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Transcending diversity: The communication manager as ethical/moral ombudsperson in the postmodern organisational setting

ABSTRACT

Although the philosophy of ethical and socially responsible communication management¹ practices has a long history and has been described in great detail, the notion of the communication manager as an ethical/moral ombudsperson is relatively new.

With increasing numbers of communication managers now forming part of the dominant coalition/strategic decision-making team in many organisations, the real influence that these individuals have over the values that organisations accept should be critically assessed.

The new role of the communication manager is conceptualised as constituting two spheres of responsibility. Internally the communication manager should be facilitating the establishment and acceptance of ethically/morally acceptable organisational values. These values will then figure in external organisational behaviour, while the communication manager will act as the eyes and ears of the society in which he/she operates.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is an attempt to stimulate the philosophical reasoning about as well as the origins and manifestations of organisational values in a postmodern organisational setting, and more specifically to question the role of the communication manager in this dynamic process. This paper will also address topics such as the reasons for an ethical/philosophical approach to the role of communication management in organisations, a discussion of approaches and theories applicable to this topic as well as some critical questions.

The motivation for this study stems from the theoretical view that communication management may play different roles within society, depending on the world view from which it is practised (Grunig, 1992). The article supports the normative world view of symmetrical communication management. The theme of this article lends itself to discussions from both a positive and a normative perspective, which may lead to rhetoric among scholars and practitioners. In an attempt to facilitate such a debate, several key questions have been asked, and although it would be possible to provide exhaustive discussions of these questions, this is not the objective of the article.

L. Grunig (IN Toth & Heath, 1992:66) contends that communication management¹ professionals should support the level of maturity this field has reached by becoming introspective and looking closely at the presuppositions, goals and methods that govern the profession. Hall (1963:7-8) also supports this notion by pleading for reflection about all things and by all individuals: *"A man is what he thinks. His mental attitude is the key to this code of action, and civilization is fundamentally a code of action."*

The practical value of such introspection is also emphasized by Hall (1963:7): *"When our systems fail us we learn to depend upon ourselves for security and well being. Ever increasing is the demand now for organisation and classification of spiritual teachings, so that the average person can base on them his own foundation for a personal code of more intelligent living."*

¹The term **communication management** will be used throughout as a synonym for **public relations**. J. Grunig, in Grunig (1992:4), contends that the terms public relations and communication management are broader than (1) specialized public relations programs and (2) communication techniques, thus equating the term public relations with communication management: *"Public relations and communication management describe the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organisation's communication with both internal and external publics – groups that affect the ability of the organisation to meet its goals."*

The moral purpose of public relations is that of building and maintaining healthy relationships toward harmony in society (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:1). The communication management function has been referred to as the 'social conscience' of organisations. Simply stated, this thus means that what is accepted and seems normal to many (in this case communication management practitioners and scholars) should be analysed in order to answer questions about what lies beneath the surface.

A starting point may be to understand the different philosophical approaches and the implications of these on communication management.

2. COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT AND DIFFERENT BRANCHES OF PHILOSOPHY AND ETHICS

The ultimate goal of a philosophy, based on specific principles, for either one's personal life or profession, such as communication management, should be to *"equip the mind to cope with any issue with at least a fair measure of true intelligence"* (Hall, 1963:9). In this case, the insight gained from critically evaluating accepted theories and ideas that govern communication management should help shape intelligent reasoning on both a philosophical and practical level.

Using Hall's (1963) view about the importance of philosophical thought, one should also consider those elements that collectively constitute the concept of "philosophy". According to the same author, the modern concept embraces six fields of mental activity:

"Metaphysics includes theology, cosmology and the nature of being. **Logic** refers to the doctrine of being reasonable. **Ethics** includes morality and character and the discovery of the nature of good. **Psychology** encompasses the whole field of mental phenomena. **Epistemology** is mainly concerned with the problem as to whether knowledge in itself can exist in an absolute form. **Aesthetics** includes the science of the reactions caused by beauty, harmony, elegance and nobility. **Theurgy** refers to the science of becoming godlike and considers the actual process by which a man becomes a philosopher – the discipline of philosophy."

There are basically three broad approaches to ethics: The Teleological approach (also referred to as Utilitarianism or Realism) that, simply put, concludes that ethical behaviour is that which would be for the greater good of the greatest number of people (Briggs & Bernal, 1992; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995, Spicer, 1997). The question of whether some action would have good or bad consequences or the amount of 'pleasure' produced by the action would determine its ethical value.

But this approach has two main flaws. The first addresses whether a good end result

could justify any means of obtaining it. Would even unethical behaviour be justified if the result is good? Secondly, the problem arises when one considers minority groups. Not all groups have the power in terms of size or importance, but this does not mean that the majority vote is 'right' and the smaller group is 'wrong'. The importance of the voice of a minority group is especially relevant for the public relations practitioner concerned with all the publics of an organisation. The consequences of actions are also important in the teleological approach, which implies that decision makers conscientiously think about the consequences of all their decisions to be ethical (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:31, Spicer, 1997:285).

The second approach is referred to as the Deontological (Idealism or Kantianism), which proposes that moral judgment should be grounded in the awareness of every person's moral obligations and duty toward society (Briggs & Bernal, 1992; Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995, Spicer, 1997). Every person should be treated with respect and people's rights have to be considered. This is why all bodies and organisations normally have ethical codes, and all acts are measured against these rights to see whether they are morally right or wrong. If any act were considered to be acceptable for any 'reasonable person', it would be ethically correct. This implies that there would be some universal acceptance of what is wrong and right – some universal law.

This second approach also has its problems: if a society would consider something acceptable, does this imply that the society is basically good or that it can be assumed that all societies are good? One can ask the question whether society has not already been desensitised to what is basically wrong or right. Can one assume that because everyone is doing it, it must be the right thing to do? A further weakness of this approach is that it can encourage individualism to such an extent that it leads to anarchy (Spicer, 1997:286).

There is also a third branch of ethics that focuses on distributional effects of actions, called the theory of justice (Spicer, 1997:283). The justice approach follows three principles, the first of which postulates that similar individuals should be treated similarly; secondly, that rules should be communicated to all and understood by everyone so that it will be conducted and controlled fairly to avoid partiality; thirdly, that individuals cannot be held responsible for anything over which they have no control.

The implications of this approach for public relations are that a set of rules should be in place to protect the rights of the organisation as well as those of the stakeholders in order to maintain the stability of relationships between these parties (Spicer, 1997:285). An external authority would be involved in settling disputes concerning rights, which could be a court of law or an internal ombudsperson function. A further process would be the fair allocation of resources between the organisation and

stakeholders on the basis of perceived fairness and kindness of organisational decision-making or by participation that would include all stakeholders. This approach protects the interests of underrepresented groups because they can revert to their minimal rights.

The weakness of this approach is that it can result in the reduction of some individuals' rights in order to accommodate justice, and it can reduce entrepreneurship and innovation (Spicer, 1997:286).

Because of the fact that the utilitarian approach is most commonly followed in managerial decision-making (Spicer, 1997:287), the most important concern for public relations managers, in terms of their role as a possible organisation ombudsperson, would be the monitoring of organisational-stakeholder interactions as well as the facilitation of participation in decision-making. The role of research and environmental scanning in this regard is again emphasized (Ströh & Leonard, 1999).

The focus on the utilitarian approach for guidelines in decision-making is often based on the importance of economics, which has the effect that decisions are based on the outcomes and not on the decision-making process where stakeholders should be included (Spicer, 1997:289). By focusing on the consequences of a decision, decision-makers often argue in favour of the organisational context to the detriment of some stakeholder groups. Organisations and stakeholders also view the consequences of actions differently and they might use different approaches or combinations of approaches in their ascertainment of ethical decisions. Since conflicts arise because of these differences, the need for an impartial and ethical ombudsperson increases.

From a postmodern perspective, ethics are seen as being just as complex as the systems within which they are suppose to function (Cilliers, 1998:136). Postmodern theorists view society as a complex network of interweaving classes of opinions and an attempt to reach consensus would freeze a system into a conforming state of stagnation. As this is rather improbable, it is more desirable to develop a sensitivity for the process of conflict management, change and ethical decision-making.

Knowledge of all these approaches and ethical perspectives will empower communication managers and give them the edge to become a credible part of the decision-making process and advise management on ethical issues. Although guidelines are provided for communication managers in the form of ethical codes and guiding principles it is still the responsibility of the practitioner to consider the consequences of all decisions, and the cornerstone of the PR profession is the individual practitioner (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995: 113).

All the questions relating to these approaches hold specific implications for communication management within the organisation. Before one can address these implications, it is important to ask whether it is the place or function of the public relations practitioner to be responsible for making these decisions, or at least facilitating ethical decision-making. The complexities of the ethical role of the communication manager will be addressed through the discussion of the following questions.

3. WHAT ARE THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION MANAGERS IN A POSTMODERN ORGANISATIONAL SETTING?

When trying to describe the role of the organisational/corporate communication manager, one has to consider briefly what the underlying perspective is that governs one's thinking about the nature of organisations.

Different metaphors are used to describe organisations, each emphasizing a different dimension. If one accepts the metaphor of the organisation as an individual, the assumption of accountability for actions is highlighted. This debate centres around questions of corporate accountability and whether an organisation has a conscience. One view argues that the corporation is an impersonal institution that has one obligation, which is to make profits and not to act morally responsible (Weiss, 1998:95). Sources such as government regulations and control should be responsible for ensuring corporate moral behaviour. Added to this, the view exists that corporations do not have moral intentions but that the people in the corporation do.

The second view maintains that corporations are individuals, thereby confirming the validity of the metaphor of the organisation as an individual responsible for their intentions and actions (Weiss, 1998:97). This stems from the humanistic approach to management, which is the dominant paradigm in the postmodern era. The implication of this view is that organisations can and will be evaluated according to the standards for individual actions. Inherent in the view of the organisation as an individual is the notion of socially responsible citizenship. Legal and moral liability is the least of what is expected of such a 'citizen' (Weiss, 1998:97).

De George (IN L'Etang, 1996:100) suggests that "individuals and organisations may both be held culpable" even though he accepts that "the corporation in itself is not a moral agent, because people within it are and actions done by them on behalf of the organisation should be morally evaluated".

L'Etang (1996:101) points out that the legal conception of a corporation is "an anthropomorphic fiction" – a corporation is an abstraction, which possesses neither human mind nor human body and is therefore not capable of expressing intention.

According to law, a person will be found guilty if their guilty mind/intention is proven. In the case of an organisation, the person/agent who is really the directing mind and will of the organisation will be held accountable.

Corporations form the basis of our economic society and all stakeholders have an interest in the way a business is run. Therefore, stakeholders have the right to question and evaluate the way in which it is run (Shaw, 1999:15). Shaw (1999:16) aptly criticizes the first view: this view "...treats the standards and rules of everyday business activity as if they had nothing to do with the standards and rules of ordinary morality, and ... as something that we give lip service to on Sundays but that otherwise has no influence on our lives."

Corporate citizenship is often referred to as the external organisational behaviour through which the latter should be seen as being a good citizen, alongside all other citizens. And, according to Bishop and Andrews (1999:16), this term should mean more than just "sponsorship of a local charity or football team; it also involves being a good employer, providing a valued product, paying the bills on time and having a sense of responsibility toward people and the planet".

Corporate social responsibility, development, broad consultation with stakeholders and sensitivity towards the natural environment all represent the ideals of ethical responsibility and values. The critical reader may argue that these are simply representative of the current zeitgeist. They may argue that a certain type of ruthlessness and aim always to gain the highest possible profit margins will always prevail as business values. But it can also be argued that without the consent of, and healthy relationships with stakeholders the organisation will not be able to function and prosper: "It is not an issue of philanthropy or appeals to the good nature of business that we should be concerned with here, but the fact that it makes sound business sense to foster good relations with the community" (Harrison, 1995: 124). This is where corporate social responsibility becomes relevant as a "concern and active two-way involvement with social, economic and political forces which influence the environment within which it exists" (Overton-De Klerk, 1994).

According to Bishop and Andrews (1999:18), corporate citizenship should also be incorporated into the mainstream corporate culture of an organisation. The most important reason for this would be to achieve personal commitment and active participation in the corporate citizenship programme by all employees.

The underlying theme in both instances is the need to connect people – be it the different levels of management within organisations or the organisation with its different strategic constituencies. Corporate communication management is the vehicle through

which this objective can be achieved.

Gouillart and Kelly (1995:1&3) believe that the organisation is inherently whole, and they use the analogy of the human body to describe how different parts should work together to achieve the organisation's objectives. Organisations are essentially made up of people who converge in order to achieve some kind of business objectives. According to Spicer (1997) and Grunig's (1992) conceptualisation of the power-control model within organisations, the communication manager operates from a powerful position. The most significant element of this perspective is the influence that the communication manager may have over the world view of the dominant coalition, thus directly influencing communication management practices. From this perspective, the following questions can be addressed.

4. WHAT REAL INFLUENCE OR POWER DO COMMUNICATION MANAGERS HAVE IN ORGANISATIONS IN TERMS OF ETHICS?

"Issues have a moral component when an organization's actions when freely performed may harm or benefit others" (Jones IN Spicer, 1997:275). This is how Jones defines moral issues in an organisation, which implies that moral decisions have consequences for others and must involve choice. Stakeholders are defined as any group that may influence or be influenced by the organisation (in other words, decisions have consequences for them) in the achievement of its goals (Grunig, 1992:125; Spicer, 1997:15). If the definition of communication management postulates that the communication manager is responsible for the management and maintenance of relationships with stakeholders (Grunig, 1992:4), it is logical to deduce that the communication manager should be involved in the moral issues and ethical decision-making processes in the organisation.

The abovementioned is a basic argument for the involvement of the communication manager in ethical decision-making. But there are other roles that validate and serve as a motivation for the communication manager's participation in strategic argumentation regarding ethical issues.

4.1 The boundary-spanning role of the communication manager

According to White and Dozier (1992:93), management needs information from the environment to make decisions accordingly, and this type of information is often provided by boundary spanners - "individuals within the organisation who frequently interact with the organisation's environment and who gather, select, and relay information from the environment to decision makers in the dominant coalition". Communication managers are responsible for managing communication between an

organisation's subsystems and various relevant publics, thereby assisting different subsystems in remaining in contact with their publics (Kitchen, 1997:12).

This boundary-spanning function also helps to keep the organisation aware of issues in the environment so that it can make decisions accordingly. The more complex the decisions concerning issues in the environment, the more prevalent the boundary-spanning function becomes because decision-makers are less sure of what information to use to manage the organisation's responses to the environment in an ethical way (White & Dozier, 1992:93). The research knowledge and skills to conduct this environmental scanning role professionally provide the communication manager with the power to assist in decision-making and advising on ethical issues (Ströh & Leonard, 1999:29).

4.2 New role opportunities for the communication manager

The normative conceptualisation of the role of communication manager (Grunig IN Grunig 1992; Spicer 1997) includes the responsibility for moral leadership within, and on behalf of, the organisation. As the term indicates, this role would allow the communication manager to operate as the ethical and moral consciousness of the organisation and help to guide the establishment of organisational values, which will determine the nature of all external behaviour.

Following the model of Goodpaster (1982:4), this role would be twofold. The communication manager should be aware of his/her responsibilities in managing the organisation's specialized internal and external relationships. In terms of the external relationships, the communication manager should view the organisation as a "moral agent in the wider society", e.g. assuming responsibility for product safety, environmental protection, truth in advertising and communication management campaigns, and acting responsibly towards investors and suppliers.

In terms of internal relationships, the communication manager should view the organisation as a moral agent in itself - an entity that "ought to be managed with a view to the freedom and well-being of its members" (Goodpaster, 1982:5). Examples of this would include the management of interpersonal relationships, authority and incentives and "more subtle organisational pressures that affect either the general moral climate or culture of the organisation or the character of individuals as they rise through the ranks".

Although he does not provide a detailed discussion of the process whereby the communication manager can achieve these objectives, Goodpaster (1982:5) says that action in both the internal and external spheres involves issues of policy formulation

and policy implementation. In itself, this process of establishing organisational values in a fair and ethical manner is of utmost importance if the communication manager wants to be worthy of the title "ethical/moral ombudsperson".

It would also be appropriate to describe the new role of the communication manager as that of being the "thinking heart of the organisation" (Goodpaster, 1982:5). Although Goodpaster's (1982:5) model has been developed to describe the responsibilities of the general manager accurately, the requirements of ethical awareness and "a healthy balance between analytical skill and intuition" undoubtedly also apply to the communication manager.

4.3 The professional characteristics of the communication manager in the role of ethical adviser

While the philosophical reasoning about actions is crucial to the communication managers' new role, the process of involving all constituencies/strategic partners should also be considered carefully – this is the crux of the new role (Spicer, 1997:285). When considering the personal values of communication managers in their professions, it would be ideal if they would have insight, knowledge and a thorough understanding of organisational values, culture and business ethics, societal culture and norms. This individual will often have to make sense of apparent confusion and should therefore have a well-established reputation as an ethical and fair professional – without these qualities no communication manager will have trust and/or credibility from any constituency in or outside the organisation.

Hall (1963:13) contends that an individual, in this case communication managers, can act wisely only if he/she has a firm grip on the reasoning for his/her actions: "Only from philosophy can we derive an enlightened courage with which to face the day. Those who have light within themselves will pass triumphantly through the difficult years which lie ahead."

The single biggest stumbling block in trying to act as an ethical/moral ombudsperson could be the resistance from any organisational constituency, e.g. an individual or two in the dominant coalition. In this case, there are both idealistic and realistic answers.

Ideally, the communication manager should have been a part of the dominant coalition for long enough to have proven his/her knowledge of and ability to manage the organisational culture and to influence the organisation's philosophical approach to communication management practice, thereby improving the quality of all relationships. In this instance, it is also the responsibility of the communication manager to use the

symbolic value of top managers ethically, i.e. have them adopt the organisational values. Following the power-control model (Spicer, 1997), this would influence what happens in the rest of the organisation because all systems are related, and what happens in society has an influence on the organisation (culture, values, effectiveness) and vice versa. Micheal Rion (IN Tuleja,?:167) also supports this thinking: *"Firm and visible top management commitment, and especially a history of such commitment, is essential to keeping ethical dimensions of management on the agenda of operating managers"*.

A more realistic view accommodates the fact that not all communication managers have the power to influence either the process whereby organisational values are created or the values themselves. Communication managers could still use their own symbolic power to ensure that all communication management efforts are executed and managed in both an ethical manner and from an ethical and a philosophical perspective (Spicer, 1997:232). Symbolic power refers to the recognition that the communication manager earns through his/her role as an expert adviser to management.

Having looked at the type of support that the communication manager would require in this new role, the focus should shift to some of the sources of sound organisational values as well as the influence of these values on the nature of communication management practices.

To fully appreciate both the boundary spanning role as well as the role of the 'thinking heart', one has to consider two dimensions. The first has to do with the processes whereby the internal and external spheres are managed and the second dimension addresses the interaction between the individual and the values and goals of the organisation.

5. HOW TO FIND COMMON GROUND BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANISATIONAL VALUES AND GOALS

In the process of establishing organisational values that all employees would embrace, all elements of the more traditional roles of communication facilitator and problem-solving facilitator, as conceptualised by Dozier (IN Grunig, 1992:333), should be understood. All of these responsibilities are inherent in the process of reconciling different values and beliefs, and eventually guiding the organisation's external behaviour and communication management practices.

The expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving facilitator dimensions should be viewed as interchangeable. According to Dozier (IN Grunig, 1992:333) communication managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations programme outcomes. "They view themselves and are viewed by

others in the organisation as communication and public relations experts. [Finally] they facilitate communication between management and publics and guide management through what practitioners describe as a 'rational problem-solving process' (Dozier IN Grunig, 1992:333).

The process of reaching consensus about what organisational values will and ought to be embraced by all employees (from the postal assistant to the CEO) also has to be carefully considered. Postmodern organisational theory prescribes that employees should be empowered to share their ideas and to take ownership of these values. In this instance, the communication manager should understand that he/she must already be neutral about the specific outcomes of the process, but should purely facilitate dialogue between different stakeholders (Ströh, 1998:39).

5.1 The communication manager's role in reconciling the diverse personal values of employees with those of an organisation

Complex systems consist of a large number of elements that interact dynamically and are interrelated in such a way that their behaviour will influence each other and the goal attainment of the system (Cilliers, 1998:121). Adorno, one of the foremost contemporary thinkers of post-modernism, argues that "there are differences among human beings that remain irreducible to a totalizing system" (Cilliers, 1998:138). The inherent individualism of the members in the organisation implies important differences, which constitutes the humanity of the system.

The diversity in frames of reference brings about conflicts of interest and methods of functioning effectively. "During times of high ambiguity, scarce resources, and moderate to high conflict and diversity" (Spicer, 1997:73), the political and symbolical frames in the organisation assists in the understanding of the communication manager's function. Spicer further suggests that the concern over the ethical issues involved in conflict management should be the responsibility of the organisational ombudsperson. Because public relations should know the intricacies of organisation-stakeholder relationships, the communication manager should be involved in this conflict management process. Only a true understanding of relationships, channels that carry information in both directions and symmetrical conflict management can contribute to wise and ethical management decision-making. "Accurately understanding the perspective of outside groups is the art of public relations and the mark of a truly talented practitioner" (Spicer, 1997:297).

The question of whether all employees at an organisation can be united in their interpretation of what "good" or "evil" organisational action would constitute is part of the dilemma that communication managers face today.

According to Veenstra (1994:83), people are constantly reminded of the dualism of life – the battle between good and evil. This constant battle occurs on a spiritual level, thus forcing people always to consider whether they are striving for either the so-called good or evil. Very often, the person's cultural philosophy or religion determines his/her view of 'good' and 'evil'. Veenstra (1994:72) explains the role of these values in the following manner: "In so far as a person tries to give up the rules and standards which he sincerely accepts, they become part of his 'philosophy of life' guiding his choices and giving direction to his conduct."

It is furthermore also the responsibility of the communication manager to ensure that the enterprise does not only have the values of the individual at heart but should also consider the consent of wider society. This implies that the communication manager has to act as a watchdog on behalf of society and ensure that the organisation always acts ethically and responsibly when achieving its business objectives. The insider-outsider impartial role of the communication manager furthermore emphasizes the responsibility to represent both the views of the organisation and its stakeholders (Spicer, 1997: 293-294).

5.2 Searching for universal values to guide the ethical/moral ombudsperson

Before discussing some super concepts in communication management that have traditionally been accepted as ensuring the aforementioned, the values that may come from various religious and cultural views should be considered. The question to be answered is whether followers of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds could be unified under organisational values, and if so, whether these values could realistically be translated into ethical/moral and socially responsible communication management practices.

In this instance the essence (principles) of two prominent cultural philosophies, Ubuntu and Confucianism, and two prominent religious philosophies, namely the Christian belief system and Buddhism, were compared to search for common values, which would transcend time, religion and culture. This comparison pointed to the central themes of love, peace, reciprocity in relationships, humanism and general moral behaviour (Parrinder, 1983).

The need for such ethical norms is emphasized by Michael Josephson (IN Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:21) who identified ten universal and timeless values summarized by Seib & Fitzpatrick (1995:22) as: integrity, honesty and fairness. They define integrity as: "sound moral principle" and actually include honesty and fairness under this umbrella term. Mel Sharpe (IN Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:22) reiterated that honesty and fairness are two ethical absolutes and defined them as "the behaviour required to create and

maintain harmony in human relationships". As the communication manager is responsible for the establishment and maintenance of relationships, the involvement in ethical decision-making against the background of these definitions is self-explanatory.

Love and peace can be associated with the deep sense of respect that organisations ought to have for themselves and with whomever or whatever they have relationships. Since relationships are the ultimate commodity in today's business environment, they should be treated as such. The values and attitudes that are intrinsically part of interpersonal relationships should enter the equation in the business world. The question is no longer whether one is willing to take another party into consideration in any process – it is assumed that this will happen: "Relationship skills are no longer a luxury. They are a necessity – both in business and for our global survival" (Youngblood, 1997:270).

But if one wants to relate these values to the ethical/moral ombudsperson role of communication managers, these have to be compared to the values that are commonly held as the ideal within the literature and practice of this profession.

Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos and Babik (1996) and Kruckeberg (1993) have all described some of the ethical dilemmas in this profession, and they have contemplated whether it would be realistic to establish an international code of ethics that will transcend international and cultural borders. They have listed respect for public interest, honesty, fairness, truth, integrity and accuracy as the basis for almost all codes of professional ethics for professional bodies.

Since these values also seem to reflect those common features of the four world views and religions, they should form the basis for ethical and socially acceptable organisational values, and form an inherent part of the communication manager's mental makeup and professional attitude.

5.3 Challenges to universal values

The traditional approach to decision-making and the interpretation of the temporal nature of a system privileged the present, and meaning was derived from the past (Cilliers, 1998:139). The postmodern view is that responsibility should also be taken for the unpredictable and unknowable future, and that the effects of decisions should be anticipated even though decisions have to be made now. Therefore, ethical decisions should be made by taking the consequences into consideration, and to fall back on a rigid universal set of principles would deny the complexities of the fast-changing environment in which organisations function. Although universal and legal principles and values have to be taken as the basis for decision-making they should be remotivated

each time they are used. "To behave ethically means not to follow rules blindly – to merely calculate – but to follow them responsibly, which may imply that the rules must be broken" (Cilliers, 1998:139). Complexity and postmodern approaches recognise the development of complex relationships where a rigid set of rules would not be possible. Cilliers (1998:139) proposes the following considerations to judge every situation responsibly:

- Respect for diversity as an inherent value in itself.
- Even though it is impossible to have access to all information possible, one should strive to seek the whole truth.
- Even though it is impossible to predict the future, consequences of decisions should be anticipated.
- Because of continuous changes in the environment, it may be possible that decisions turn out to be imperfect. It is crucial for these decisions to be researched, revised and ultimately reversible, if necessary.

The moral responsibility of communication managers should not be limited to the current or immediate future, and the abovementioned values would provide guidelines and an understanding or morality to assist ethical decision-making that would surpass time. Without this knowledge, it would be virtually impossible to navigate your organisation through the current unpredictable environment of social values and market forces.

6. CONCLUSION

It is the responsibility of every professional communication manager to be intellectually sophisticated in ethical decision-making, and these must be grounded in theories developed and strengthened over time, but should also meet the demands of every particular situation (Seib & Fitzpatrick, 1995:114). To be truly seen as professional and credible, it is to the advantage of communication managers to be ethically educated in order to provide strategic advice on ethical issues.

The boundary-spanning function of communication managers enables them to be in touch with all the stakeholders of the organisation, but also to be advisers to management on issues in the environment. For this position to be exploited to its utmost, a firm research background that would make the communication manager more credible should be developed. Research has shown that communication managers who are more knowledgeable and well trained in formal research could contribute to the reaching of strategic goals of the organisation (Ströh & Leonard, 1999). Proficient skills in research also sensitise communication managers to ethical issues and create an awareness of minority voices to be consulted in the decision-making process.

The most important role that communication managers should fulfil in terms of ethical issues in the organisation, especially if they are not well trained and feel inadequate to give advice on ethics, is to facilitate dialogue and discourse on ethical issues. It is especially important to bring minority groups to the discussion tables so that they can participate and assist in ethical decision-making. If all the parties concerned share the responsibility of decision-making it would empower them and contribute to two-way symmetrical communication, thereby ensuring more ethical processes and outcomes.

In future, communication managers cannot only be the non-symbolic and symbolic decision-makers or administrative heads of departments, expert negotiators and strategic thinkers, but should also be true custodians of corporate consciousness – moral leaders on behalf of both organisations and society as a whole. But this places the responsibility on such individuals to prove that they deserve this position.

If communication managers can fulfil the role and play the political game of being conflict managers between the organisation and its different stakeholders, they should be able to facilitate ethical decision-making. Communication managers should further be educated in ethics, fulfil their role as impartial boundary spanners between the organisation and stakeholders, undertake research to include minority opinions and facilitate participation for ethical decision-making. If communication managers have the ability to adhere to these demands, they could fulfil the role as ethical ombudsperson in the organisation.

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