communication. Focus groups and surveys are as much channels of communication as news releases, press conferences and internal publications. The corporate communication manager therefore needs expertise in strategic research. According to Lerbinger (1977), techniques such as environmental scanning, the public relations audit, the social audit and corporate image studies are useful in the identification of strategic stakeholders and their expectations/feelings/opinions regarding, and familiarity with, the organisation.

➔ *What is a stakeholder?*

An organisation has a relationship with stakeholders when the behaviour of the organisation or a stakeholder has consequences on the other. Research should be undertaken to scan the environment the identification of these consequences — ongoing communication helps to build stable, long-term relationships with stakeholders.

People are stakeholders when they are affected by the decisions of an organisation or if their decisions affect the organisation. Many stakeholders, such as employees or residents of a community, are *passive*. Stakeholders who are or become more *aware* and *active* can be described as publics (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig, 1992:125).

An important step in developing a corporate communication strategy is to make a list of the people who are linked to the organisation. Such a *stakeholder map* (Freeman 1984) usually contains groups such as owners, consumer advocates, customers, competitors, the media, employees, special interest groups, environmentalists, suppliers, governments, local community residents and others.

➔ *What is a strategic stakeholder?*

Strategic stakeholders (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig, 1992:123) are those that are *"critical, crucial, essential, important, or vital for an organisation in the accomplishment of its mission"*. Communication programmes should be planned only with the most important - the most strategic - stakeholders. Communication at the stakeholder stage, before conflict has occurred, is important because it helps to develop the stable, long-term relationships that an organisation needs in order to build support.

One method for the identification of key stakeholders is to analyse strategic linkages that are critical for an organisation to survive. The following four can be identified (Esman, *in* Grunig & Hunt, 1984:140-142):

- *Enabling linkages* are with groups that provide authority to, and control the resources of, the organisation (e.g. government legislators, stockholders, the board of directors and donors).

- *Functional linkages* are with groups that provide inputs to the organisation (e.g. employees and labour unions) and outputs (e.g. consumers and graduates).
- *Normative linkages* are with professional or industry associations – these linkages provide connections to similar organisations that might be of assistance in solving shared problems.
- *Diffused linkages* are connections to groupings of individuals who are not part of any organisation. Minority relations, community relations, media relations and environmental relations are organisational attempts to manage linkages with diffused groupings.

Organisations must manage *enabling* and *functional* linkages because these stakeholders create consequences for the organisation — organisations cannot pursue their goals without them. The organisation must manage *diffused linkages*, where organisations create consequences for others. When diffuse publics organise, they in turn create consequences for the organisation. The more turbulent an organisation's environment, the more linkages the organisation must manage with its environment and the more rapidly those linkages change (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). These linkages should form the basis for the corporate communication function's communication programmes.

➔ *The link between stakeholders and corporate communication strategy*

Managing communication with stakeholders as if they were discrete and unconnected groups of people does not add value to the organisation. What is required is a more integrated approach, supported by well-considered strategies, systems and behaviours that enable organisations to prioritise between stakeholder needs, to align the strategies and activities directed at stakeholders and to build bridges between them (Scholes & James, 1997).

The most important way in which corporate communication managers/practitioners can do this is by building and maintaining excellent relationships with strategic stakeholders. If what the stakeholder wants does not match the needs of the organisation, the long-term viability of the organisation may be at stake. Positive matching of the needs and objectives of stakeholders and the organisation is required for a lasting good relationship.

The corporate communication strategy entails *inter alia*:

- identifying and defining strategic stakeholder groupings;
- identifying key strategic issues around which publics may (have) emerge(d);
- determining whether the publics are in the *latent, aware or active stages*, and which publics have already turned activist.

Only when the organisation is aware of stakeholder concerns and the publics that emerge around issues can decisions be taken as to *what should be communicated* to them to solve problems or capitalise on opportunities. The second step in the process of developing a corporate communication strategy for an organisation is therefore to:

Identify strategic stakeholders and publics (in the external and internal environments)
Draw up Stakeholder Map (*organisational linkages, environmental scanning*, public relations audit**) Identify organisational consequences on Stakeholders/Publics (*social audit**) Identify Stakeholder Perceptions/Attitudes/Concerns (*public relations audit**) Identify Stakeholder familiarity with organisation (*corporate image studies**) Identify Key Stakeholder Issues (both organisational and communication)

*(Lerbinger, 1977).

7.3 Identify and differentiate between key strategic issues

Strategic issues are developments, events and trends viewed by decision makers as consequential because of their potential to impact on an organisation's strategy (Ansoff, 1980; King, 1982; Dutton & Ottensmeyer, 1987). Strategic issues could range from a new competitive strategy necessitating fundamental changes in attitudes and behaviour, to downsizing or transformation.

Strategy is determined by first identifying key strategic issues of critical importance for achieving the corporate vision and mission. This is achieved by doing an environmental analysis and issues tracking, incorporating the effects of environmental changes into corporate decision making and formulating new strategies (i.e. deciding *what* to do).

Being part of the team that identifies the key strategic issues facing the organisation is part of the strategic role of the corporate communication manager (Steyn, 2000a). It is here that the strategic link between corporate strategy and the corporate communication function is made. Corporate communication managers must be experts in using communication to remove the organisation's barriers to success. Rather than trying to move communication up on top management's agenda, they should link communication with what is already at the top of that agenda (Quirke, 1996) – the organisation's key strategic issues.

Top management is interested in business problems, not in communication problems. They may not readily see the connection between communication and their problems — especially when they are measured not on the levels of excellence of their communication, but rather on attaining key organisational goals. It is the role of the corporate communication manager to identify these key strategic issues and to demonstrate (by means of the corporate communication strategy) how communication can provide solutions to key organisational problems.

The corporate communication function is often blamed by other managers for failing to reach communication goals when, in effect, other factors should be blamed. Even more problematic is the seeking of information or communication solutions when they are not adequate. It is therefore imperative that corporate communication managers take the initiative in deciding whether a problem can be solved by communication efforts alone, by communication in conjunction with other measures or by other measures only (Windahl, Signitzer & Olson, 1993).

Corporate communication managers should assert their views in order for other managers to stop defining a problem as being communication when it is, in reality, not. However, many corporate communication managers/practitioners may take the easy way out by regarding compliance as the best solution. In the latter case, the corporate communication function will be blamed for failure when so-called 'communication goals' are not reached (although they should not have been set in the first place for not being achievable). To prevent this situation, the following typology is suggested to assist corporate communication managers in differentiating between *organisational* and *communication* issues (Steyn, 2000b):

- ***Organisational issues Type 1***:
  Communication is not the cause of the problem, but can provide a solution (e.g. organisational change situations such as *transformation* or *downsizing* or *mergers*).
- ***Organisational issues Type 2***:
  Communication is not the cause of the problem, and cannot provide a solution but can explain the issue (e.g. *budget cuts* or *Employment Equity legislation*).
- ***Corporate communication issues:***
  Too little or no communication with external stakeholders is the problem (e.g. with the *media* in the case of negative publicity; or with *investors* in the case of low share price).
- ***Management communication issues:***
  Too little or no (internal) communication between managers and employees is the cause of the problem — not telling employees *what* they want to hear (e.g. about the organisation's vision or staff reductions).

- ***(Tactical) communication issues:***
  Messages are not reaching the target groups (e.g. because of the use of inappropriate communication channels such as *television* to reach a rural population; or *email* to reach factory workers; or difficult/technical *language* used to reach people who are communicating in their third or fourth language).

In developing a corporate communication strategy, it is therefore important to identify and clearly describe key issues, and especially to differentiate between types of strategic issues. Although strategic *communication* issues should be addressed, the corporate communication strategy should also address key *organisational* issues - showing top management how communication can be used as a solution to critical organisational problems, or at least explaining the problem to strategic stakeholders.

Identify and describe key strategic issues
Macro/Task/Internal Environment (*environmental scanning/issues tracking*)* Identify Publics/Activists that emerge around issues (*issues tracking*)* Identify consequences for organisation (e.g. SWOT analysis) Prioritise key strategic issues
Differentiate between types of strategic issues (organisational or communication)

7.4 Identify implications of strategic issues for stakeholders

An important step in developing the corporate communication strategy is to identify the implications that key strategic issues might have (or already have) for strategic stakeholders and publics. (In order to do this, practitioners need firstly to understand the business/strategic issues that the organisation faces). In addition, the effects that organisational strategies (enterprise/corporate/business) or the behaviour of top management might have on the stakeholders should also be determined.

Identify the implications of each strategic issue
For each (strategic) stakeholder/public

7.5 Formulate the corporate communication strategy

The implications/effects of the strategic issues on the stakeholders become the subject that has to be addressed by the organisation in its communication with strategic stakeholders/publics. Corporate communication strategy therefore entails to *the clear formulation of* that which has been identified during the previous step, i.e. *what* should be communicated to strategic stakeholders (Steyn, 2000b):

- To *solve the problems* created by the implications of a strategic issue. (For example, in a situation where improving productivity has been declared a key focus area for an organisation, one of the implications of such a top management decision is that employees fear losing their jobs. The corporate communication strategy in this case is to provide communication that will either allay or confirm these fears).
- To *capitalise on the opportunities* presented by the implications of a strategic issue. (A strategic issue could, for instance, be the requirements of new environmental legislation concerning a product manufactured by the company. Whereas the implications of this issue could be *problematic* in that consumers, suppliers or stockists become nervous about the continuation of the product and proactively switch to other products, it could also be that the company has already complied with the specifics of legislation. In both these cases, it is important for this information to be conveyed to strategic stakeholders immediately. Using the fact that the product already complies with the new legislation in product advertisements could be seen as *capitalising on an opportunity* provided by a strategic issue.)

An organisation should compile documentation regarding its corporate communication strategies. This would contain a collection of the different corporate communication strategies formulated, each one specifying *what should be communicated* to strategic stakeholders either to solve problems created by a specific strategic issue or to capitalise on the opportunities presented by a strategic issue or focus area.

It is therefore clear that a corporate communication strategy is not the same as a communication plan; neither is it the same as the *implementation* strategy referred to in the communication plan. Implementation strategy is the approach to, or framework for, the communication activities. Decisions concerning an *implementation* strategy involve selecting a *series of special events* or a *package of activities* and the communication media most likely to achieve the communication goal(s). For example, using a *print campaign* to reach employees or investors; or using an *interpersonal approach* for fund-raising activities; or using a *mass media* campaign to reach the community would constitute *implementation* strategy. Each of these implementation strategies would then form the framework for the activities selected to implement them, e.g. articles in the employee newsletter (to implement the print campaign), or a luncheon with a major donor (in the case of an interpersonal approach) or news releases/TV talk shows (to implement the mass media campaign).

Formulate the corporate communication strategy
Clearly indicating *what* must be communicated to *each* strategic stakeholder to solve the problem/capitalise on the opportunity presented by the strategic issue

7.6 Set communication goals

Based on the corporate communication strategy (which identified *what* the organisation should be communicating about), communication goals are to be developed to indicate *what* the organisation *wants to achieve* with its communication regarding the situation described (the strategic issues and their implications for the stakeholders). Does the organisation want to *give information* regarding the issue to its stakeholders, or does it want to *change the attitudes* of specific stakeholders regarding the issue or *the behaviour* of stakeholders caused by an issue, etc. (In many cases, if the behaviours or attitudes of stakeholders need to be changed, it is necessary firstly *to provide them with information* about the issue.)

In the process of developing a corporate communication strategy, the step of goal setting is the *link* between the corporate communication strategy and the communication plan. Communication plans should be developed based on the communication goals that are developed during the corporate communication *strategy* phase. This means that for each communication goal set during the strategy phase, two or more objectives should be developed for it in the communication plan.

Furthermore, if communication goals are set according to the strategy model, the corporate communication function will automatically be aligned with the corporate mission — for the communication goals are derived directly from the corporate communication strategy, which is formulated to solve the problems/capitalise on the opportunities presented by the organisation's key strategic issues and their implications for the stakeholders. This results in the corporate communication function's contributing towards organisational effectiveness (Steyn 2000d).

Set communication goals (derived from the corporate communication strategy)
Develop communication plans around these communication goals

7.7 Formulate a corporate communication policy

A good corporate communication strategy should include a clear policy statement. The corporate communication policy is based on the corporate mission and strategies, but is also influenced by the corporate culture, values and norms of the organisation (Trainor, 1990:15). Therefore, communication policy may differ greatly from organisation to organisation.

In general terms, corporate communication policy could deal with:

➔ functional communication areas (internal or external communication) and specified communication programmes, e.g. lobbying or media liaison;
➔ functional relationships between corporate communication and other departments, e.g. marketing, research or human resources;
➔ the structure of the corporate communication department, hierarchical orientation and lines of command;
➔ corporate communication goals and objectives;
➔ corporate do's and don'ts.

A way of developing corporate communication policy is to make a list of (Trainor, 1990:16-17):

- what *must* be communicated to stakeholders;
- what *should* be communicated;
- what the organisation is *prepared* to communicate;
- what the organisation is *not prepared* to communicate;
- what is to be communicated in *special situations* such as emergencies or crises.

The communication policy must be enforceable, precise and clear. Messages must be consistent and all departments must use the same standards when communicating internally or externally. An example of corporate communication policy might be a commitment to honesty and openness, transparency, access to top management, credibility, compassion, trust, integrity and sensitivity to the diverse nature of stakeholders and publics.

Formulate corporate communication policy (*who* is allowed to communicate *what* to *whom*)
Organisational guidelines for communication

7.8 Submit a draft corporate communication strategy and policy to top management

Top management should be kept abreast of the different steps during the development of the corporate communication strategy (and policy). They should be informed of the logic that guided the formulation of the strategy and the way in which communication will provide a solution to critical organisational problems. Research results on which the strategy is based (even if it is informal research) should be stated.

It is important to remember that top management approves the budget for corporate communication strategies. The better they understand the important contribution that the corporate communication function is making towards the achievement of organisational goals, the easier it will be to obtain funds for implementing such strategies. It will also assist in changing the negative perceptions that many top managers have of the corporate communication function's contribution to the 'bottom line'.

Draft to top management
Obtain management support and buy-in for each step of the corporate communication strategies (and policy)

7.9 Conduct an overall corporate communication media analysis

The purpose of the overall media analysis is to investigate the different corporate communication media that might be suitable for the specific organisation and its stakeholders. In the communication *strategy* phase, the aim is not to identify specific media for specific communication plans, but rather to establish broad guidelines on the different types of media that might be considered. Corporate communication media can range from interpersonal media, to group or organisational media to public or mass media (Rensburg, *in* Lubbe & Puth, 1994).

Conduct an overall corporate communication media analysis
Interpersonal, group, organisational, public and mass media

7.10 Develop a strategic communication plan

This step does not form part of the corporate communication *strategy* phase, but is rather the beginning of the *planning* phase. However, it is included to indicate clearly the position of a strategic communication plan (and resulting operational plans/ campaigns/programmes) for the corporate communication function and what it entails.

The strategic communication plan is the *framework* within which communication *programmes* (being continuous communication with strategic stakeholders) communication *campaigns* (which can be single or cyclic) and communication *plans* (developed to achieve specific communication goals) are developed (Steyn, 2000b).

➔ *Communication programmes*

In a study sponsored by the IABC Research Foundation (Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992), researchers report that corporate communication managers who follow a strategic approach conceptualise and direct the most effective communication programmes. A strategic approach is not historical — excellent communication programmes are not an evolution of what has been done in the past, but are rather aimed at stakeholders/ publics who are identified as strategically important to the organisation during the stakeholder analysis. Excellent practices are concerned with impact, not process, and aim to influence stakeholder attitudes, opinions or behaviours rather than simply putting processes in motion such as a news release production.

The corporate communication function should therefore have *continuous programmes* for strategic stakeholders (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig, 1992). This does not mean that the same activities are repeated year after year, but rather that campaigns/activities are developed annually for the organisation's strategic stakeholders and current publics (Dozier & Grunig, *in* Grunig, 1992). *Ad hoc* communication plans could be made during the year for new stakeholders or emerging publics (previously unknown or non-existing). If these publics persist in the long term, they should be incorporated in the ongoing programmes. Examples of continuous programmes for strategic stakeholders are the following:

Continuous communication programmes

Issues management	Employee relations	Change management
Media relations	Government relations/ lobbying	Customer relations
Industrial relations	Community relations	International relations
Social investment	Sponsorships	Corporate identity
Publications	Corporate advertising	Crisis communication

It is important to note that there is a difference between communication *programmes,* as described above, and communication *campaigns.*

➔ *Communication campaigns*

According to Kendall (1992:3), the term 'campaign' in its general usage means a *"connected series of operations designed to bring about a particular result".* Although the distinction between programmes and campaigns may not be universally recognised, there are advantages in differentiating the *continuous* 'programme' from the *time-limited* 'campaign'. A campaign planned for a month, six months or a year is much more subject to measurement of effect and tends to involve greater precision in planning and execution than a continuing programme that has no clear beginning and end. Plans for activities that have no deadlines tend to be pushed back in the scheduling of priorities (Kendall, 1992).

- Corporate communication (public relations) campaigns

  The above description of a campaign fits the corporate communication/public relations campaign, which is a *"concerted effort of an organisation to build socially responsible relationships by achieving research-based goals through the application of communication and the measurement of outcomes"* (Kendall, 1992:3).

  The corporate communication campaign is an organised and integrated effort to manage certain well-focused corporate communication activities, together with their supporting communication, to achieve a more controlled result. Best results are achieved when regular activities that form part of corporate communication programmes (i.e. announcing decisions to the press, publishing the employee newsletter or responding to media enquiries) are coordinated with the concentrated efforts of the campaign. For example, when the campaign theme and activities are incorporated into a newsletter, bulletin board and other means of communication, the additional notice will multiply the effect. Coordinating regular programmes and campaign activities also enables the corporate communication department to measure the effectiveness of specific activities as well as the total effect. A campaign will also attract renewed interest in familiar programmes (Kendall, 1992).

A campaign needs not be a one-time effort — a cycle of campaigns, each building on, and profiting from, previous ones has much to recommend it over the indeterminate continuing programme. The basic elements that make up a corporate communication campaign can simply be repeated with revisions, additions, and different directions for a more effective long-range programme. The cyclical continuing series of campaigns also has the advantage that the evaluation of one campaign can be incorporated in the research phase of the next (Kendall, 1992).

- Public communication (information) campaigns

The public communication/information campaign tends to focus on an *immediate objective* — to stop smoking, control wildfires or reduce crime — and relies primarily on *mass communication*. The corporate communication campaign described above also seeks such objectives but rather as a means of building relationships with the organisation's stakeholders. While it may also use mass communication, it relies on the complete spectrum of corporate communication media (Kendall, 1992).

Develop a strategic communication plan (a master plan for *how* to implement corporate communication strategies)
Communication programmes (continuous communication with strategic stakeholders) Communication campaigns (single or cyclical) Communication plans (implementation strategy and action plans)

8. A MODEL FOR DEVELOPING A CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Based on the steps identified in the previous section, a model for developing corporate communication strategies for an organisation is now suggested. (It should be emphasised that research forms an important component of the different steps in the model.)

ANALYSE THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

↑ ↓

IDENTIFY STRATEGIC STAKEHOLDERS AND PUBLICS
(in the external and internal environments)

↑ ↓

IDENTIFY, DESCRIBE AND DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

↓

IDENTIFY IMPLICATIONS OF EACH STRATEGIC ISSUE
(for each strategic stakeholder)

↓

FORMULATE THE CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY
(decide *what* must be communicated to strategic stakeholders/publics)

↓

SET COMMUNICATION GOALS
(derived from the corporate communication strategy)

↓

FORMULATE THE COMMUNICATION POLICY
(*who* is allowed to communicate *what* to *whom*)

↓

DRAFT TO TOP MANAGEMENT

↓

CONDUCT AN OVERALL CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MEDIA ANALYSIS
(which *types* of media are best suited to the organisation's strategic stakeholders)

↓

DEVELOP A STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION PLAN
(master plan for *how* to implement the strategy)

9. CONCLUSION

Developing a corporate communication strategy is a process of identifying and analysing the implications of the organisation's key strategic issues and the effects of its current/ future strategies on the stakeholders. Furthermore, it includes identifying stakeholders and their major concerns, and considering the implications thereof for the organisation — determining *what* should be communicated to strategic stakeholders to solve organisational problems or capitalise on opportunities.

From the model outlined above, a corporate communication strategy can be developed for any type of organisation, large or small. It is as much a *thinking* process as a doing process. A very important element in the process is the use of research — to identify strategic issues as well as stakeholders and publics, to gauge their attitudes towards the organisation, and to identify the consequences of the organisation's strategies and policies on relationships with its strategic stakeholders.

Although the steps in the process of developing a corporate communication strategy were indicated in a linear fashion in the model (i.e. one leading to the next), this development does not necessarily always occur in this sequence in practice. It is the responsibility of senior corporate communication practitioners to judge the situation and the specific circumstances in which the organisation finds itself, and to decide what is to be done at that specific time. Furthermore, the development of a corporate communication strategy takes place continuously, and is not a once-a-year exercise. The steps in the model serve only to make practitioners and students aware of aspects that should be considered in the process. Developing a functional strategy will help to establish a new paradigm for corporate communication. This paradigm will be focused on strategic communication decisions concerning corporate communication *strategy* (deciding *what* to communicate), rather than tactical decisions concerning a communication *plans* (deciding *how* to communicate). This will produce a new pattern of thinking about and studying organisational and corporate communication problems. However, it will necessitate both a strategic role for corporate communication at top management level as well as managing corporate communication plans/programmes/ campaigns strategically by aligning corporate communication goals with organisational goals.

In order to determine a corporate communication strategy, corporate communication managers/practitioners will need to understand the business issues that the organisation faces — suggesting communication solutions to critical organisational problems. Thinking and talking alone in terms of communication processes, goals, products and the corporate communication function will no longer make a substantial contribution to organisational effectiveness.

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