dialogue is not a panacea. Dialogue cannot make government behave morally or force it to respond to the public. Government itself must first be willing to make dialogic commitments to the public.

It can be argued and recommended that advocacy should not be excluded from the theorising of government communication. Advocacy should be acknowledged as something present in government communication. Once acknowledged, it then becomes an element that must be regulated and managed. Therefore, government communication theories must find a way to manage advocacy so that it does not take away from government communication being an essential public good. The following section offers conclusive remarks concerning the main research objective.

10.6 CONCLUSIONS ABOUT RESEARCH PROPOSITIONS (OBJECTIVES)

The distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment as measured by 13 identified features has been confirmed in the data. It is conclusive that these features have a significant impact on the practice of government communication, as they affect the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of communication management in provincial government departments.

Liu and Levenshus (2010) recommended that in order to contribute to theory building, the study on the impacts of the distinctive communication environment of the public sector must be replicated elsewhere for comparison. The present study has contributed to such a comparison in an entirely different context. Similarities would mean that the distinctive features are not necessarily context specific but universal. The present study, in comparison to Liu and Levenshus (2010) and other studies discussed in chapter 2, found that the existence of the distinctive features of the public sector are suggestively universal. However, their impacts are relatively dissimilar and therefore context specific. Sometimes

they differed from department to department as the present study evaluated eight provincial government departments.

The conclusion is that although the distinctive features of the public sector communication environment are suggestively universal, their impacts are context specific. This conclusion brings into question what causes distinctions in impacts. To this question, it was found that the impacts of the distinctiveness of the public sector on the practice of government communication are dependent and regulated by the extent to which the government department (provincial government if taken holistically) is strategic as measured by the principles of excellence and effectiveness in communication management. An additional factor is the extent to which the practice is being professionalised. It can therefore be suggested that the negative impacts of the public sector communication environment are significantly reduced by the extent to which communication management in the public sector is strategic (excellent and effective) and professional.

The regulation of government communication by institutions such as the GCIS to a certain degree reduces the negative impacts associated with the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment. Certain features of the distinctiveness of the public sector are manageable by the GICS. For example, the GCIS can elevate the status of communication in the public sector by educating government management structures of the values of government communication. This may have a positive impact on budgeting and resourcing of government communication units to a point where they are capacitated enough to contribute to organisational effectiveness. Politics can be managed by designating the communication unit equally between the MEC and the HOD offices and by ensuring that the MEC group does not co-opt government communication towards the political. It is suggested that when government communication moves away from the MEC group is likely to be strategic and less political. The findings demonstrate that professionalism in government communication is the ability to insulate and manage all features of the distinctive communication environment of the public sector so that they do not negatively affect the practice of government communication.

The practice of government communication in the KZN provincial government is moving towards the self-advocacy rhetoric by focusing immensely on identity management, branding and reputation management. Identity management and other variations of external organisational rhetoric are indeed essential in a young democracy where the public are still uninformed about the bill of rights, the functions of various government departments and services provided by each ministry department. With time, a democracy must move from talking educationally *at* the public towards communicating *with* them. Government communication in the KZN province can move towards symmetrical communication by incorporating dialogue and dietetics. An important step towards symmetrical communication is the incorporation of continuous environmental scanning and not only opening, but also encouraging public participation.

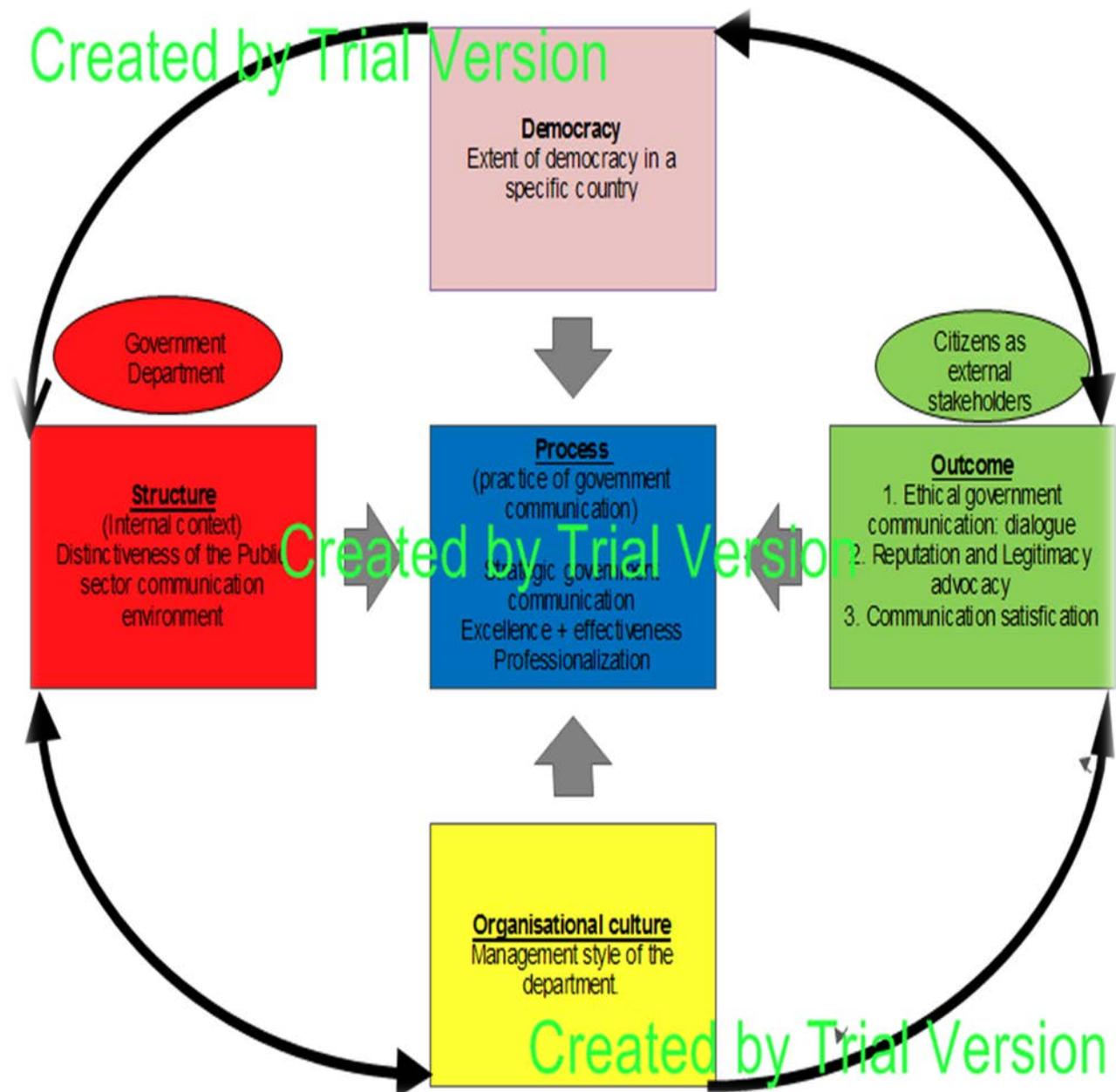
Notwithstanding the key argument of extant theories in communication management such as the systems theory, symmetrical model, stakeholder's theories, and the excellence that ethical communication is without self-interest, advocacy is unavoidable in communication management as predicted by the materialism theory of ethics. For that reason, the external rhetorical theory has demonstrated other measures in which government communication can be ethical without being devoid of self-interest presentations.

Having fulfilled the 'excellence' requirement of strategic communication, government communication in the KZN provincial government is relatively strategic. It is conclusive that participating government departments in KZN fulfil various elements of the excellence principle as documented in the excellence theory. However, many of the sample departments currently do not fulfil the 'effectiveness' principle of strategic communication. Communications units do not contribute sufficiently to organisational effectiveness as they do not contribute enough to strategic decision making about the legislations, policies, and strategies of their government departments (*i.e* the enterprise strategy). Their role is limited to communicating about departmental strategies once decisions are made. The major obstacle is poor environmental scanning and communication evaluations. The failure of which further contributes to the devaluation of communication in government.

10.7 THE DISTINCTIVE, STRATEGIC AND ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

- **Objective 2:** To design a framework for government communication that takes into account the strategic, ethical and distinctive elements.

Figure 15: The distinctive, strategic, and ethical framework for government communication



10.7.1 INTRODUCTION

Graber (2003:13-14) suggests that much like the study of organisational communication, government communication studies lack an overarching theory, both in relation to the level of analysis and ideological lenses. This study contributes to this literature gap by proposing a three-dimensional framework from which government communication can be practiced and theorised. This framework lays the foundations for the development of a government communication model that predicts effective and strategic communication management within the distinctive communication environment of the public sector. The framework posits that for government communication to be efficient, it must be *strategic*, *distinctive*, and *ethical*.

In order to develop a framework for government communication, this study drew on the theoretical chapters of this document and the findings from the study. Chapter 2 outlined the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment. Chapter 3 presented the theoretical literature on organisational effectiveness and excellence in communication management. Chapter 4 discussed the philosophy of strategic communication management and its incorporation to (strategic) government communication. In overall, chapter 2, chapter 3 and chapter 4, described the key elements that must be considered in the theorising of government communication. Once the data was analysed in chapter 8 and chapter 9, the mapping of the interrelationship between these elements became probable. Through the consideration of history and developments, chapter 6 provided the contextual background in which government communication is practiced in South Africa.

The thesis statement presented by this study is that communication management is vital for democracy. Hence, for government communication to be professional and strategic, it must be organised excellently and effectively (excellence theory) while taking into account the advocacy nature inherent in external organisational rhetoric which may threaten the ethics and legitimacy of (government) communication management. It is also essential that the distinctive communication environment of the public sector (the public sector distinctiveness theory) be considered in both the theorising and the practice of government communication.

The proposed framework describes the internal context of government communication. It presents the structuring of the elements, which must be in place for government communication to function optimally for organisational effectiveness and for the benefit of citizens within a democracy. It is therefore, essential to determine what makes government communication *strategic, distinctive, and ethical*. These elements have been discussed throughout the study, in theory (literature and theoretical chapters) and in practice (result chapters).

As suggested in the introduction, this study adopts Sanders' *et al.* (2011) framework for the analysis of government communication. The framework surveys three central components of an organisation, namely, structure, processes, and outcomes (Sanders *et al.*, 2011:5). *Structure* concerns the conditions in which an activity takes place (*i.e.* the distinctive communication environment of the public sector), *processes* are a set of ordered actions such as roles, functions and communication practices, and *outcomes* are the results or consequences of processes (such as government reputation as an outcome). Each component along with its features is discussed next. The features of all components in combination provide a checklist or a benchmark in which to evaluate the extent to which a communication unit is moving towards the practice of government communication that is strategic, distinctive, and ethical. For this reason, this model provides recommendation for practice.

The effects of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment upon the practice of government communication are context specific. They are dependent on: **(1)** the level of democracy within a specific country, **(2)** the government department management style, **(3)** the ethical orientation of the communication unit, **(4)** the extent to which government communication is strategic and **(5)** the extent in which government communication is professionalised.

10.7.2 STRUCTURE OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The first component to be discussed is structure, which concerns the conditions in which an activity takes place. This study identifies the distinctive communication environment of

the public sector as an internal condition in which government communication is embedded. It was empirically established that the distinctive communication environment of the public sector (structure) influences the way government communication is practiced. From literature, the features that make government communication *distinctive* were suggested, and proven in practice. Liu, Horsely and Levenshus (2007, 2010, 2012) provided the features for the distinctive communication environment of the public sector, which are incorporated in this framework. The following thirteen 13 features make government communication distinctive:

1. Politics affect the practice of government communication
2. Government communication is a public good
3. Government communication faces heightened media and public scrutiny
4. Government communication functions within a myriad of legal constraints
5. There is a devaluation of government communication
6. There is poor public perception of government communication as propaganda
7. There are poor professional developments in the government communication
8. There is limited leadership opportunities
9. Centralisation and integration of communication between the three tier system
10. External above internal communication
11. Government communication is challenged by budget constraints
12. There is poor (insufficient) communication evaluations taking place
13. There are multiple communication responsibilities

It is conclusive that these features significantly influence the practice of government communication, as they affect the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of communication management in provincial government departments. It was therefore essential to evaluate the extent to which the 'distinctive communication environment' of the public sector along with its inherent features, enables or deters against the enactment of government communication as a strategic function. The findings confirm that these features deter against the practice of strategic communication. Nonetheless, with the restructuring of government communication to incorporate excellence, effectiveness, and ethics in strategic

communication management, the negative impacts associated with the distinctiveness of the public sector are possibly reduced. Furthermore, the professionalization of government communication also lessens these negative impacts.

The effects of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment upon the practice of government communication are context specific. They are dependent on the level of democracy within a specific country, the government department management style, the ethical orientation of the communication unit, the extent to which government communication is strategic and the extent in which government communication is professionalised. These are expanded upon throughout the description of the framework.

10.7.3 PROCESSES OF GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

From the findings, it is conclusive that strategic communication reduces the negative impacts associated with the distinctive communication environment of the public sector. The discourse of strategic communication management according to Grunig (2007:29) consists of loose references to the idea that “public relations should be planned, managed by objectives, evaluated, and connected in some way to organisational objectives”. Strategic communication is composed of the excellence, effectiveness, and professionalization of communication management. Strategic government communication is therefore operationalized as follows: Excellence + effectiveness + professionalism = strategic government communication. These elements are co-dependent and cannot exist without each other. They co-create each other. These features are discussed next.

10.7.3.1 Excellence in government communication

Through the excellence theory, Grunig (1992, 2007), outlined the fourteen features of excellence in communication management which are also incorporated in this framework. From this literature, it is suggested what brings *excellence* to government communication as a requisite to the enactment of strategic communication. These features are summarised as follows:

1. Strategic management is the interlink that integrates excellence and effectiveness in government communication.
2. Excellent communication departments engage in environmental scanning.
3. Excellent public relations departments contribute to decisions made by the dominant coalition of senior management by providing information to that coalition about the environment of the organisation.
4. Organisations with high environmental turbulences are more likely to engage in environmental scanning; often leading to the excellent government communication,
5. Government communication must be a management function if it is to contribute excellently to organisational effectiveness.
6. Excellent communication departments must have access to the dominant coalition,
7. All communication management functions must be integrated in a single department (however, there must be specialisation of roles).
8. There must be a separation of government communication from other functions such as marketing departments.
9. Government communication must demonstrate an enactment of the two-way symmetrical model by initiating dialogue, seeking and attending to feedback.
10. Design and manage government communication programmes strategically.
11. Diversity is not only essential, but also mandatory for excellence in government communication management. This should reflect the diversity of the citizenship.
12. Excellence in government communication does not exist in isolation; it is a characteristic of an excellent government and excellence in governance.
13. Government communication functions better within a participative rather than an authoritarian organisational and management culture.
14. Employ communicators with specialised body of knowledge in the field, professionalism.

10.7.3.2 Effectiveness in government communication

Effectiveness in government communication is a prerequisite to the enactment of strategic government communication. The features of the effectiveness principle in communication management were collated and integrated from the readings of the Pretoria School of

Thought, Moss and Wanerby and Grunig. These features were then incorporated within the framework as follows:

1. Government communication must implement the fourteen (14) features of excellence in order to structure, manage, and effect strategic government communication (Grunig, 2007).
2. Government communication must manage long-term relationships with the citizens as external stakeholders through symmetrical communication (Grunig & Repper, 1992:117).
3. Government communication must significantly enhance efforts in environmental scanning, issue management and communication evaluations as methods to understand the public, the environment, emerging issues and the effects of government communication programmes (Moss & Warnaby, 1998:136).
4. The government communication unit must actively and continuously, contribute to the enterprise strategy. According to literature, effectiveness in government communication is achieved by (1) conducting environmental scanning, (2) the compilation of information from the environment and (3) the communication of this data to government management structures. The dominant-coalition would henceforth consider arising information in decision-making, policy-making, legislations, service delivery and towards the general response to identified public issues. This becomes an iterative and a circular process leading to democracy.
5. Government communication must be duly recognised as a management function (Steyn, 2004). This means communication managers must retain seats in Maco and Exco. Within the decision-making table, communication managers must not only listen to government strategy, but also robustly contribute to it through the process discussed in number 4.

The Pretoria school of thought recommends a societal approach to communication management. Central to this approach are issues pertaining to legitimacy and public trust. For government communication to contribute to democracy, it should be incorporated to the macro/enterprise level of management of the organisation. Therefore, it is essential for government communication to be practiced and theorised from a societal approach.

To contribute to organisational effectiveness, government communication must be aligned with organisational goals and objectives. For that to be possible, government communicators must fully understand the organisation's goals and objectives. It is thus necessary for communication managers to be part of the dominant coalition. Through environmental scanning and issue-management, communication managers should influence the enterprise strategy by providing intelligence regarding the socio-political and economic environment of the organisation. This information should be used to develop better government policies, goals, and objectives. Only then, will government communication contribute meaningfully to organisational effectiveness.

For strategic government communication to be truly effective there must be a buy in from top management or the dominant coalition. If not, the unit is most likely to fail both in its planning and in operation (Mertinelli, 2012:146). The implementation of communication strategy documents depends heavily on the knowledge base of practitioners and the support from management (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1998:230). The knowledge base of government communicators can be drastically improved by various elements involved in various professional development initiatives. The professionalism and standardisation of government communication is discussed next.

10.7.3.3 Professionalism and standardisation of government communication

Professionalism and standardisation of government communication is likely to reduce the negative impacts associated with the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment. Sanders *et al.* (2011:20) have shown that “professions are usually governed by codes of practice. These codes typically contain generic statements suggesting that those working within a particular profession should, for example, act in the interests of both the people they serve and the wider general public, and promote good practice within their profession”. Professionalism in government communication relates to the ability to insulate the negative effects associated with the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment. It was found for example, that being professional is the ability to insulate the effects of politics from doing one's job, the ability to manage professional media relations, and the ability to learn more about the practice. ***The hypothesis is that, the more***

professionalised government communication is, the less negatively affected it will be by the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment.

Government communication custodians such as the GCIS are able to instil professionalism through training and the standardisation of the practice by providing directives, policy, and guidelines. The GCIS is recommended to act between the communication unit and its department management structures (where such intervention is necessary) to: (1) encourage budget argumentation, (2) educate management structure of the proper function of government communication in attempt to increase the value management hold of government communication, (3) advise on the structural position of the communication unit within the department and (4) educate the media about the complexities of government communication.

10.7.4 DEGREE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE SPECIFIC COUNTRY

It is conclusive from the study that the impacts of the distinctive communication environment of the public sector are context specific. The features are indeed likely to affect the practice of government communication universally, but the impacts may be different from country to country, depending on the extent to which a country is democratic. ***The hypothesis is that the more democratic a country is the less negatively affected government communication will be by the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment.*** For example, within a democracy, the practice of government communication is likely to be professionalised. This means that the practice is standardised with rules and regulations and the structuring of government communication units is likely to be reflective of the excellence theory. The impacts of politics and legal constraints may be reduced due to the lessening of legal constraints stifling the freedom of government communication. Furthermore, within a democracy, governments are arguably interested in communicating with the public through a dialogic two-way symmetrical communication, listening to issues, and using those issues to draft policy, legislations and to guide service delivery.

10.7.5 MANAGEMENT STYLE OF THE GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

It was found from this study, that the features of the distinctive communication environment of the public sector affect the practice of government communication slightly differently from department to department. ***The hypothesis is that the more open and engaged the government department's management style is the less negatively affected government communication will be by the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment.***

The management style of the government department seems essential to the practice of strategic government communication that is ethical and distinctive. The position of the communication unit in the government department, access to government management structures, contributions to the enterprise strategy are internal issues influenced by the management structure of the department. These issues prove the validity of the power-control theory, which states, "organisations behave the way they do because the people who have power in an organisation (the dominant coalition) choose that behaviour".

The excellence theory indicates that strategic communication is only possible when government communication is treated as a strategic management function involved in all aspects of organisational management. This means retaining a seat within the management structures of the department, contributing to decision-making and having those contributions acknowledged, respected and utilised. Budgeting and resourcing of the communication unit stem from how important the communication unit is valued by the government department. If government communication is valued and adequately financed, and capacitated with sufficient and skilled employees, then it is possible that there will be enough resources to conduct environmental scanning and communication evaluations, which will further elevate the value and the contribution of the communication unit to organisational or government effectiveness. The positioning of the communication unit also proved to have an influence on the practice of government communication. It was found that when the communication unit is positioned in the HOD office, it is more likely to be strategic and less political than when it is placed within the MEC office. It is therefore

truthful that excellence in government communication does not exist in isolation; it is a characteristic of an excellent government and excellence in governance.

10.7.6 OUTCOME: ETHICAL GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATION

The ethical orientation of the government department also determines the extent to which the distinctiveness of the public sector affects the practice of government communication. The ethical orientation of the government communication department on either wanting to achieve (outcome) advocacy (publicity) or dialogue (public engagement) or both, influences the choice of government communication practices, relating to the extent to which they may incorporate strategic, professional and ethical communication practices or not. Grunig and White (1992) have demonstrated the effect of worldviews on communication management. “The practice of public relations and theories about its practice, therefore are affected by the assumptions that practitioners and theorists have about such things as morality, ethics, human nature, religion, politics, free enterprise, or gender” (Grunig & White, 1992:32). For example, if government communicators perceive their profession as ‘advocacy’, they are likely to assume a self-serving, propaganda, and image-oriented model of government communication. However, if they view the profession as ‘dialogue’, they are likely to practice a participatory symmetrical form of government communication that is aware of public opinion and is responsive to it. The public good analogy demands for a government communication model that services democracy in the interest of the public. Literature suggested elements that render government communication ethical. These features are summarised below:

1. Organisations facilitate identification by communicating its values, goals, and information (identity management). The first purpose or principle of external organisational rhetoric is the establishment and maintenance of credibility, reputation, and legitimacy.
2. Relationship management is the third principle of external organisational rhetoric. The end goal of relationship management is ethics, morality, and social capital (credibility, reputation, and legitimacy).

3. Symmetrical communication and dialogue - It is only through dialogue that government co-create and co-define meaning of service deliver, democracy, and human rights with the public. Arguments and multiplicity of discourse are essential to the proper functions of democracy. Herein, government listens and responds to counter dialogue from the public, the media, oppositions, and civil society et cetera.
4. Discourse enactment and enlightened choice - It is assumed that discourse, as stated above, fosters enlightened choice, and that relationships result from and often lead to social capital. Through multiple voices engaged in rational debates in the public sphere, citizens are able to make rational choices about matters of public policy.
5. Advocacy - The rhetorical tradition has always-recognised advocacy as a tactical tool in communication management. An advocacy model of government communication is a way of responding to government critics who challenge management policies and actions, legislations and issues of service delivery. Advocacy is essential, and permissive as long as exist in competition and is respectful of the interests of others.

10.7.7 CONCLUSIONS OF MODEL

The effects of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment upon the practice of government communication are context specific. They are dependent on: (1) the level of democracy within a specific country, (2) the government department management style, (3) the ethical orientation of the communication unit, (4) the extent to which government communication is strategic and (5) the extent in which government communication is professionalised.

In conclusion, the model demonstrates that the external environment, which is the enterprise/societal level, the nature of government and the degree of democracy, influences the internal environment in which government communication is practiced. The internal environment is the distinctive communication environment of the public sector. The hypothesis is that the more democratic a country is, the less distinctive the communication environment of the public sector becomes. In addition, by the incorporating NPM reform

strategies, the internal environment of the public sector becomes less distinct and relatively similar to corporate communication. This would make government run more like a business.

The internal environment affects the organisational culture of the department. The declining negative impacts of the distinctive environment of the public sector would result in an open and strategic organisational culture. As a matter of consequence, the management style would become susceptible to influences from the communication unit. Communication would then be valued and treated as a management function. Moreover, as the management style becomes strategic and democratic, it further reduces the negative impacts of distinctive features of the public sector. Hence, the structure and the organisational culture are co-dependent.

The organisational culture (whether communication is valued, transparent, financed, treated as a management function, and contributes to the enterprise strategy) will have an impact on the outcomes of government communication such as ethics (transparency & truthfulness), legitimacy (satisfaction & reputation), and democracy (by being responsive to public opinion). The above-mentioned outcomes should overtime increase the degree of democracy.

This study demonstrates that the structure (internal environment of the public sector) influences the practice (of government communication) which in turn determines the outcome (ethical & strategic). It can therefore be suggested that all four nodes consisting of the external environment, the internal environment, the desired outcomes, and the organisational culture equally affect the practice of government communication.

10.8 CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATION FOR THEORY

This section outlines how the present study has contributed academically to the field of communication management and government communication. Because of a variation in terminologies, locating literature for this study proved problematic. This is because different terminologies are used for the same concept such as government

communication, public communication, public relations in the public sector, public administration, information management and others. The first recommendation to the research community is to settle on a terminology.

Much of the studies so far in government communication are athoretical. These studies have paid attention to various elements about the practice of government communication without theorising about government communication or extrapolating cognate theories towards understanding these practices of government communication. It is only recently that strategic management and the excellence theory have been extrapolated to government communication. There are a small number of studies that applied the excellence theory in a government communication sector (for example Grunig & Jaatine, 1999; Killingsworth, 2009; Likely 2013), but in overall, research in this area is still lacking. Liu *et al.*, Gelders *et al.*, Canel, and Sandars have noted the need for theory development in government communication. Liu and Horsley have contributed immensely towards the development of a distinctive model of government communication. However, this model is contextual and does not comprehend much of the South African context.

The suggestion from Liu and Levenshus (2010) and Gelders *et al.* (2007) is that the distinctive features of the public sector communication environment affect the practice of government communication negatively. This led to the proposal that future research and theories must attempt to find ways to manage these features of distinctiveness to affect less negatively on the practice of government communication. This study has contributed to Liu and Levenshus's (2010) recommendation to lay the foundation for the development of a theory that predicts effective communication management in the distinctive public sector environment. For this reason, a framework for government communication that takes into account the strategic, ethical, and distinctive elements of the practice of government communication is offered by the present study.

Government communication research in South Africa centres predominantly on mediated political communication, political rhetoric, political campaigns, participatory communication, and development communication. Notwithstanding the vibrancy of government communication research in South Africa, there remains a dire need to understand

government communication from an organisational perspective. The present study adds a *practice* dimension, which is necessary to understand the nature of government communication in South Africa. No studies on the practice and the distinctiveness of government communication have been conducted within the African context. This study fills this gap by focusing on South Africa.

Whilst a variety of features contributing to a distinctive communication environment of the public sector may be identified in extant literature, very few of these studies are grounded on extensive empirical research (Gelders *et al.*, 2003:327). Moreover, these studies rarely evaluate the impacts of such 'distinctiveness' on the practice of government communication. This study aimed to narrow this empirical gap. These distinctive features are now empirically tested to determine the extent to which they influence the function, structure, and practices of communication management in government (Liu & Horsley, 2007:392).

Extant literature on the exploration of government communication from an organisational perspective has tended to concentrate on one element of government communication: such as communication roles (Edes, 2000; Gregory, 2006), external communication (Gelders & Ihlen, 2009), communication performance and quality (Vos, 2006; Vos & Westerhoudt, 2008), professionalization (Sander *et al.*, 2011), strategic communication (killingsworth, 2007), uniqueness of government communication (Gelders, Bouckaert & Van Ruler, 2007; Liu, Hosley & Levenshus, 2010, 2011, 2012; Waymer, 2013). However, none of these studies have evaluated the practice of government communication holistically or the interrelation between these various elements. This study has attempted to do so.

The present study offers a comprehensive exploratory study of government communication contributing to an understanding of the complexity of strategic government communication as approached from an organisational perspective. The study took into account various elements that were previously studied in isolation and connected the relationships among these isolated elements and thus consolidating a comprehensive understanding of the intricacies of government communication.

The few studies (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999; Killingsworth 2009; Likely 2013; Valentini, 2014) that introduced strategic communication in government communication have not addressed the impacts of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment on how such distinctiveness either advances or constrains strategic communication. This research has proved that strategic communication is in fact impeded by various features of the public sector distinctiveness. However, it was also found that as communication moves towards professionalism, excellence, and effectiveness, strategic government communication is therefore made possible and its presence further moderates the negative impacts of the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment.

Most research on strategic communication is approached from a communication roles perspective, particularly measuring strategic communication by evaluating the roles enacted by the most senior communication manager (Steyn & Green, 2006). The present study has looked at strategic government communication from various principles of strategic communication that must be in place for communication management to be excellent and effective.

Strategic management literature demonstrates that the context affects the management practices of an organisation. Thus, the context is critical in understanding the nuances in strategic management processes (Ring & Perry, 1985:276). Extant literature accentuate that the distinctions between the two sectors involve important differences in organisational environments, constraints, incentives, and culture, which should be incorporated to management theory (Perry & Rainey, 1988:182). The critical argument presented by this study is that such differences in the communication environment of the public and the private sector should also be incorporated in government communication theories.

Most studies in organisational communication and communication management tend to be concerned predominately with how the external environment (context) affects the practice of communication management. There is very little literature that evaluates the effects of the internal context on the practice of communication management. The present study has

demonstrated how the internal environment (context), which is the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment, affects the practice of government communication.

It can be demonstrated that some ideals of the New Public Management are becoming evident in the South African government sector especially in how government communication is practiced, managed, financed and evaluated (government communication is the only section of government activity considered for the study). However, as these ideals are documented in strategy documents and government communication policy and legislations, they are not sufficiently enacted in practice. This means there is still a lot to be done before such ideals of effective; excellence and efficiency are translated into practice.

Ring and Perry (1985:281) are of the opinion that if public sector performance is judged against a normative model of strategic management developed in the private sector, it is likely to be found inadequate. However, judged against standards grounded in the public sector, different conclusions might be drawn. So far, there were no standards developed for evaluating strategic communication in the public sector that considered the distinctiveness of the public sector. This study has demonstrated how strategic communication management can be judged in the public sector by evaluating elements of the excellence and effectiveness in the public sector and how these elements are impacted upon by the distinctive features of the public sector.

The thesis argued that in order for the ideals of the New Public Management to come into fruition, strategic communication management is mandatory in government communication. Only this model of government communication is best able to implement the objectives of the consultative, networked, responsive, customer-focused mode of governance envisioned by the NPM paradigm/movement. However, unlike the NPM, this thesis does not wish away nor deny the 'distinctiveness' of the public sector, but rather to argue that through strategic management, they can be acknowledged, accounted for and thus managed. This study finds that through strategic government communication, the negative effects associated with the distinctive communication environment of the public

sector can be positively managed and even alleviated. The next section describes the research implication to policy and practice of government communication in South Africa.

10.9 IMPLICATION FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

In 1996, the then deputy president Thabo Mbeki set up a Task Group on government communication (known as the Comtask) to look into government communication as a whole (that is looking at everything pertaining to government communication). This section appraises developments and progressions of government communication from the Comtask era, to this present-day study conducted in the KwaZulu Natal provincial government, 20 years post democracy, and 14 years post the publication of the Comtask 2000 report about the status of government communication in South Africa.

With regard to **government communication as a profession**, early in the 1996s, the Comtask report acknowledged the low status accorded to government communication. Poor recognitions and poor understanding of the role of communications and its functions in government were identified by the Comtask report. The findings of the present study are not conclusive in this area because government communicators claimed that the politicians (MEC group) understood and valued communication more than the administrative group (HOD group). In general, there are significant improvements towards the valuing of government communication in South Africa.

There seems a relationship between the understanding of government communication by management and the value placed on it by them. Where there is understanding, there is a corresponding value attached. Where value is recognised, support and budgets are provided. The key is either to enhance the value of communications by encouraging the GCIS to step in to educate management and politicians of the nature and purpose of government communication or by demonstrating the value of government communication to management and politicians through continuous communication evaluation measuring the impact, successes, and returns of government communication.

The **challenges of government communication** units identified in the Comtask report (2000:21) were that “(1) there is no clear standard for setting budget levels or (2) defining the functions of the communication personnel. (3) The line reporting structure, combined with a tradition of rigid control of information severely hampers creativity and responsiveness of communications professionals”. Looking at the results of this study, there has not been significant improvements on these issues identified here. (1) Selected communication strategic documents of government departments in the KZN provincial government and government communicators alike *still* complained of budget constraints and poor resources and being understaffed (6.8.3/Pg:236). There is *still* a struggle in (2) defining the functions of the communication personnel in government, the result shows that although there is an acknowledgement of role differentiation in various communication titles, in practice there is poor job specification and a lack of specialisation in provincial government communication because of shortages in communication staff. Most departments are understaffed, so communication staff members must be adept in interchanging between various roles, from branding, marketing, advertising, events management *et cetera* (8.18.1/Pg:302-304). (3) Rigid control of information, consultations and bureaucracy, what has been termed legal constraints *still* severely hampers creativity and responsiveness of communications professionals (8.5.1/Pg228-232).

The comtask report had identified that “there is no clear policy in relation to government communication and information in South Africa”, poor media access for government issues and poor training of communication officials. There are notable improvements in this area. Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) strives to achieve integration, coordination, and high levels of professionalism in the government communication profession. In order to facilitate this role, the GCIS has developed a number of government communication policy guidelines for government communicators in all levels of the three tiers of government. Policy guidelines of government communication in South Africa are outlined in section 6.8 in page 619-171. However, the challenge has been noted in implementation and compliance.

On **strategic government communication**, the Comtask report identified a need for strategies and objectives in the South Africa government communication practice. Of the

eight departments that partook in this study, six had approved communication strategy documents and two had draft documents that were not yet approved by the government department management structures. This shows that it is now a norm than an exception for government departments to have communication strategy documents and policies. Again, the challenge had been noted in implementation, application, and compliance. The communication strategy documents are rightly idealistic but much of the content does not reflect sufficiently in practice. However, for government communication to be strategic, there are many other requirements that must be put in place as discussed in chapter 5.

On **government identity management**, the Comtask report recognised a failure of the South African government to present a coherent image to the public. Government has both a duty and a right to present the case for its policies and actions and this advocacy role needs to be strengthened. Significant strides are noted towards the improvement of the identity and reputation of governments department. This study found that promoting government services through branding, identity management, and events management has been rated as the most vital function of government communication. This has implications for ethics in government communication that must now be considered.

10.10 IMPLICATIONS FOR METHODOLOGY

10.10.1 METHODOLOGICAL SUCCESSES

This research is predominately constructivist, added with some elements of positivism as a way of ensuring validity and reliability of the results. For that purpose, a triangulation of methodology was used. Data collection methods elected for this purpose incorporated in-depth interviews and document analyses. A questionnaire survey (35) complimented the research by providing quantifiable data. Triangulation offered the display of multiple, refracted realities simultaneously. This triangulation of methodology added validity and reliability to the research findings. The advantage of using open-ended interviews was the latitude accorded for the respondents to explain and build on their responses, which proved valuable for qualitative studies. This provided rich data about the practice of government communication and the day-to-day experiences of government

communicators. The additional advantage of open-ended interviews was their flexibility to accommodate emerging issues. In this way, new issues and themes emerged out of the data that were previously unexplored in the literature. As for Bowen (2009:30-31), documents analysis of communication strategy documents of selected government departments provided background and context, supplementary data and verification of findings from other data sources.

10.10.2 METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Issues of confidentiality and anonymity are essential when government is the subject of study. Ensuring anonymity was challenging for this research because the interview sample was purposely-selected government communicators at various levels, working in various government departments in the KwaZulu Natal provincial government. This meant that identifying any department or the level of employment would identify the participant by default. This made it ethically cumbersome to identify the eight departments that participated in the study and the employment levels of selected participants.

Access is a formidable impasse in organisational research and case studies in general. Without gaining access to the primary source of data, there is no research. It was difficult to get some respondents to commit to an interview over the phone or on emails. So walk-ins proved useful in explaining the research purpose in details and in personifying the researcher. It was even more difficult (not impossible) to receive responses on the online surveys. For that matter, surveys were delivered in person on the day of the interview and collected after the interview.

The 30-person sample size for the interviews was appropriate as data saturation was at some point achieved (repetitive responses). However, a 30-person sample size was insufficient for the survey data. However, for this study it was satisfactory as incorporated in a methodology triangulation were supplementary data was present. It was also essential for the researcher to ensure that the same people who provided the interviews answered the surveys. The quantitative methodology (surveys) employed here was not meant to

generalise from the data but rather to attempt to quantify the qualitative themes, patterns and responses already collected from qualitative means.

10.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The limitation of this study is also its strength. Using the concoction of eight government departments in the KZN provincial government as a case study, the present study has looked at various elements of government communication at once and evaluated the intersections between these elements. While some may see this as a limitation by making the study big, it may also be considered strength because the study provided a detailed view of the practice of government communication and its impacts on the theorising of government communication. In addition, the case study method is permissive of investigating anything and everything that best describes the case study in order to come to an optimal understanding of what is happening in the case study. This study has done essentially that. However, no study is ever completely comprehensive. Despite this study having closed certain gaps in literature, more research is still needed to further understand the nature of about government communication in South Africa. For that purpose, some research recommendations for future studies are presented below.

10.12 FUTURE RESEARCH RECOMMENDATIONS

There are still very limited empirical studies in government communication globally; the situation is even extreme in South Africa. As a groundbreaking exploratory study that incorporated various elements of government communication, it was not long until significant gaps in literature were identified. From these gaps, emerge the following recommendations:

The study of the distinctiveness of government communication is new in South Africa. With reference to the distinctive features of the public sector communication environment, it is imperative to quantify in a broad survey study if indeed these features are present in various government departments in South Africa. In addition, the identified effects of these distinctive features upon the practice of government communication, as presented

qualitatively, in this study, can also be measured quantitatively to further evaluate their validity.

The same methodology triangulated study, with the same research objectives to be replicated in any other province in South Africa for a comparative study. In addition, but preferably in a different study, the hypothesis identified in this study could be examined further in order to prove or to disprove their relevance.

There is a need to evaluate the interrelationship of government communication units of a single ministry government department (e.g. education) from the national, provincial, local and districts. In this, a single stream should be followed, for example one could focus on national (Pretoria), provincial (KZN), local (municipality), and regional/districts (Durban). This would demonstrate the relationship and communication flow among the three tiers of government. Until this relationship is understood, theorising of government communication can never be fully complete.

South Africa has many policy guidelines that regulate the practice of government communication, it is essential to investigate these policy documents (document analysis) and evaluate their uses in practice (interviews). This would provide an invaluable data detailing the relationship between government communication policies and practice.

Government communication seems to be moving towards direct communication (in addition to indirect media relations). In this, social media (Gov 2.0) has been incorporated into the theme of government communication, bringing with it, opportunities and challenges in both practice and policymaking.

Government-media relations is still a significant issue to explore. This study has approached the government-media relations issue from the perspectives of government communicators. It is advisable to contribute further by approaching this issue from the perspective of the media.

Relationship management has become vital in government communication. This study focused on one directional flow of communication, from government departments to the public. There is a lot that government departments are doing to communicate with the public. It is thus essential not only to evaluate the perceptions of the public about government communication, but also to study the counter-flow of communication from the public back into government.

10.13 CONCLUSION ABOUT THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

As Vos (2006:257) had recommended that future academic research in government communication focus on exploring communication practices and factors that influence them, the present study has responded to such a call. This study has explored the extent to which the distinctive communication environment of the public sector affects the practice of strategic communication management in government departments within the KwaZulu Natal provincial government.

This research had come to the following conclusion: The distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment as measured by literature-identified features has been confirmed in the data. It is conclusive that these features have a significant impact on the practice of government communication, as they affect the organisational structures, communication practices, roles and functions, and evaluation measures of communication management in provincial government departments. It is therefore suggested that the negative impacts of the public sector communication environment can significantly be reduced by the extent to which communication management in the public sector is strategic (excellent and effectiveness) and professional.

It was also concluded that government communication is relatively strategic by fulfilling the excellence requirement of strategic communication. However, the KZN provincial government failed to uphold the effectiveness principle, as most sampled communication departments failed to conduct informative environmental scanning necessary to contribute substantially to organisational decision-making for the attainment of organisational effectiveness. Improvements are obligatory for the fulfillment of the 'effectiveness'

principle of strategic communication. This is the only way that government communication in KZN can be seen as strategic.

The external organisational rhetoric theory has been used to understand ethics in government communication. It was found that government communication in KZN is moving towards asymmetrical communication by focusing more on publicity, marketing, identity management, and reputation management. For this reason, it can be argued and recommended that advocacy should not be excluded from the theorising of government communication. Advocacy should be acknowledged as something that is present in government communication. Once acknowledged, it then becomes an element that must be regulated and managed for the attainment of ethical government communication.

This study has reflected upon the interrelationship between, the distinctiveness of the public sector communication environment, strategic communication, and ethical communication. A model to this effect has been developed. This framework demonstrates that the structure (internal environment of the public sector) influences the practice (of government communication) which in turn determines the outcome (ethical & strategic). This is not withstanding to the fact that all four nodes consisting of the external environment, the internal environment, the desired outcomes and the organisational culture equally influences the practice of government communication. For this reason, study government communication should be approached from a multi-faceted theoretical perspective.

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APPENDIX A

- 1st draft of data collection instrument(-s) -

Questionnaire

INVESTIGATING COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT BY GOVERNMENT BY DEPARTMENTS IN THE KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Dear respondent

Thank you for your willingness to complete this survey. The purpose of this survey is to evaluate if government communication is as unique as predicted by extant literature. Literature postulates that communication management in the public sector is different from that of the private-corporate sector. The proposed study questions the practical existence of a unique communication environment in the public sector and its likely impacts on government communication practices within the KwaZulu Natal metropolitan.

The survey should not take more than 30 minutes to complete. This is an anonymous and confidential survey. You cannot be identified and the answers you provide will be used for research purposes only.

Please answer all questions where possible. There are no right or wrong answers. We are only interested in understanding your opinions, perceptions and experiences as government communicators.

Do you consider yourself a government communicator?

This term refers to government public relation practitioners who handle communication on the behalf of government departments. The term is inclusive of all various positions and n names given to different specialty functions of government communication.

YES	
NO	

If your answer is 'NO', please do not continue answering the questionnaire.

Do you handle communication for a government department in the KwaZulu Natal metropolitan area?

YES	
NO	

If your answer is 'NO', please do not continue answering the questionnaire.

If you answered 'No' to either question 1 or question 2, please stop. Do not continue answering the questionnaire. Thank you for your time. If you answered 'Yes' to both questions, please continue.

Please write your employee's Title (*example: Media Liaison, communication officer Corporate Communication manager, Chief Communication Officer*):

.....

Please indicate your gender

Male		*Please indicate your term of employment	
Female		Permanent	
		Contract	

Please indicate your age

20-34		35-39		40-44		45-49	
50-54		55-59		60-65		Older	

Please indicate your education qualification

BA		BA Hons		MA		MBA		Diploma	
BS		MS		LLB		PhD		No tertiary	

*Specify if other:

How many years if any, have you been employed in government communication ?

1-2		3-5		6-8	
8-9		10 & beyond		Some months	

Question: how frequently do you engage in the following media relations' activity?

On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 = "never engage in activity" and 5= "engage in activity daily".

How frequent do you perform the following media relations roles?

	1	2	3	4	5
Responding to media inquiries					
Contribute to/edit Website					
Media release					
Track media clips					
Social Network fb, Twitter...					
Brochures					
Fliers					
Pitch stories to media					
Newsletters					
Media interviews					
Strategic plans					
Fact sheet					
Guides					
Train leadership/experts for interviews					
Crisis communication plans					
Print advertising					
Community meetings					
Primary research					
Radio or TV					
News conference					
Broadcast advertising					
Blog					

(Source: Liu et al., 2010)

In my department, government communication functions include (check all that applies)

Advertising		Marketing of departments services	
Corporate Identity Management		E-governance (website)	
Reputation Management		Social Media	
Corporate missions statements		Media Relations	
Crisis management		Internal Communications	
Issue management		Community engagement	
Speech writing		Intergovernmental Relations	
Communication advice to management		Other:	
Other:		Other:	

Table Scale (source: Liu *et al.*, 2010)

Please rate the following as high or low

HIGH LOW

		HIGH	LOW
Media coverage evaluation	How would you rate the level of coverage? -positive -negative -neutral -fair		
Politics	Rate the impact of politics on your job		
Professional Development	How satisfied are you with your <u>employer's</u> support to your professional development?..... How satisfied are you with you're the <u>GCIS's</u> support to your professional development?..... Rate your satisfaction of <u>promotion</u> and advancement opportunities within your organisation ?		
Centralization	Rate the frequency in which you interact with the central government department in Pretoria? Rate the frequency in which you interact with the districts?		
Relationships with Primary Publics	Rate the level of information diffusion to publics? Rate the level of interaction with publics?		
Devaluation of Communication by Management	Rate the value of government communication as perceived by management? Rate the value of government communication as perceived by the general public?		
GCIS	Rate the level in which you consult the handbook? Rate the level in which you interact with gcis?		
Transparency	Rate your personal value to transparency. Rate the level of transparency in your department. Rate your support of the information bill Rate politicians/management support of transparency.		

Thank you

Interview questions

Section 1: government communication as a practice

Government Communication: Roles and Responsibility

- What is your employment title?
- What is the role of the communication cluster in this government department?
- What are your roles and responsibilities in the department?
- Are these roles and responsibilities in alignment with your job title and job description?
- Do you feel that you are expected to perform a variety of responsibilities outside your job description? If so, please describe additional roles.
- How long have you been working in government communication and in what capacity?
- What levels of education are you qualified and for which discipline are you qualified?
- What is your employment background, including those conducted in other sectors?
- *If you have worked in communication at the private sector, (even if not) how do you view the similarities and differences of communication management within the two sectors?*
- How many government communicators are currently employed by this government department?
- How many employees if any do you manage?
- What do you think is the overall purpose of government communication?
- Do you think managers (politicians) understand the role of government communication ?
- To what extent is government communication advocacy, information diffusion, or boundary spanning?

Role of the GCIS in the province

- Do you understand the role of the GCIS in the province?
- How do you relate with the GCIS and when last have you been in contact with them and for what matters?
- How often do you attend GCIS briefings?
- In terms of training and development, do you feel that you have enough support from the GCIS?
- How useful is the GCIS and its resources in conducting your everyday job?
- How often do you consult the GCIS communication handbook and how useful has it been?
- For communication managers, how useful are the PCF meetings?

Strategic Government Communication

- Do you have a communication strategy document in the department?
- How closely aligned is this communication strategy from the GCIS provincial communication strategy?
- Who is responsible for the development of a communication strategy and how much input does he have from the rest of the colleagues?
- What is your understanding of strategic communication?
- To what extent, if any, does the communication cluster have influence over policy decisions in the government department?
- Does the communication managers have a sit in the decision making table?
- According to literature, strategic communication involves environmental scanning, compilation of information from the environment and communicating this to management. Management will henceforth consider arising information and make decisions, policies and legislations in respond to identified public issues. It becomes a circular process. How do you see this process working in your department?
- In retrospect, what would you say are the major challenges in government communication?
- Is communication symmetrical (one way) or asymmetrical (interactive)?
- What is done as part of internal communication?

Communication Structures

- Please provide me with the organogram of the communication cluster?
- Can you explain how the communication cluster fits in the overall departmental organogram?
- Does this structure have an impact on government communication?
- Are there government communicators in districts?
- How does this (communication) department relate to them, how often do you communicate with them (districts)?
- Are these trained government communicators and who regulates their activities?

Communication Evaluations

- How do you collect data about the public's needs?
- How possible is it to conduct communication effectiveness evaluation?
- What types of evaluations are conducted using which tools?
- How often are communication evaluations conducted?

Outreach programmes and events management

- How often do you initiate communication with citizens as your primary publics?
- What are *imbizos* and how are they structured and handled?
- What are outreach programmes and how do their work?
- Who sets the agenda for these events, who decides on the area to visit?
- Is there a criterion on deciding the locations for *imbizos* and outreach programmes?
- What is project '*sukuma'sakhe*'? And how is it enacted in your department?

Corporate identity and branding

- Do you think the public is aware of your branding (brand awareness)?
- Can you explain the process of branding for events and outreach programmes?
- What other identity communication initiatives are in place excluding the visual branding?

Direct communication: Publications

- What in-house journals do you have? Who are the target audiences?
- What publications are directed at external stakeholders, particularly the general public?
- How often does this department contribute news to *Simama*?
- How is Simana and other publications distributed to the public (circulation)?
- What is the readership figure of your external publication (readership)?
- It seems KZN government is moving towards direct communication through the establishment of self-publications, what is driving that move?

Government Communication and Media Relations

- Literature shows a high media scrutiny and negative coverage of government, what's your perception on this?
- Do you feel that the media fully understands the issues of the department?
- Whose role is it to educate the media about the intricacies of your departmental issues?
- What is done in this regard?
- How important is building relationships with the media?
- What strategies do you use to encourage more (positive) media coverage?
- How often does the department initiate communication with the media?
- Who sets the communication agenda?
- Do you feel that management (politicians) understand media relations?
- Which media do you most engage? Local, provisional, or national?
- Which media type is predominately targeted by the department? Newspapers, magazines, radio, television, the internet (our website)?
- How does the GCIS assist in media relations?

Section 2: the uniqueness of government communication

Politics

- Politics is a dynamic of every organisation, but literature assumes that politics is fully encompassing in government, how does politics affect your job?
- Are you able to remain non-partisan in performing your job?
- What would you say marks a distinction between government communication and political communication?

Legal constraints

- Are there any laws or legal issues that stifle your ability to communicate?
- How affected is government communication by the bureaucracies of government?
- How do you think the proposed information bill will affect government communication?

Devaluation of Communication

- Do you think the value of communication is recognised by management (politicians)?
- Do you feel appreciated for your job?
- Does communication have enough budgets, and enough resources including human resource?

Professional development:

- Are you a member of any professional organisation like prisa or other?
- How useful is the GCIS in professional development?
- Is there any kind of training that you have received from GCIS?
- Is there any training you would like to attend and have you made any request for it and to whom?
- In your opinion, how can GCIS improve its services to you as government communicators?
- How are new staffs inducted into government communication?
- Do you think government communicators (particularly new ones) fully understand the intricacies of government?
- How satisfied are you with advancement and promotion opportunities within your organisation ?
- How satisfied are you with your ability to play a leadership role within your organisation ?
- What is the most important skill a government communicator must possess? How different is this from the skill required of corporate communicators? Comment.

Centralisation

- How often do you work with your central government department in Pretoria?
- How often do you work with local offices of your government department?

[Thank You]

Communication strategy documents consulted

1. Department of public works communication strategy (2010-2014) Final draft December 2009 (not yet approved)
2. Draft Communication policy department of sport and recreation 2012 (not approved)
3. Provincial Communication strategy (2012/2013)
4. Department of Health corporate communication strategy 2011
5. Communication, marketing and media strategy – KZN Department of Co-operative Governance and Traditional Affairs April 2012 – March 2013.
6. Department of education's draft communication strategy **(2012/13 – 2017/8)**
7. Economic development and Tourism (KZN) draft DEDT Communication Policy 2012/2013

APPENDIX B
- Informed consent form -

Introduction Letter

GOVERNMENT COMMUNICATORS

INVESTIGATING COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN THE KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Greetings, my name is Rofhiwa Felicia Mukhudwana. I am a PhD candidate at the University of Pretoria.

This letter is an invitation to an empirical study focusing on government communication and government communicators. All government departments in KZN are targeted for this study. For years, government communication has been seen as tantamount to corporate communication in the private sector. Communication research examining the public sector rarely indicates differentiation of communication practices as due to a differential communication environment of the government sector.

It is claimed that government communication is unique and distinguished from the communication management of the private sector. Government communication contains with it opportunities and constraints that are assumed different. For instance, Theaker (2004:218) argues that working in the public sector is challenging for public relations in that government often deals with various, never-ending complex networks of stakeholders. This calls into question the uniqueness of government communication.

The purpose of the study is to explore the extent to which the unique communication environment of the public sector impacts upon the practice of communication management in government departments within the KwaZulu Natal metropolitan. In addition, the study examines the role of the Government Communication and Information Systems GCIS in standardising and professionalising government communication at a provincial departmental level.

I will extremely appreciate your participation and input in this research, and hence would like an opportunity to come and explain the study in further details (10 minutes). Participation in this research will consist of a 20 minutes interview and a 15 minutes self-administered questionnaire. The goal is to understand your experiences as a government communicator. I sincerely believe that the department has a lot to contribute and learn from the project (together we can do more). The study is conducted for academic purposes. The findings will be made available to the participants and confidentiality is guaranteed. A consent form is attached for your perusal.

A response to this meeting request will be greatly appreciated. A courtesy phone call will be made at your request for more details.

Kind Regards

Ms R.F Mukhudwana (ID: 840204 0803 082)



Faculty of Economic and
Management Sciences

Informed consent for participation in an academic research study

Dept. of Communication Management

INVESTIGATING COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT BY GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENTS IN THE KWAZULU NATAL PROVINCE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Research conducted by:

Ms. R.F. Mukhudwana (11168049)

Cell: 076 7534 844

Dear Respondent

You are invited to participate in an academic research study conducted by Rofhiwa Felicia Mukhudwana, a Doctoral student from the Department of Marketing and Communication Management at the University of Pretoria.

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which the unique communication environment of the public sector impacts upon the nature of communication management practiced in the South African government sector (KZN) and the degree to which this uniqueness is perceived and experienced by government communicators. In addition, the study aims to examine the role of the GCIS in standardising and professionalizing government communication at a provincial departmental level.

Please note the following:

- This study involves an anonymous survey. Your name will not appear on the questionnaire and the answers you give will be treated as strictly confidential. You cannot be identified in person based on the answers you give.
- Your participation in this study is very important to us. You may, however, choose not to participate and you may also stop participating at any time without any negative consequences.
- Please answer the questions in the attached questionnaire as completely and honestly as possible. This should not take more than 30 minutes of your time.
- The results of the study will be used for academic purposes only and may be published in an academic journal. We will provide you with a summary of our findings on request.
- Please contact my supervisor, Professor Ronel Rensburg (renel.rensburg@up.ac.za, 0122403395, 0836325332) if you have any questions or comments regarding the study.

Please sign the form to indicate that:

- You have read and understand the information provided above.
- You give your consent to participate in the study on a voluntary basis.

Respondent's signature

