CHAPTER THREE
CONCEPTUALISATION OF COMMUNICATION RESEARCH

3.1 INTRODUCTION

The systems theory and the information gap theory provide the theoretical base for this study. These theories were discussed in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Three the development and importance of communication research receives attention. The communication professional and research will be addressed. This includes measurement, reputation management and knowledge management.

According to Du Plooy (1995: 1), we can describe science broadly as a human enterprise carried out within a community of practitioners. The purpose of science is to study and explain human reality in an authoritative fashion, and in such a way that it acquires value and use for mankind. In the scientific study of communication, we emphasise a specific part of this reality, namely the communication process with its constituent parts (communicators, messages, recipients and the circumstances in which the process takes place).

The structure and process of communication research can be broadly divided into **two categories**: the first deals with **abstract** issues like the origin of research traditions. The second category focuses on the **practical** dimensions of the research process, or how to conduct research (Du Plooy 1995: 2).

Members of a research tradition tend to have the same view of **reality**: about what constitutes valid **knowledge**; about the way the communication process should be **theoretically** explained; and about the best research **methods** (Du Plooy 1995: 2).

3.2 POSITIVIST RESEARCH

The positivist research tradition in communication (sometimes called empirical or quantitative research) originates in the approach to, or ideology of, science known as positivism. Positivism originated in the 17th century Europe. By the early 19th century this approach and ideology of science displayed three key components:

- A belief that valid knowledge could only be gained from **observable (empirical)** evidence. In this process the researcher had to be **objective.**
- A belief that researchers should strive towards methodological unity between the social sciences and natural sciences, by applying the methods of the natural sciences (like laboratory experiments) on the social sciences.
- A belief in the progress of human reason and the need to utilise the social sciences to establish a new social order (a better world). The latter was also referred to as the positivist ideal (Mouton 1996).

Positivist media research assumes an **empirical theory of knowledge**. Developed by a succession of British philosophers, empiricism views experience (observation) as the only source of real knowledge. To achieve the positivist ideal of methodological unity with the natural sciences, empirical communication research uses the **scientific method**. This method differs from other methods of obtaining knowledge because it is based on observation and the testing of assumptions **(hypotheses)** against the evidence of the "real world".

3.3 THE CRITICAL RESEARCH TRADITION

While the positivist research tradition in communication developed in the United States the critical research tradition started in Germany. By the turn of the century, Germany – like the United States – was in a state of flux and upheaval. Social critique and ideological power in particular typified the philosophical and political thinking of the day. This was because of change and transformation in the country brought about, mainly by industrialisation. These changes led to political and economical inequality. To chart the development of this modern but dislocated society, intellectuals relied mostly on Karl Marx's theory of historical materialism (Du Plooy 1995: 13).

As in the United States, people in Germany were unhappy with the destruction of the old agrarian community and its replacement by the new mass society. Thus when the Frankfurt School of Social Research started in 1923, it represented an effort to incorporate the critique against mass society into a Marxist framework. The academics at the School formed their own variant of Western Marxism, which we call critical theory (Du Plooy 1995: 13).

The School's idea of reality was informed by Marx. Marx himself was influenced by the ideas of the German philosopher, Georg Hegel (1770-1831). Hegel contended that social reality had a dialectical nature.

3.4 COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS AND RESEARCH

There has been a substantial amount of research by academics into the way in which practitioners use research. Broom & Dozier (1990) drew a distinction between two extremes of public relations practice at either end of a continuum. At one extreme the practice is "intuitive", and personal, with little use for social and behavioural research. At the other end scientific research is conducted and the practice is "objective and rigorous," based on application of empirical knowledge and theory (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 168).

In this chapter, the positioning and the current status of communication research and environmental scanning will be investigated. Both communication research and environmental scanning, a research method, experienced notable growth during the past years.

During the last two decades, rapid changes in the environment seriously threatened many organisations, resulting in radical re-engineering, restructuring or transformation for many. Management increasingly realises that it is imperative to understand the organisation's environment and change along with it, in order to survive and prosper. They have come to understand the importance of monitoring changes that are taking place, since an organisation can only respond to those parts of the environment of which it is aware.

There is thus increasing pressure to make greater investments in personnel and systems for gathering environmental information, to reduce some of the uncertainty and risk encountered in strategic decision making. Technological innovations are making it easier to acquire environmental information. However, effective systems should be developed to acquire *relevant* environmental information in a timely fashion.

In the current academic literature, there is a strong bias in favour of scientific positivist research. Dozier (1990) contrasts various types of public relations practitioners in his research into roles in which he identifies "the creative artistic practitioner (who wants) more say in decisions but not at the expense of their spontaneity and emotional involvement in the public relations process". The implication of Dozier's research is that "creative artistic practitioners" who do not use or understand scientific research are likely to be limited to a technician role (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 168).

3.5 THE MEASUREMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS IN CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

3.5.1 Why is it important to measure relationships in public relations (corporate communication)?

A growing number of corporate communication practitioners and scholars have come to believe that the fundamental goal of corporate communication is to build and then enhance on-going or long-term relationships with an organisation's key constituencies.

Techniques for measuring and evaluating the relatively **short-term** *outputs* and *outcomes* of specific programmes, events and campaigns have existed for quite a number of years. But up until now, measuring the success or failure of **long-term** *relationships* stemming, in part from public relations efforts, have not existed (Grunig & Hon 1999: 4).

Outputs are usually the immediate results of a particular public relations programme or activity. They measure how well an organisation presents itself to others and the amount of attention or exposure that the organisation receives. *Outcomes* measure whether target audience groups actually *received* the messages directed at them …paid *attention* to them …*understood* the messages …and *retained* those messages in any shape or form (Grunig & Huang 2000: 23).

They also measure whether the communication materials and messages that were disseminated have resulted in any *opinion, attitude,* and/or *behaviour* changes on the part of those targeted publics to whom the messages were directed (Grunig & Hon 1999: 4).

As important as it can be for an organisation to measure public relations *outputs* and *outcomes,* it is even more important for an organisation to measure *relationships*. This is because for most organisations measuring *outputs* and *outcomes* can only give information about the effectiveness of a *particular or specific public relations programme or event that has been undertaken* (Grunig & Hon 1999: 4).

3.5.2 Why are successful relationships important to public relations?

For at least 25 years, public relations scholars have asked two fundamental questions? "How do you measure the effects of public relations?" and "How do you show the value of public relations to an organisation and to society?" Communication researchers have known how to measure several effects of public relations for many years. Nevertheless, they know how to evaluate the effects of public relations techniques and programmes better than they know how to measure the value of public relations to an organisation and to society (Grunig & Hon 1999: 8).

Measures of the effects of public relations techniques and programmes indicate whether they have achieved their communication objectives, but they fall short of being able to measure the value of public relations to an organisation or society. It is possible, for example, that a public relations programme could be based on poor strategic thinking and change the cognitions, attitudes and behaviour of a public that has little impact on the organisation (Grunig & Hon 1999: 8).

3.5.3 The value of public relations is in relationships

In the research project on excellence in public relations and communication management conducted for the International Association of Business Communicators' Research Foundation, researchers searched the literature on organisational effectiveness for ideas that could explain the value of public relations.

They believed it was necessary to understand what it means for an organisation to be effective before they could explain how public relations makes it more effective. The search of the literature on organisational effectiveness revealed that effective organisations achieve their goals. Effective organisations choose and achieve appropriate goals because they develop relationships with their constituencies, which public relations practitioners typically call publics. Ineffective organisations cannot achieve their goals, at least in part, because their publics do not support and typically oppose management efforts to achieve what publics consider illegitimate goals (Grunig & Hon 1999: 8).

Public opposition to management goals and decisions frequently results in "issues" and "crises". As a result, the process of developing and maintaining relationships with strategic publics is a crucial component of strategic management, issues management, and crises management.

The process of incorporating the goals, interests and concerns of publics into the strategic decision processes of organisations is never easy, because organisations generally encounter multiple publics with multiple goals.

Public relations makes an organisation more effective, when it identifies the most strategic publics as part of strategic management processes and conducts communication programmes to develop and maintain effective long-term relationships between management and those publics.

As a result, we should be able to determine the value of public relations by measuring the quality of relationships with strategic publics.

3.5.4 What contribution does achieving short-term communication objectives make to the building of long-term relationships?

Grunig & Hon (1999: 8) says strategic public relations consists of the identification of the most strategic publics with which an organisation needs to develop a relationship; planning, implementing and evaluating communication programmes to build relationships with these publics and measuring and evaluating the long-term relationships between the organisation and these strategic publics.

They also say that knowledge of how to evaluate public relations largely is limited to the second stage: we know how to determine the effects of specific communication programmes on the cognitions, attitudes and behaviours of publics in the short term. There is a link, however, between short- and long term outcomes of public relations.

The International Association of Business Communicators Excellence study provided evidence that there is a correlation between achieving short-term communication effects and maintaining quality long-term relationships. The research team classified public relations departments as excellent when the chief executive officer's of their client organisations assigned a high value to the contribution of the department. The chief executive officer said they valued these departments because of their ability to maintain relationships with key stakeholders. The senior communicators in the excellent departments also reported more often than those in less-excellent departments that their programmes had "change-of relationship" effects such as changes in behaviour of a public, greater cooperation between the organisation and the development of a stable, long-term relationship.

3.6 LERBINGER'S CLASSIFICATION OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION

In relating research to the development of a corporate communication strategy (and plans), a very useful definition of the kinds of corporate communication research is provided by Lerbinger (1977: 11).

3.6.1 Environmental monitoring

Environmental monitoring or scanning is research to detect trends in stakeholders' opinions and in the social-political, economic, technological, ecological and legal environment. It is used to keep track of "what is going on out there". Environmental monitoring is the mainstay of corporate communication and is often referred to as "assessing the corporate climate" (Lerbinger 1977: 12).

3.6.2 Social auditing

Social auditing is research similar to environmental monitoring. Social audits determine the effects the organisation has had on its stakeholders and the extent to which those effects must be corrected. The primary purpose is to examine, catalogue, systemise and measure the organisation's performance as a corporate citizen (Lerbinger 1977: 12).

3.6.3 Corporate communication auditing

Public relations auditing is research to define stakeholders, and to determine how they perceive and evaluate the organisation. There are two basic types of audits: audience identification and corporate image studies.

Audience identification:

- Identifies relevant stakeholders
- Evaluates the organisation's standing with each relevant stakeholder
- Identifies issues of concern to those stakeholders
- Measures the power of each stakeholder.

Corporate image studies are an extension of the corporate communication audit insofar as they determine:

- The familiarity of each stakeholder with the organisation
- The attitudes of each stakeholder toward the organisation
- The personality characteristics each stakeholder associates with the organisation (Lerbinger 1977: 14).

3.6.4 Communication content auditing

This is research to evaluate corporate communication programmes or plans to find out whether messages have actually reached the target audience. It includes readership surveys, content analysis of messages, and the measurement of the readability of messages (Lerbinger 1977: 15).

Research is generally divided into being quantitative and qualitative. Quantitative projects are aimed at quantifying the number of people who have a specific attitude or problem with the company. Qualitative research is where one is trying to get a deeper understanding of the issues.

3.7. QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Qualitative research is broader than quantitative research and based more on observation. Quantitative research provides statistical information. Used together, both types of research complement each other (White 1998:15).

3.7.1 Qualitative research

Qualitative research aims at the development of theories *(grounded theory)* and understanding. The objective of qualitative research is to promote better self-understanding and increase insight into the human condition. Unlike quantitative researchers, qualitative researchers do not regard themselves as collectors of "facts" about human behaviour that will lead to verification and the extension of theories and enable researchers to determine causes of and predict human behaviour. In qualitative research the emphasis is on improved understanding of human behaviour and experience (Garbers 1996: 283).

These researchers try to understand the ways in which different individuals make sense of their lives and to describe those meanings. Empirical observation is prominent, because researchers need to study actual cases of human behaviour if they are to be in a position to reflect on the human condition with more meaning and clarity (Garbers 1996: 283).

Qualitative research is mostly done in groups – for instance a number of people (about 8) is brought to a venue and asked to discuss the issues being researched. These venues are mostly equipped with a one-way mirror and sound equipment for recording for the client to review the process. A professional person will guide the group to ensure that they remain focussed on the subject, that some people do not dominate, that they move through the issues in an orderly fashion, and that interesting points raised by the participants are pursued (Du Plessis 1994: 3).

Qualitative methodology includes direct observation, an overview of different documents and artefacts, participant observation and open-ended, unstructured interviewing. Researchers are led by an evolving and flexible design (Garbers 1996: 283).

"Qualitative" is an umbrella term for research based on *different theoretical orientations*. Prospective qualitative researchers should familiarise themselves with, *inter alia*,

- The *phenomenological approach* whereby researchers strive to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in specific situations;
- *Symbolic interaction*, which is based on the assumption that objects, people, situations and events do not have inherent meaning – meaning is attributed to them and this process involves interpretation;
- *Ethnomethodology,* which refers to the study of how individuals create and understand their daily lives; and

- *Cultural studies*, which are embedded in conceptual frameworks like neo-Marxism, feminist materialism and feminist post-structuralism (Garbers 1996: 284).

The most important person in this process is the moderator. This person has to know how to get the group to participate; who has to keep them going; who has to get the shy respondents involved; who has to ensure that people remain interested in the proceedings; who has to make sure that time is spent on interesting topics when these come up spontaneously; who has to ensure that the group moves onto new issues when an issue has been exploited; etc (Du Plessis 1994: 3).

Generally the moderator does not start to put the case for the company - i.e. when people have views the company would feel to be "wrong" the moderator does not get into explaining why their views are wrong - which is often failing when the moderator is attached to the company or its public relations practitioner.

The strength of group discussions is using the inter group dynamics that occur in any social occasion. People express views, raise new issues, argue differences et cetera. But this is also the weakness of a group. In such a setting people's views are influenced by the views of others, and the way in which other people express views (Du Plessis 1994: 3).

The presentation of the dichotomous “formal” (quantitative) and “informal” (qualitative) framework does not make the point that good or bad research may be either quantitative or qualitative. The emphasis tends to be on quantifiable outcomes (Puchan, Pieczka & L’Etang 1999: 168).

What are the characteristics of qualitative research?

- *Words.* Qualitative research focuses on words rather than numbers.
- *Researcher involvement*. The main research "instrument" in qualitative research is the researcher who closely engages with the people being studied.
- *Participant viewpoints.* A desire to explore and present the various subjective perspectives of participants is associated with qualitative research.
- *Small-scale studies*. Qualitative researchers are interested in deep exploration in order to provide rich, detailed, holistic description – as well as explanation.
- *Holistic focus.* Rather than directing their attention to one or two isolated variables, qualitative researchers tend to be oriented to a wide range of interconnected activities, experiences, beliefs etc.
- *Flexibility:* Although researchers have a topic and an agenda which fuel their research progress, they are usually committed to exploring new and often surprising avenues that emerge as informants reveal their understandings and interests.
- *Processual.* Qualitative research rarely provides static portraits of phenomena. Instead it aims to capture processes that take place over time.
- *Natural settings.* On the whole, qualitative investigations are carried out in people's natural environments such as in their offices or where they shop.
- *Inductive then deductive*. Qualitative research tends to start out with inductive reasoning and then, through a sequential process, employs deductive reasoning (Daymon & Holloway 2002: 7).

3.7.2 Quantitative (empirical) research

Quantitative researchers seek explanations and predictions that will generalise to other persons and places. The intent is to establish, confirm, or validate relationships and to develop generalisations that contribute to theory.

Some research data are in numbers. In fact, quantitative research methods are inquiries in which observations are expressed predominantly in numerical terms. Quantitative research has two major branches, surveys (of all varieties) and experiments (Reinard 2001: 8).

Quantitative research represents the mainstream approach to research and carefully structured guidelines exist for conducting it. Concepts, variables and hypotheses tend to be defined before the study begins and remain fixed throughout.

Researchers must remain detached from their “subjects” in order to make unbiased, universal, context-free generalisations.

Quantitative researchers typically reduce their data to numbers, which they then present as the results of statistical tests.

The advantage of quantitative research is that people are interviewed individually, and they all answer the same questionnaire. Thus when they are asked a question, they give their own opinion - unbiased by answers they have just heard someone else give. From a quantitative study the client can read that a certain percentage of a specific stakeholder-group has a specific view about him (Du Plessis 1994: 4).

3.8 INFORMAL REVIEWS

Broadly, such practical assignments will fall into the subjective or objective categories. Certainly if the goals for the public relations performance were originally set only as aims, then there is not much point in taking the assessment behind the subjective stage. Though, even this can be valuable.

One well-established subjective measure is to hold a performance review towards the end of a programme or activity and before the detailed planning of the next stage. This needs to involve all the people who contributed to the original discussions and helped in preparing the aims. The meeting will look at each of the aims originally defined and will discuss whether there is any evidence to support any improvement related to the targets.

According to Brody & Stone (1989:6) informal research are all those processes that do not employ statistical methods, thus implying that the results are not necessarily reliable. The trend, however, is to acknowledge many research techniques which do not use statistics, as equally reliable. Informal research can therefore be regarded as research that has not been verified through accepted research techniques.

3.9 PUBLIC RELATIONS EVALUATION

Both formal and informal research methods have a place in the practice of public relations and although instinct and gut feelings remain important in the conduct of public relations work, management also demands measurement, analysis and evaluation at every stage of the public relations process (Walker 1997: 98).

The term measurement is often confused with evaluation. Measurement is the process of assigning numerical values to some or all attributes of the study object. Another primary concern with measurement is whether the measure is "valid" and "reliable". *Validity* means that the measurement instrument actually measures what it is supposed to measure. *Reliability* refers to the consistency of the measure.

The increasing move to quality management with its expectations of measurable outcomes has intensified the demands for the public relations practitioners to evaluate their work. Economic constraints and increasing competition for scarce resources favour those who can demonstrate their effectiveness with facts and figures. At the same time, attempts to professionalise the public relations industry have emphasised professional characteristics as particular expertise, a shared body of knowledge and continuous learning (Walker 1997: 98).

Setting measurable objectives is essential in order to know the value of public relations but it is difficult to decide how much should be spent to determine this value. Given that the "pressure to measure" seems to outweigh current practice in public relations evaluation, and the fact that public relations is increasingly compared with other marketing disciplines, it can be argued that between 3 and 12 per cent of the public relations budget should be assigned to public relations measurement generally (Macleod 1998: 384).

According to Cole (1997: 49) the lack of communication measurement is one of the reasons why organisations cannot "fix" their communication problems. Many people automatically turn their minds to the "off position" upon hearing words such as "measurement, numbers, or statistics". Cole suggests that there are two choices for quantifying successful communication. The first is observing the actual outcome, and the second is to implement a regularly scheduled procedure to measure communication.

Many people trained in the communication arts have an aversion to measurement, while people trained in the science of engineering and finance tend to have an affinity for it. Between this aversion and affinity lies a fair amount of tension. Managers frequently insist that they measure everything, that "what gets measured is what gets done" (Lee 1999:13).

With a sophisticated understanding, an organisation can become adept at measuring communication in a wise and constructive way.

In recent years, more and more public relations professionals and chief executive officers have come to realise not only that reputations matter, but also that they can be managed. Indeed, many public relations firms have gone so far as to substitute the words "public relations" for "reputation management" to describe their work (Klein 1999: 32).

But whether you call it "public relations" or "relationship management," the struggle has been the same - how to prove the effects of your work. Now, however, public relations professionals have access to a new generation of research tools that can help measure the reputation they're purporting to manage and prove whether their work actually improved it (Klein 1999: 32).

What's motivating this rush to reputation management and measurement is a plethora of evidence that a good reputation can dramatically affect an organisation's results. A 1997 Ernst & Young study, "Measures That Matter," found that as much as 40 percent of the average company's market value is based on non-financial assets, including its reputation. But before you can manage a company's reputation, you have to measure it (Klein 1999: 32).

According to Lee (1999:13) the first touchstone of good measurement is to understand *why* you want to measure at all. It is not really constructive to attempt to quantify the value of strategic communication. As economists remind us, the value of anything is whatever someone is willing to pay for it. To the extent that management doesn't know how much to spend on communication, the real problem may be a poor understanding of communication as a leadership and management process.

The second touchstone of good measurement is to agree on *what* to measure. In general, one should resist the temptation to measure the inputs and outputs of the work of communication. Instead, one should measure the consequences of communication. Examples of inputs are the resources (such as time, money and personnel) that go into communication. Examples of outputs are the frequency and circulation of a publication (Lee 1999:14).

The alternative is to concentrate on how well the communication function is building awareness, understanding and acceptance of the competitive environment and strategic direction as a foundation to commitment. To do that, measurement should focus on *outcomes*, the impact of communication within the organisation on whatever strategic metric is of importance. The third touchstone of good measurement is to understand *how* to measure (Lee 1999:14).

3.10 WHY PRACTITIONERS DO NOT EVALUATE

It is widely and well known that practitioners have not evaluated their work in the past. In this section, the researcher will investigate why this is the situation. A survey of IPR members' attitudes to evaluation, done by Watson (1993) discovered that while three-quarters of practitioners claimed to undertake some form of evaluation, three-quarters of respondents also agreed that little money was spent on evaluation – from zero to five per cent of the total budget.

When questioned about their motives for undertaking evaluation, "prove value of campaign" came out a very clear leader, followed by "help campaign targeting and planning" and "need to judge campaign effects". Another reason, "help get more resources" came a distant fourth (Watson 1993:139).

Watson's research showed that practitioners were defensive about their activities. They used evaluation techniques to present data on which they could be judged rather than using evaluation to improve programmes. Output measurement was seen to be more relevant than gauging impact or gaining intelligence so that programmes could be improved (Watson 1993:139).

It is common that communication professionals feel that they need to prove the value and efficiency of their department, but don't know where to begin. Because the work of the communication professional is largely devoted to formal communication - newsletters, brochures, videos, speeches and so forth – they are looking for yardsticks on such things as the readership and readability of publications (Lee 1999:16).

According to Baron (1997: 32) there are three main reasons why communicators don't measure:

1. Nobody asks them to or gives them time and/or budgets to do so.
2. The influences of communication programmes are almost never isolated, so it's difficult to posit relationships between performance and communication programmes only.
3. Most communication professionals are not comfortable with research methodology.

Two of the main reasons why communicators do not measure are insecurity and not understanding the need to measure. They are afraid that the results will be bad news.

Elizabeth Howell, ABC, concurs by saying, "When I don't measure, it's usually because I don't know how; I have no budget to outsource the measurement activity, or management doesn't really want to know" (Baron 1997: 33).

Many communication managers shrink from measurement because of anxious uncertainty over what to measure and how to measure it. That, along with intimidation by colleagues in other disciplines who insist to measure everything (Lee 1999:17).

One of the major difficulties in evaluating the effectiveness of public relations activity is the sheer range of the activity. Public relations can, for example, support business objectives, explain policies, increase awareness, focus attention on issues, encourage informed discussion, help to change perception, influence attitudes, motivate staff, reinforce the marketing and sales effort, build and sustain a reputation over time, help restore credibility, have some effect on the values of a particular group (Dyer 1998: 13).

It is indeed a broad range of activities. To accomplish assessment of these activities, current public relations evaluation strategies are very dependent on surveys of public opinion. According to Dyer (1998: 14), there are furthermore no models of public relations productivity and performance that specify categorical statements of what is good or bad public relations outcome.

The specific challenge we face is how to go about communication measurement in a meaningful way. Communication cannot be measured meaningfully if the quantifying metrics is the disputed value of communication. To have meaning, communication measurement must assume the value of communication and focus on effectiveness with respect to the organisation's strategic direction. That makes measurement of communication worthwhile (Lee 1999:17).

Lee (1999: 17) pinpointed the main reasons why programmes were not formally evaluated. These were, first, lack of knowledge, second was "cost", followed by "lack of time" and "lack of budget".

There are also other reasons why evaluation is seen to be problematic.

- **Understanding what it is that has to evaluated** Often what is measured is output and not outcome. So we will be very happy to see a nice, fat clippings file and will spend money to pay a clipping agency to collate the file for us. However, in the long run it doesn't matter how heavy the clippings file is, what matters is what those clippings achieved (the outcome) (Watson 1993: 141).

- **Setting objectives**. Objectives need framing in measurable terms. "Raising awareness" is not a good objective unless you quantify by how much: 1 per cent or 99 per cent? Research will show you what is possible. Some objectives will be fairly simple to quantify. The achievement of objectives is the clearest way to evaluate any programme or campaign.

- **Understanding of what can be achieved**. Public relations practitioners should make realistic promises. What is required is an honest, sober appraisal of what can be achieved. The over-promising problem is exacerbated by a genuine lack of knowledge of the psychological art of the possible (Watson 1993: 142).

- **Range of evaluation techniques required.** Public relations are unlike some other forms of marketing communications, such as direct mail, where the evaluation is relatively simple. You count the number of returns and the business transacted. Public relations addresses many audiences in many different ways and different types of evaluation techniques are needed (Watson 1993: 142).

- **The communication chain**. The decisions that have to be taken all along the communication chain affect the communication outcome. You have to decide on the message, the medium, the form of words and/or images, and ensure the target is receiving and interpreting the communication correctly. "Evaluation" has to take place all along the chain. If one element is wrong, the desired outcome will not be achieved. Thus evaluation just at the end of the programme can be misleading.

Past and current research on the measurement and evaluation of communication focussed on the evaluation of the communication process. The focus should instead be on the distinction of the goals of the company, the alignment of the communication processes with the goals and the measurement of the output. In other words, the measurement of the effectiveness of the technique and process is not sufficient.

The trick is to focus on impact, not activity. It is pointless to survey employees on their readership of a newsletter lacking much strategic information and future perspective. Rather, measure their awareness, understanding, acceptance, and commitment to the organisation's strategic success. It is one thing to ask employees, in a survey, whether they know the strategy. It is quite another thing to ask them to state the strategy (Lee 1999:19).

Other practitioners set only process or output objectives, which refer to the effort extended by the practitioner, such as "to send out 10 press releases per month" or "to invite 100 people to a cocktail party". However, if none of the press releases is published or if no organisational message is given to guests at the party, the public relations activity had no impact (Steyn 1999:10).

Before launching a programme, it should be pre-tested (i.e. through focus groups) to see if it communicates the intended message. It should also be tested along the way (in-process evaluation) to see whether the programme is making a difference, and to fine-tune it (Steyn 1999:10).

Many public relations practitioners serve as mere practitioners and do not use scientific research. As a result, public relations practice tends to focus on the means or strategies, paying little attention to the specifics to be achieved. Few programmes have measurable objectives specifying measurable outcomes, and even fewer use systematic research to determine the nature of problem situations, progress toward achieving objectives, or programme success or failure (Broom & Dozier 1990).

The outcomes of the programme are monitored by means of summative evaluation research, to see whether the problem has indeed been solved, whether another problem has inadvertently been caused or whether a new problem has arisen itself (Steyn 1999:11).

Internal evaluation can be done among employees (informal research such as talking to people involved in executing the programme) to identify hiccups experienced during implementation, which can be avoided in the future. External evaluation (formal research such as surveys or focus groups or perception studies) can be done to assess the climate among external publics, to see if attitudes and perceptions have indeed changed (Steyn 1999:11).

The described model should form the basis of any corporate communication actions. Without a research orientation and the skills necessary to make corporate communication truly part of an organisation's adaptive subsystem, the function cannot become part of the organisation's strategic decision-making process (Steyn 1999:11).

Measuring the effectiveness of communication with respect to strategic direction requires first appreciating the rightful role of communication in business. It is just this: to create and cultivate employee awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the organisation's competitive environment and strategic intent as a foundation to a broad, real commitment to executive strategy, welcoming change and achieving goals (Lee 1999:19).

Viewed this way, communication is an essential leadership tool. No longer is it merely the "morale shop" or a harmless publisher of newsletters with free classified ads and grainy snapshots of company picnics. Now its mission and the company's mission are one and the same (Lee 1999:19).

The organisation's top leaders may or may not have a sophisticated understanding of communication. But chances are they will listen to and embrace an explanation of communication in a strategic context. Commitment of the personnel is needed and that can only be obtained through communication. Commitment, moreover, requires the acceptance of strategic intent. Acceptance of strategic intent requires understanding of it, and understanding requires awareness of it. This four-stage progression - from awareness to understanding to acceptance to commitment – is what strategic communication is really all about (Lee 1999:20).

According to Grunig (1992: 186), there are two kinds of corporate communication research – evaluation research and environmental scanning. For corporate communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness (make a contribution to the bottom line), the most senior manager or practitioner heading the public relations function has to take responsibility for providing strategic information to top management. This information should be focused on the organisation's stakeholders and their concerns, as well as on identifying and managing the response to issues emerging in the internal and external environment, and anticipating their consequences for the organisation's policies or stakeholders.

Evaluation research will be discussed now and environmental scanning will be discussed in length in the next chapter.

3.11 EVALUATION RESEARCH

Evaluation research or programme evaluation is conducted primarily to determine the effectiveness of public relations plans or programmes. Such studies are among the most sophisticated research activities that practitioners can undertake.

Evaluation research adds objective feedback on programme impact to the subjective assessments and informal research now used to judge programme effectiveness. Evaluation research uses scientific procedures to collect, analyse and interpret information to *help* determine the worth of something.

Evaluative research uses techniques that allow for comparisons between situations and measure changes.

Surveys or focus groups in themselves are key communication vehicles sending strong messages across the organisation. Valid techniques can be effective when implemented at the outset and incorporated into the design of the initiatives. The fact that most people today still rely mostly on focus groups to measure is our own limitation. There is an art to research techniques and, there are people who have been trained in effective measurement methods (Baron 1997: 33).

With the establishment of evaluation as an academic discipline, researchers began to investigate the evaluation process itself: were evaluations too costly and too late? Did evaluators use the right tools, methods and measures to find the right answers?

Geddie (1996: 24) further came to the conclusion that surveys are a waste of time and money until you use the results. "Communicators who let surveys and other evaluations gather dust on a shelf – rather than using results to plan – are doomed to begin every project at the bottom of the hill". Strategic implementation can begin as simply as setting baselines for improvement.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s a significant debate in the field was the quantitative-qualitative debate which was strongly related to the discussion of knowledge construction in evaluation (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 167).

According to Steyn (2000:10) evaluation research can be subdivided into:

3.11.1 Formative evaluation

Formative evaluation helps practitioners to plan public relations programmes and design communication strategies to deal with opportunities and threats found in the environment.

It takes place before a public relations programme or plan begins or during implementation. It helps practitioners to better formulate plans and design implementation strategies (Steyn 2000: 10).

According to White (1998:15), formative research establishes benchmarks and clarifies situations and objectives. Precise and measurable objectives at the outset of a programme are a prerequisite for later evaluation. Diagnostic research can be used to evaluate and, if necessary, adjust programme activities.

3.11.2 Summative evaluation

Summative evaluation, which measures public relations programmes, is used both to monitor their implementation and to evaluate programme performance against stated objectives (Steyn 1998: 22).

It is used to measure the overall impact of public relations programmes – both to monitor its implementation and to evaluate programmes to ascertain whether goals and objectives were met (Steyn 2000:22).

Communication auditing is a well-known evaluation technique to most practitioners. It is research to evaluate public relations programmes and plans to find out whether messages have actually gotten through to the receivers. It assesses communication activities, widely used to study the readability and readership of corporate newsletters, and other routine communication, such as annual reports and press releases (Steyn 2000: 10).

In the implementation phase public relations plans and programmes are developed to implement the corporate communication strategy. Once again research plays an important role in evaluating ongoing programmes, pre-testing the effectiveness of certain tools, profiling a specific stakeholder and its attitudes, accumulating information about effective uses of media and evaluating completed programmes and campaigns (Steyn 2000: 10).

Apart from quantitative objective measures, subjective measures of performance are also quite legitimate. These factors may be especially important in the client and consultancy relationship, but are also highly prized in the relationships that in-house departments build with other departments within the organisation. Examples of these subjective yardsticks are enthusiasm; efficiency and professionalism; creativity and initiative (Gregory 1996: 145).

Communication professionals have an unproductive instinct to hold a yardstick up to inputs and outputs, or a combination of the two, and compare them with the yardsticks of their companies. It's easy to measure inputs, which are just the resources (such as money and personnel) that go into the communication. It's equally easy to measure outputs, such as quantity and quality of media. The alternative is to concentrate on how well the communication function is building awareness, understanding, and acceptance of the competitive environment and strategic intent as a foundation to the needed employee commitment. To do that, measurement should focus on outcomes, the impact of communication within the organisation on whatever strategic metric is of importance (Lee 1999:19).

Many communication personnel still think of communication as only newsletters and brochures and regard formal communication as the only communication. Perspectives should be broadened to include semiformal and informal communication. For together, semiformal and informal communication account for the preponderance of communication in any organisation. It is also the most important (Lee 1999:19).

Semiformal communication includes those programmes and initiatives, procedures, systems, and processes that carry the organisation's official endorsement. They function as communication because they do what communication does or should do: convey information, messages, and meaning to people and induce or impede certain kinds of thinking or behaviour in response.

Informal communication consists of relationships between leaders and the led, driven by routine conversation-comments, questions, complaints, humor – as well as by all those myriad behaviours and decisions, attitudes, and choices on the part of leadership that so often speak louder than words (Lee 1999:20).

Communication professionals often shy away from thinking in terms of semiformal and informal communication because they assume it is beyond their power to influence or measure. Their pessimism is unwarranted. Lee (1999:21) suggests that the four-stage progression - from awareness to understanding to acceptance to commitment - provide a much-needed structure for measuring impact. There is a distinct relationship between the three rubrics of communication and the four stages.

Formal communication works best at building awareness and understanding. Semiformal communication, to the extent it is consistent with its formal brethren, builds understanding and acceptance. Informal communication - again, to the extent it reflects the themes and messages of formal communication stand alone in building commitment. With this relationship in mind, one can measure levels of awareness, understanding, acceptance and commitment as an indication of the impact of formal, semiformal and informal communication (Lee 1999:21).

In practical terms how does this translate into reality? There are a number of critical factors to consider when planning a campaign or programme:

- Set measurable objectives;
- Build in evaluation and quality checks from the start;
- Agree on measurement criteria with whoever will be judging the success of the work;
- Establish monitoring procedures that are open and transparant; and
- Demonstrate results (Gregory 1996: 143).

In recent decades, the emergence of trends such as the demand for accountability, the need to prove goal attainment and the development of modern management practices have forced not only private business but also the public sector to acknowledge the necessity of evaluation. Evaluation provides its user with two major advantages: feedback and the documentation of effectiveness (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 164).

The origin of programme evaluation is difficult to pin down. Planned social research, as we would call it today, was recorded in 2000 BC in China where sophisticated personnel selection measures were established. The last 200 years have seen an enormous increase in attempts to carry out evaluation, but it was not until the 1960s that modern programme evaluation emerged as a discipline. The 1960s was also the decade when established professional societies, especially in social sciences, became interested in evaluation at their annual meetings and conferences, and informal groupings of researchers amalgamated into professional organisations such as the Evaluation Network and the Council for Applied Social Sciences (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 166).

In the 1970s, the Professional Evaluation Research Society became established and professional journals were released such as the *Evaluation Quarterly* in 1977, later re-titled *Evaluation Review and Evaluation and Program Planning*. All these developments were very much United States-centered (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 166).

Evaluation practices in the United Kingdom began in the 19th century, with the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws in the 1830s, and other social surveys. Evaluation developed most strongly after the Second World War when the field of evaluation was most strongly connected with educational evaluation (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 166).

In the United Kingdom "evaluation" means mainly media evaluation or content analysis, which may in some instances be quantified in terms of a measure of advertising equivalence. In 1996, the trade magazine *PR Week* commented that the emphasis is on the growing professionalism of the practice. It is expressed through increased evaluation practice and it is worth noting that the evaluation also becomes an issue in the relationship between the occupations of public relations and marketing (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 168).

A useful device is the macro-model of evaluation demonstrated by Jim Macnamara (Macnamara 1992). The model forms a pyramid. At the base are the inputs, basically information and planning, and at the peak, objectives achieved. Each activity is split down into the various steps of the communication process.

It recognises inputs and asks the user to make a judgement on the quality of information, the choice of the medium and the content of the communication. It then considers outputs, the communication produced, for example the newsletter or press release and then it considers the results or outcomes – what the communication actually achieved (Macnamara 1992).

The mode needs to be customised for each project, but the basics remain the same. Its strength is that it recognises a range of evaluation methods. The more advanced evaluation methods further up the pyramid are recommended. They measure actual outcomes, are more sophisticated and more expensive. The ones lower down the pyramid are more basic and can be seen as tests that you are doing things right, more akin to quality control (Macnamara 1992).

Despite the trend of increase in evaluation, in 1998 *PR Week* reports that still less than 5 per cent of most public relations budgets are spent on any kind of evaluation. In public relations textbooks evaluation is part of the planning process. There is a sharp contrast between American texts (which specify a range of techniques and approaches to evaluation) and the British public relations field, which is likely to be less knowledgeable and produces less research literature (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999: 168).

Contemporary European interest in the field has seen the establishment of specialised interest groups in the 1980s and 1990s and the launch of a new journal, *Evaluation*, which takes a more European focus. More recently, there are signs that evaluation is becoming of more interest to the Latin countries.

The interest in evaluation has been stimulated by several important trends in society: the consumer interest movement, the implementation of measures to improve managerial effectiveness and the tendency to professionalisation in both the public and the private sector.

When White and Blamphin undertook their Delphi research study among United Kingdom academics and practitioners to discover what the national priorities for research within the public relations industry were, evaluation came out top of the list. According to Gregory (1999:142), nothing has changed since then.

This is largely because there is increasing recognition in the communication world that to be taken seriously, there has to be evidence of the contribution made. There is growing evidence that organisations and clients require public relations and the communications functions to demonstrate their effectiveness and that showing a file of press cuttings is not enough (Gregory 1999:142).

White and Blamphin's Delphi study in the United Kingdom placed the "measurement and evaluation of public relations" as top priority for research. Academics have been urging practitioners to use more research at both strategic and planning levels and to get to grips with evaluation. They should investigate the value of research to the development of public relations and potential influence at boardroom level. There have been some debate about what it is in public relations that has to be evaluated - "measuring the effectiveness of public relations efforts has proved almost as elusive as finding the Holy Grail". The problem, it seems, is twofold. Firstly, what do we measure and secondly, how do we measure it? (Puchan, Pieczka & L'Etang 1999:170).

Since the Delphi study, there have been a number of initiatives. In 1996, a cross-industry body formed to devise a standard unit of measurement, the PR Point. This was followed in November of the same year by a two-day workshop attended by practitioners and media evaluation companies from Europe and the United States of America. The aim of the workshop was to devise a minimum international industry standard. In October 1997 the International Committee of Public Relations Consultancies Association (ICO) launched a client guide to designing measurable communication objectives. At the same time the Association of Media Evaluation Companies (AMEC) introduced a guide on media evaluation (Gregory 1999:143).

At a forum in November 1999 hosted by *PR Week* it was agreed to develop an evaluation tool kit endorsed by the participating bodies. As a result, the Public Relations Research and Evaluation Toolkit was launched in May 1999.

Although there is no standard methodology that can be employed to make evaluation simple, there is general agreement on a number of basic principles. Evaluation starts at the beginning of a programme, not at the end. There has to be clear understanding about the starting point. Next comes the setting of objectives. For substantial programmes these objectives need to contribute towards the achievements of the organisation's overall goals. The final stage is an assessment of whether or not the objectives were met, that is summative evaluation (Gregory 1999:143).

3.12. FORMAL RESEARCH

Market research specialists will confirm that monitoring the effectiveness of a public relations campaign is not as difficult as many people imagine; nor need it be an extremely expensive activity. It is essential that the measure is of the public relations effectiveness and that other changes are not inadvertently monitored; for example other influences could include an increase in the sales force, the effectiveness of a new sales manager, the impact of an advertising campaign etc.

Therefore, as the original objectives will probably have been phrased in relation to some form of quantifiable awareness or attitude factor, it is that which needs to be measured. In fact, attitude surveys are probably the most valuable method of assessing the effectiveness of the campaign. Attitude research should also be the benchmark against which future effectiveness can be measured.

Without the completion of the communications loop, communication is one-sided and one must then depend only on "gut feel" for guidance. But, what is "gut feel"? It is the experience and background knowledge brought to bear in making business decisions. Research, in providing the feedback link, does not detract from this very important experience, nor does it replace it. Research **adds** to one's market knowledge, aiding communication managers in making more informed decisions.

The use of research to evaluate public relations programmes has been growing as client management steps up its demand for accountability throughout its operations. This has accelerated the growth of research departments at major public relations firms that measure everything from media coverage to behavioural shifts. The new bottom-line focus among clients has also led to the creation of strategic alliances between public relations and research firms (Harris 1998: 267).

Unlike the advertising business, which banded together decades ago to create standards for research, public relations has no unified measurement standards. Harris embraces the measurement model of Dr Walter K. Lindenmann, Senior Vice President and Director of Research at Ketchum Public Relations (Harris 1998: 267).

In 1988, Dr Lindenmann devised a survey of public relations research, measurement and evaluation to assess the full extent of public relations research in the United States. This survey provided the first clear picture of what practitioners believed or thought about research. As well, it gave insights into what they used research for, when they used it, and which techniques they mainly used (Walker 1997: 98).

According to Lindenmann (1998: 66) anyone can count press clippings and the mistake that many public relations practitioners make, is to do the same thing and pass the numbers and/or percentages that they come up with on to their senior management. They assume that by doing so they have "measured" the effectiveness of their public relations programmes and activities. This is only an elementary first step in the very complex and involved process of seeking to measure and evaluate impact.

All they are doing, is measuring what many in the field call measuring public relations "outputs". *Outputs* are usually the short-term results of a particular public relations programme. It measures how well an organisation presents itself to others, that amount of attention or exposure that an organisation might receive (Lindenmann 1998: 66).

Measuring outputs need to be viewed as only the first step in the entire public relations evaluation process. By counting press clippings and reviewing the subjects that are covered in those clips practitioners can begin to measure possible *exposure* to public relations messages, but cannot measure whether target audiences actually saw the messages and respond to them at all (Lindenmann 1998: 67).

What are really needed are mechanisms for measuring awareness and comprehension, recall and retention, opinion and attitude change and behavioural patterns. The Ketchum Public Relations and Measurement Department concluded that to really determine, as fully as possible, whether a particular public relations programme or activity had an impact, or not, a two-step process was needed:

- setting in advance very specific and clearly defined public relations goals and objectives, and
- pin pointing those levels of measurement that are crucial to the organisation in determining to what extent those specific public relations goals and objectives have been met.

The Department found three levels for measuring public relations effectiveness:

Level 1 is the *basic* level for measuring public relations outputs. This measures the amount of exposure that an organisation receives from the media, the total number of placements et cetera. It includes content analysis, segmentation analysis etc (Lindenmann 1998: 67).

Level 2 is the *intermediate* level for measuring public relations outgrowths. It measures whether or not target audience groups actually *received* the messages directed at them, paid *attention* to them, *understood* the messages, and *retained* those messages in any shape or form (Lindenmann 1998: 67).

Level 3 is the *advanced* level for measuring outcomes. This measures opinion, behavioural change, determining if there has been a shift in views and/or how people actually act when it comes to an organisation, its products or its services (Lindenmann 1998: 67).

The different levels of measuring public relations impact can be plotted on a yardstick in a hierarchical fashion.

Permission was obtained to use the Lindenmann survey for an Australian study to identify behaviour, beliefs and attitudes using an existing instrument. The study of public relations research in Australia has attempted to uncover current practice in the industry and to identify the attitudes and beliefs of practitioners about the place of research in their work. It provides some new information about the beliefs underlying particular actions relating to public relations research, measurement and evaluation (Walker 1997: 98).

Organisations need a performance measurement management framework that allows for the choice of three important measures: effectiveness; efficiency and cost-effectiveness. While the discussion of communication product and programme effectiveness measurement still dominates communication measurement literature, communication managers are finding that executive management is just as concerned with efficiency and cost-effectiveness as it is with effectiveness. It can be measured on three levels, being the level of product, programme and positioning.

3.13 MAJOR EVALUATION COMPONENTS

What are the major components that need to be evaluated? For any public relations evaluation research to be credible, five major components of the process or steps need to be taken into consideration. It is first setting specific measurable public relations goals and objectives. Then targeting public relations outputs, next targeting public relations outgrowths, eventually targeting public relations outcomes, and finally taking steps to link what has been accomplished in public relations to the ultimate business goals, objectives, and accomplishments of the organisation as a whole (Lindenmann 1998: 67).

According to Lee (1999:45) the sophistication of the measurement instrument can vary from a stratified random-sample survey with response sheets of computer-read bubbles to a quick pulse- and temperature telephone survey of arbitrarily selected employees. Responses to the questions are analysed in terms of awareness, understanding, acceptance and commitment and are then tracked back to the relevant kinds of formal, semiformal and informal communication they represent.

One fundamentally important point in all this stands out. The communicative power of programmes and policies (semiformal) and of decisions, behaviours and actions (informal) is a legitimate aspect of the communication professional's work. It is not realistic to expect the communication function to take responsibility for the organisation's communication processes and environment without it also addressing the critically important semiformal and informal communication (Lee 1999).

3.14 SETTING SPECIFIC MEASURABLE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This component has to come first as no one can really measure the effectiveness of anything, unless they first figure out exactly what it is they are measuring that something against. In setting public relations goals and objectives, it is usually important to recognise that measuring public relations effectiveness *per se* – that is, the management of an organisation's overall communications activities with its target audience groups or publics – can be difficult to do unless the individual elements or components of the programme are clearly defined. Instead of trying to measure public relations as a total entity, steps should be taken to measure the effectiveness of individual or particular public relations activities.

3.14.1 Measuring public relations outputs

Outputs are usually defined as the short-term, or immediate, results of a particular public relations programme or activity. Media content analysis is one of the principal methodologies used to measure media outputs. Outputs might also be the assessment of a specific event, a direct mailing campaign or how a chief executive officer handles himself or herself at a press conference. In any event, both the quantity and quality of outputs can be measured and evaluated (Lindenmann 1998: 69).

Macleod (1998:382) considers input as the first step. "Input provides benchmarks to answer the question: Where are we starting from?" Input research is a prerequisite to determine whether and to what extent attitudes and behaviour have altered (outcome) in line with objectives.

Output measures whether the message was sent and aimed at the target audience. One of the principal outputs is media evaluation – what message was sent, where did it appear, who would have seen it, and what impact did it have?

3.14.2 Measuring public relations outgrowths

As important as it might be to measure public relations outputs, it is far more important to measure public relations outgrowths. The usual starting point for any public relations outgrowth measurement is to determine whether target audience groups actually *received* the messages directed at them, paid *attention* to them and *understood* the messages (Lindenmann 1998: 69).

Macleod (1998: 383) labels this step “out-take” – the degree to which the audience has understood and retained the message imparted by public relations.

It is important to obtain benchmark data against which to measure any possible changes in awareness and/or comprehension levels. To determine whether there have been any changes at all in audience awareness and comprehension levels usually requires some type of comparative study, either a “before and after” survey or a test and control group study.

Two other outgrowth measures that are important for public relations practitioners to examine are whether those in the target audience group can *recall* the messages that are being disseminated, and whether they are *retaining*, in any shape or form, the information that is being directed at them (Lindenmann 1998: 69).

Although recall and retention studies have not been conducted that frequently by public relations practitioners, they clearly are important forms of outgrowth measurement that ought to be seriously considered by public relations professionals. Various data collection techniques can be used when conducting such studies, including telephone, face-to-face, postal etc (Lindenmann 1998: 69).

3.14.3 Measuring public relations outcomes

Outcomes measure whether the communication materials and messages that were disseminated have resulted in any opinion, attitude, preference and/or behavioural changes on the part of those targeted audiences to whom the messages were directed. "Opinion research" generally measures what people say about something. "Attitude research" on the other hand, is far deeper and more complex. Usually, attitude research measure not only what people say about something, but also what they know and think, what they feel and how they are inclined to act (Lindenmann 1998: 70).

According to Macleod (1998: 383) "Outcome is to what degree attitudes and behaviour have been affected".

The ultimate test of effectiveness - the highest outcome measure possible – is whether the behaviour of the target audience has changed, at least to some degree, as a result of the public relations programme or activity. It is general knowledge that it is hard to measure behaviour, because it is difficult to prove cause-and-effect relationships.

3.14.4 Measuring business and/or organisational outcomes

It is imperative that public relations practitioners take steps to link their accomplishments to the ultimate goals, objectives and accomplishments of the organisation as a whole. The objective is to relate public relations outcomes to such desired business and/or organisational outcomes as increasing market penetration, market share, sales and ultimately, increasing an organisation's profitability (Lindenmann 1998: 72).

Obstacles of evaluation in public relations practice include:

- Lack of understanding on the part of practitioners of the role of research and evaluation, and of the techniques of research

- Lack of understanding on the part of clients

- Lack of time and resources .

There is a second process embedded within the overall scheme outlined above. Evaluation takes place on a continuous basis to ensure the programme is on track and will meet the required objectives. There are three stages at which evaluation takes place.

The first stage is at the input level: was the information gathered for the campaign platform adequate; were the channels of communication selected correctly; was the message presented properly? (Gregory 1999:144).

The second stage is at the output level: how many messages were sent; how many people received them; how many were placed in the media; who considered them? (Gregory 1999:144).

The final stage is at the outcome level; what were the effects of these communications; how many changed their attitude or responded positively to the message? For some theorists there is an intermediate stage between output and outcome and that is outtake (Gregory 1999:145). Given that the process is not complicated, why is so little evaluation undertaken? Watson (1997:145) in his study of IPR members discovered that it was due to ignorance of methods, lack of budget and a lack of confidence in promoting evaluation to employers and clients.

What is clear is that evaluation is becoming a requirement. It can help put the professional communicator on an equal footing with other business professionals who have to be accountable. What is incumbent on the professional communicator is that they learn about the different types of public relations research and how to conduct research properly (Gregory 1999:145).

Many of the factors that have shielded communicators from the need to evaluate are changing rapidly. Also, leading-edge communicators are engaging in more integrated and comprehensive interventions, so they can tie their multiple-tactic programmes to performance. Professionals in a related career, training, are already doing this. If employee and public communication professionals don't start, they will find their roles being taken over by others who are practicing a newer and more appropriate form of communication/knowledge management system (Baron 1997: 33).

3.15 SCORECARDS

Scorecards focus on many common elements, including: leadership; strategic management; customer focus; internal processes; and employee learning and change. Of these, strategic management, organisation and continuous improvement are the most important measures for the communication function.

3.15.1 Strategic management

This can be done, in part, by examining the correlation between corporate and business line objectives and actual work activities, and between communication function objectives and work activities.

3.15.2 Organisation

We examine organisational structures, roles and resource utilisation against planning priorities, production processes and client satisfaction. Does the organisation of our work mirror the needs and priorities of our clients? (Likely 2000: 27).

3.15.3 Continuous improvement

We can conduct an examination of individual and group professional development plans, function knowledge management systems and archival or corporate memory mechanisms, and then compare them to client satisfaction, product and programme results, internal and external recognition programmes and industry benchmarks and trends (Likely 2000: 27).

For a communication manager to help position his or her organisation correctly in the market, it is important to be aware of and monitor the reputation of the organisation.

3.16 REPUTATION MANAGEMENT

In this section, the researcher will investigate what is meant by the term "reputation management". Intuition will always play a role in understanding your organisation's image. But you don't have to fly by instinct alone. More scientific measures are now appearing as a growing number of research firms and consultants, who see reputation management as a smart business opportunity, are offering more affordable and accurate reputation management tools (Klein 1999: 33).

A public relations executive who'd like to measure his company's reputation has many choices of products and providers. Among the firms offering reputation management services are Ernst & Young and PriceWaterhouseCoopers. But no matter which tools you use, some general criteria apply as you move into a reputation management study or survey. For example:

1. Get buy-in from the top. A company's top management needs to understand the importance of reputation management and measurement.
2. Measure all constituencies. A good gauge of a company's reputation considers the views of all its different stakeholders. "We say reputation is the reflection of an organisation over time, and as seen through the eyes of all its stakeholders".
3. It's not brand equity. Reputation must not be confused with brand equity, which is typically tied to how one audience – the consumer – views a company's products or services. Or with corporate identity, which really represents how the company defines itself. Reputation is all stakeholders' view of the entire organisation.
4. Measure over time. You ought to look at reputation as financial people look at the quarterly results. Once a benchmark study has been done, it's possible that some of the department's other regular duties – like monitoring media relations results – can contribute to regular updating of an understanding of its reputation.
5. Apply what you learn. Understanding how stakeholders view a corporation allows a public relations department to use limited resources more effectively and increase its effectiveness as a strategic business tool. The bottom line is that companies can't afford not to know their reputation and other constituencies (Klein 1999: 33).

The enormously challenging world of managing in the rapidly changing and highly competitive markets, the world of complex thinking, the speed at which change happens and evolutionary theories all have an impact on individuals in various work environments (Hardijzer 2000: 22).

3.17 KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

Achieving success in the knowledge economy is one of the fundamental forces shaping the future of business. Knowledge is a fundamental driver of business success and is effectively becoming an organisation's most valuable asset and its chief tool for creating wealth (Kelleher & Seekings 2000: 24).

In the knowledge economy a key source of sustainable competitive advantage and superior profitability within an industry is how a company creates and shares its knowledge.

Professionals can no longer know everything they need to know in order to do their jobs well and compete in the marketplace. They require instant access to critical information. In the future, organisations able to provide their members with rapid access to the full repository of knowledge are the organisations that are most likely to succeed.

3.17.1 The purpose of knowledge management

Every employee builds a wealth of knowledge through learning, skills development and daily behaviour. Every employee possesses knowledge of beneficial value to the company, yet most of this knowledge is not leveraged to the collective benefit of the organisation (Breedt 2000: 22).

The purpose of knowledge management is to integrate the collective knowledge of employees in such a way that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This information must then be made accessible to all relevant individuals within the organisation so that it may be utilised and applied to enhance the competence and competitive advantage of the organisation as a whole. In addition, knowledge management aims to provide the organisation with the ability to learn, and thus, undergo a continual process of change. With this change process comes the opportunity to improve and enhance the performance of the organisation (Breedt 2000: 22).

3.17.2 Knowledge Management Objectives

The objectives of knowledge management is *to develop a knowledge base* equal to all employees' knowledge, skills, behaviours, perceptions, values, principles and education within the organisation's specific culture, strategy and structure.

Following an integrated approach to identifying, capturing, retrieving, sharing and evaluating the enterprise's knowledge assets, enables the organisation to develop a knowledge base. These assets may include databases, documents, policies and procedures as well as uncaptured, tacit expertise and experience resident in the individual workers' minds (Breedt 2000: 23).

It has been suggested that we have gone beyond the human capacity to process information. The information overload currently experienced is the cause of more than a third of all reported stress-related illnesses. Symptoms of information overload include paralysis of analytical ability, feelings of being overwhelmed and a loss of control, increased anxiety and decreased self-confidence, and an increased tendency to blame others (Hardijzer 2000: 22).

Wurman (1989: 32) says: "Information anxiety is produced by the ever-widening gap between what we understand and what we think we should understand. Information anxiety is the black hole between data and knowledge. It happens when information doesn't tell us what we want or need to know".

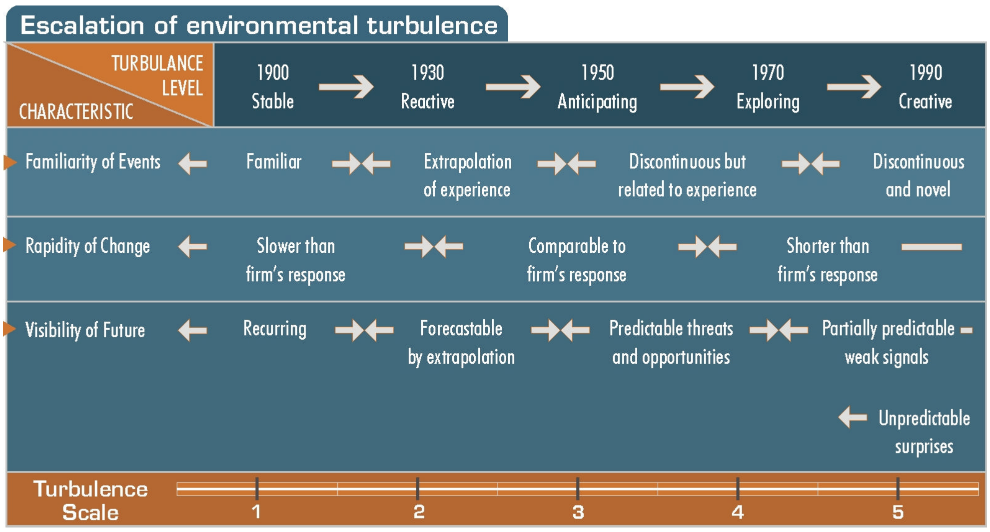
A weekday edition of the New York Times contains more information than the average person was likely to come across in a lifetime in seventeenth-century England (Wurman 1989: 32).

According to Wurman (1989: 35), more new information has been produced in the last 30 years than in the previous 5,000. About 1,000 books are published internationally every day, and the total of all printed knowledge doubles every day.

Wurman (1989: 35) goes on to point out that, as we are confronted with increasing amounts of information, we are increasingly unable to cope with it. “The glut has begun to obscure the radical distinctions between data and information, between facts and knowledge… And the more images with which we are confronted, the more distorted is our view of the world”.

Information overload is certainly not diminishing. Information technology has created a tidal wave of change to the extent that planning has become almost unrealistic due to market volatilities, complexity and the various evolutionary theories. The above is clearly indicated in the following figure.

Figure 3.1 Escalation of environmental turbulence



Source: Ansoff 1984

The explosion of information technology places a great deal of stress on our cognitive capacity to deal with so much choice. The high technology, high-pressure society has made it difficult for individuals to cope with choices, with the ultimate impact of poorer choices due to time constraints.

According to Wurman (1989:39) "Meaning requires time-consuming thought, and the pace of modern life works against affording us the time to think".

It seems clear that it is not only the pace of modern life militating against understanding and wisdom today, it is also the sheer volume and variety of information we are confronted with. People have only so much time. How they choose to spend their time is an important economic decision.

While computers have become faster and more powerful, there have been comparatively few resources put into educating people about how to cope with the mass of information with which they are confronted. Succeeding in the knowledge economy is not just about technological brilliance and innovation; an aspiring knowledge enterprise has also to overcome the biggest challenge of all – culture (Kelleher & Seekings 2000: 24).

Knowledge is power, but what about information? Can there be anything more *dis*-empowering than the torrent of information that cascades across our desks each week? It's hard enough to keep one's head above the unstoppable flow of information, much less make sense of it all.

The management of knowledge goes far beyond the storage and manipulation of data, or even of information. It is the attempt to recognise what is essentially a human asset buried in the minds of individuals, and leverage it into an organisational asset that can be used by a broader set of individuals on whose decisions the firm depends (More 1998: 353).

The Internet reveals that knowledge management is one of the hottest management topics on companies' agendas. Why such intense interest in knowledge management? The old adage, follow the money, provides some initial insight. With the increasingly complex problems that global organisations face every day, knowledge has become the currency of competitiveness and success.

Knowledge as an asset is beginning to supplant the traditional factors of production – land, labour and capital, and has become the most important new corporate and competitive resource. On average, about three-fourths of companies' market value stems from intangible assets of which the mainstay is intellectual capital – patents, copyright, trade secrets et cetera (More 1998: 353).

We should ask: "how do we know that we know what we know?" and "how does what we know shape our practical, daily activities?" Recognising the increasing value of information and knowledge to business success, many organisations have launched knowledge-management initiatives to leverage their competitive advantages (Mudge 1999: 25).

The spirit of knowledge management becomes reality in an organisational context when the principal knowledge management enablers – content, community and computing are brought together.

3.17.3 Content, community and computing

3.17.3.1 Content

Content focuses on managed content, which means that things we know about and know how to do are handled in a disciplined manner. Knowledge (content) can be classified as "tacit" or "explicit" and the difference shapes how the knowledge content will be managed (Mudge 1999: 6).

Explicit knowledge is what has been written or otherwise recorded. It includes books, manuals, patents, databases et cetera. *Tacit knowledge*, on the other hand, is personal, hard to formalise and communicate to others. Tacit knowledge often takes the form of a mental model: beliefs and perspectives so ingrained that they are difficult to articulate. It's the wisdom and expertise in people's heads (Mudge 1999: 6).

3.17.3.2 Community

Community is largely about collaboration. Often the collaboration centres round a business issue in which all community members have a vested interest. Community is the most significant differentiator between knowledge management and information management. A community might be defined by geography, organisational units, functional specialities, or shared topics of interest (Mudge 1999: 7).

3.17.3.3 Computing

Computing includes the gathering, storage and maintenance of content; it also provides access to content upon request of a community member. Computing can be thought of as both the requisite backbone of knowledge sharing and one of the most significant enablers (Mudge 1999: 7).

3.17.3.4 Content, community and computing working together

Millions of dollars are spent on collecting and moving content around within companies – increasingly over company Intranets. Companies must develop the processes, disciplines and know-how to focus on relevant, high-quality knowledge – *to become knowledge gourmets rather than knowledge gluttons*.

Collaborative advantage will go to those who use technology to create mutable and permeable boundaries between communities and to establish trust relationships with external communities (Mudge 1999: 8).

Companies need to manage their knowledge because in part knowledge has become their most important product. Effectively leveraging their knowledge assets is key to understanding their customers' needs and meeting those needs in innovative ways.

Once information is identified, collected and managed, it must be transformed into knowledge. This requires classification, analysis and synthesis – which require human intervention. Knowledge is not captured. What is captured is information that is more easily transformed into knowledge by the recipient. Knowledge management exists at two levels, namely:

3.17.4 Management of information

Knowledge equals objects. This entails the construction of information management systems. This track is new and growing rapidly, assisted by developments in information technology.

3.17.5 Management of people

Knowledge equals processes. The focus here is primarily on assessing, changing and improving human individual skills and behaviour. This track is not growing as fast as the track on information.

Organisational knowledge and memory can be retained in six places: namely individuals, organisational culture, organisational transformations, organisational structures, organisational ecology and external archives. Individuals do, however, remain the prime location for retention of the organisation's knowledge (Hardijzer 2000: 22).

Most employees of knowledge companies are highly qualified and highly educated professionals - they are knowledge workers. Their work consists largely of converting information to knowledge, using their own competencies for the most part, sometimes with the assistance of suppliers of information or specialised knowledge (Hardijzer 2000: 22).

The effort of knowledge management is not new at all. Successful organisations have always made strategic use of the information at their disposal. The term is used rather widely to describe a host of quite different practices and activities, ranging from simple document management to business intelligence gathering to complex efforts to create "learning organisations" (Mudge 1999: 25).

In some companies knowledge management is led by the information technology unit; in others the impetus comes from specific business units such as sales and marketing.

Information technology can support organisation knowledge and memory in two ways: either by making recorded knowledge retrievable or by making individuals with knowledge accessible.

Managers in some of the fastest-growing and more profitable businesses focus on knowledge, see their business from a knowledge perspective and act as if their intangible assets are real assets. By freeing themselves from the mental straightjackets of the industrial age, some of these pioneer managers have found a wellspring of limitless resources arising from the infinite human ability to create knowledge and benefit from the convenient fact that, unlike conventional assets, knowledge grows when it is shared. Knowledge on its own then cannot represent power, only knowledge sharing will (Hardijzer 2000: 22).

Knowledge management is both a discipline and an art. It's a management discipline insofar as processes can be defined and implemented to capture and tend the knowledge, to make it available to the workers, to keep track of who is contributing to the knowledge arsenal and who is applying it well, and so forth (Mudge 1999: 6).

But it's the art part that actually causes knowledge management to work. Knowledge management takes aim at evolving people's attitudes and work behaviours to effect new heights of collaboration – *the intentional sharing of ideas, information, knowledge and work itself* – in support of a business need. It's about changing people's value paradigm from "my information is power" to "sharing is power" (Mudge 1999: 6).

According to (Mudge 1999: 6) we might define the *spirit* of knowledge management as:

- Knowing individually what we know collectively and applying it.
- Knowing collectively what we know individually and making it (re) usable.
- Knowing what we don't know and learning it.

Knowledge management is about changing the culture of an organisation in order to exploit the full breadth and depth of experience and expertise contained within. Traditionally, knowledge has been seen as a source of power and competitive advantage for the individual – something to be hoarded. The overriding aim of any knowledge management programme is to get people to share their knowledge with the rest of their community and to see that it is in their best interest to do so (Alexander & Ward 1997: 167).

The ability to manage human intellect and its conversion into useful "product" is, perhaps, the most critical management skill in our age, providing the ultimate in competitive edge. In most organisations managing intellectual capital and more specifically the human side of knowledge management, remains largely unexplored territory (More 1998: 353).

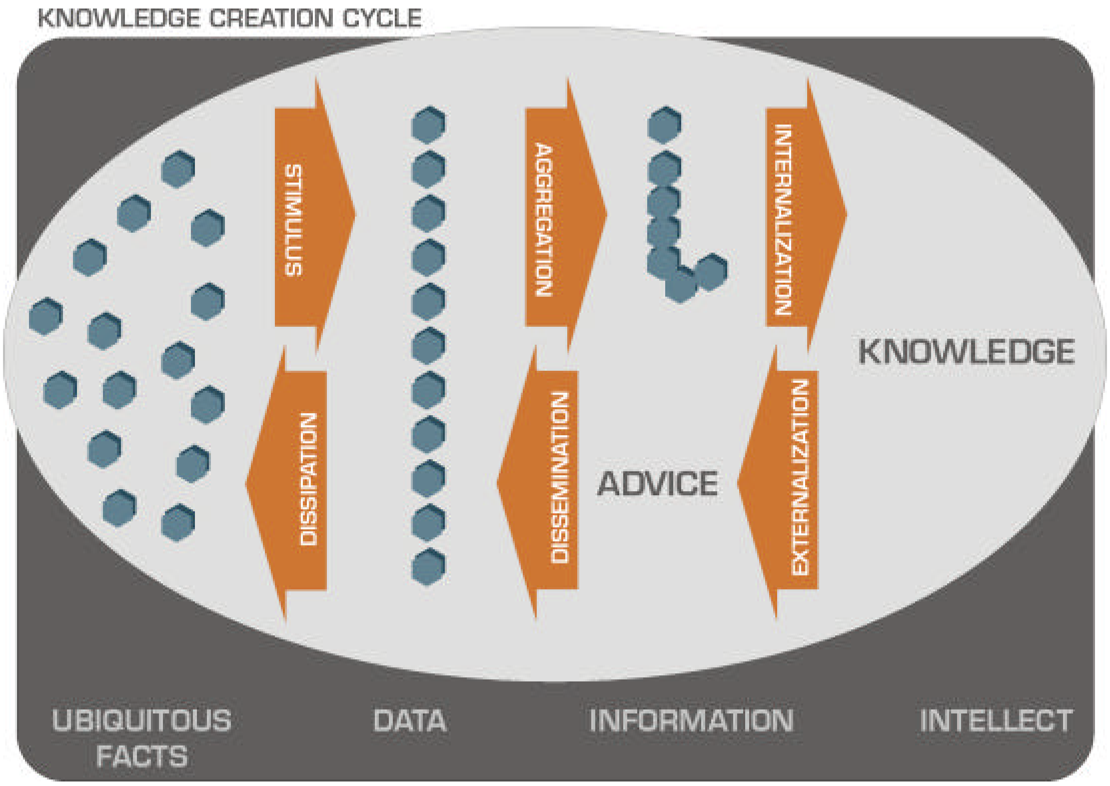
3.17.6 The nature of knowledge management

It's helpful to understand knowledge management's relationship to information management before delving further into how knowledge management works. Information management typically is associated with the industrial era. It focuses on using information technology to enable the collection and management of explicit business information, largely for purposes of management reporting within hierarchical organisations (Mudge 1999: 6).

Knowledge, in contrast to information, could be thought of as the best understanding that we have about a particular topic at a given point in time. Because knowledge is rooted in human experience and social context, managing it will mean paying attention to people, culture and organisational structure, as well as to the information technology that is an essential tool for knowledge sharing and use in large organisations.

There should be a differentiation between data, information and knowledge before defining knowledge management. The relationships between these entities are illustrated in the following knowledge creation process.

Figure 3.2: The Knowledge Creation Cycle



Source: Breedt (2000)

Knowledge, in theory, is a product of a continuous cyclical process that starts by organising ubiquitous facts through specific stimuli into structured data and then developing information through a process of aggregation. Once information is internalised by a knowledge worker it is used to create knowledge and understanding. Once the knowledge worker expresses this understanding in a structured form it becomes information, e.g. advice, which is then disseminated to yet again form data and is finally dissipated to become mere facts (Breedt 2000: 16).

Knowledge is what is learned or retained after data or information is forgotten or the product is sold. Examples of knowledge include knowing where things are, how they can be found, understanding and comprehending as well as developing believes and values that are used to facilitate decision making. Knowledge promotes understanding and proposes action whereas intelligence is the efficient use of information to produce more knowledge (Breedt 2000: 16).

According to a variety of authors (Miller 1999: 12; Mitchell 2001: 8; Bednar 1999: 22) knowledge management is in trouble, to the benefit of the communication professional. Companies have been ploughing huge organisational resources into knowledge management for a couple of years, only now to hit what they call "cultural blockages". This is a polite way of saying that, even though all the information technology systems are in place, our people still won't talk to each other.

This initial failure may prove a blessing. Now that knowledge management initiatives are losing momentum, there's a glorious opportunity for the internal communication function to step in and invigorate the field. By galvinising knowledge management activity, you will gain the boundless gratitude of information technology, knowledge managers and of the chief executive officer (Miller 1999: 12).

According to Miller (1999: 12) there are six ways that internal communication can mobilise knowledge sharing in the company.

1. Show people what's in it for them
2. Create neighbourhoods everywhere
3. Get those neighbours talking
4. Generate terrific content
5. Show why trust is vital in any neighbourhood
6. Show people how knowledge management can benefit your internal public relations.

3.17.7 Knowledge creation

The target of a process for knowledge creation is to enhance the potential of creating innovations. Firstly, knowledge domain members start by creating collective tacit knowledge by jointly experiencing new work processes, tasks, technological characteristics, use of technologies et cetera. This is not an easy process. Members of the knowledge domain must spend considerable time together, discuss and reflect upon their experiences, observe how their colleagues solve tasks and interact with technologies and explain and give sense to their actions (Aben, Nonaka & Von Krogh 2001:424).

In the next phase, the team attempts to make these collective experiences explicit, through agreeing on proper, just and accurate descriptions of their experiences. In the third step, this concept then becomes subject to scrutiny. It is matched against market data, consumer trends and technological requirements. A concept that successfully passes through this phase is transformed into a prototype process, product or service (Aben, Nonaka & Von Krogh 2001:424).

While these four steps typically cover the major steps of knowledge creation, the fully-fledged process goes further by integrating the newly created knowledge in existing manufacturing, marketing and sales. An important issue of knowledge creation is to enhance the pace of innovation and to reduce the time span to commercial success in the market (Aben, Nonaka & Von Krogh 2001:424).

3.17.8 Knowledge transfer

Knowledge transfer with external partners is also important. Strategic partnerships provide mutual access to other companies' knowledge. Research and training agreements with universities and other research institutions provide companies with access to recent research knowledge.

3.17.9 The relationship between corporate communication and knowledge management

3.17.9.1 The nature of our work is changing

While even the most technologically savvy organisation will always need carefully crafted messages and skillful practitioners to convey those messages, the Internet, e-mail, and Intranets are spurring profound changes in organisational communication. Participating in knowledge management initiatives will enable communicators to develop and extend these new competencies (Mudge 1999: 27).

3.17.9.2 Communicators already know something fundamental about knowledge management

"True knowledge management is taking all that information out there and structuring it in ways that work to the advantage of both the individual and the organisation".

In addition to crafting messages, communicators provide structure and context for an audience, and that is the fundamental act in knowledge making. According to Mudge (1999: 27), departments like information technology or finance have their own agendas. But a communicator's agenda is to be the glue. It is all about your audience and not about you.

3.17.9.3 Knowledge management is interesting

According to Mudge (1999: 27), this new discipline attempts to address fascinating and complex technological and organisational issues that have large implications for a business's bottom line. By getting involved in these initiatives now, communicators can help shape the discipline in ways that are useful to an increasing number of people and organisations.

3.17.10 Strategic knowledge management

In order to manage competence (human knowledge) there must be an understanding of how employees, and in particular professionals, should be recruited, developed, motivated, and rewarded. To achieve this, dependence on external experts needs to be decreased as the knowledge and wisdom exists within the internal structure. Some other strategies that could be considered are:

- Implement distinct strategies for information and knowledge. An information-focused strategy will address the development of information technology, while a knowledge-focused strategy addresses the intangible assets, assets that convert invisible revenues from a large number of activities into tangible revenues (Hardijzer 2000: 27).

- Establish a learning culture. If people cannot learn how to learn, they run the risk of becoming “walking encyclopaedias” of outdated information. The learning process therefore will require a creative destruction of barriers to learning and the broadening of access to new sources of knowledge and experience. It also needs to be understood that learning can be formal, informal of incidental (Hardijzer 2000: 27).

- Expand the virtual office. The knowledge worker can be accommodated in terms of working from home or anywhere else for that matter.

If you want to make the most out of your company’s knowledge, knowledge strategy formulation and choice need to be tightly coupled with other strategic activities within the company. The development of a knowledge-based advantage requires adequate attention and resource allocation paralleling the development of other types of company advantages.

A company benefits from taking a proactive approach to its knowledge and expertise, rather than just letting knowledge drift and evolve at the periphery of management's attention. In this sense, strategising in the knowledge economy is about moving away from "driving ahead by looking in the rear-view mirror" to "driving ahead by knowing what is around the corner."

As was discussed, the organisation must provide an incentive for employees to share knowledge and apply it to the mutual benefit of employees, departments and the organisation.

3.18 CONCLUSION

According to Hardijzer (2000: 27), knowledge management is an abstract concept that have become over-hyped and misunderstood. It is not a technology tool but an amalgamation of strategy, technology and human application.

To take advantage of knowledge management requires investment. Knowledge exists in people, not in technology, and requires human effort. Technology can help to capture and store information, but it cannot create knowledge.

Knowledge management should not be allowed to become a stand-alone fad. In order to successfully build a knowledge-sharing culture, it's vital to integrate knowledge management messages with an organisation's wider corporate communication efforts.

Knowledge is partially a result of research and the scanning of the internal and external environment. Employees will not share their knowledge capital unless they feel safe and feel that they will receive benefit from their actions. Sound corporate communication will enhance this process.

In many instances employees that are not on a managerial level can make considerable contributions to the knowledge base of the organisations. A specific culture of learning, and failure being part of the learning and knowledge creating process, will add value.

The primary objective of knowledge management is to create and maintain superior knowledge by making it available at point-of-need and enabling a learning-organisation culture for the future.

In this chapter, the researcher investigated and conceptualised communication research. Attention was also given to the application and management of communication research.

Environmental scanning is the focus of Chapter Four. The origin of environmental scanning and it's correct application and management also receives attention. The valuable contribution of this research technique is also discussed.