

**THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC
RELATIONS TO AN AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTION IN
BOTSWANA.**

by

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DECLARATION

I, Lesego Patricia Agang, declare that the contents of this mini dissertation titled "The investigation of the contribution of public relations to an agricultural institution in Botswana" represent my own work, and that the dissertation has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.



Signed



Date

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Gaborone

Botswana

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Communication plays a vital role in the everyday lives of individuals, societies, organisations and the world at large. Without communication it would be very difficult to understand each other and to carry out daily activities that make up human life. Communication can come in many forms and shapes. Signs and symbols were used by our ancestors to communicate long before sound and speech technology was discovered (Mersham and Skinner, 1999). Notwithstanding the importance of communication for any form of human interaction, it is taken so much for granted. As pointed out by Mersham and Skinner (1999: 2), “until someone misunderstands us and the misunderstanding causes a problem, only then do we pause to think about what went wrong.” Macnamara (2006: 3) points out that communication is complex even at family level, because often what we try to communicate to those closest to us is not received the way we intended or meant. This shows that communication is beyond talking and far more complex than it seems. In an organisational setting it is even more complex because the organisation is made up of different units or departments with different responsibilities, all working towards the attainment of the same organisational goals and objectives.

It is for these reasons that communication needs to be coordinated so that the organisation as represented by the different units or departments does not send conflicting messages to its stakeholders. This is where public relations, hereafter referred to as “PR”, “as a function that focuses on communicating

can assist each of the other functions to coordinate their activities” (Botha, Chaka, du Plessis, Krause, Rawjee, Porthen, Veerasamy & Wright, 2007). PR controls and manages the communication of an organisation to both the internal and external stakeholders of an organisation. The PR practitioner as an expert in human communication is able to advise the different departments on how best to communicate to achieve the image and reputation that the organisation wants to portray. The practitioner’s duty is to unify the different activities of an organisation and to send the same consistent messages to the stakeholders (Botha *et al.*: 2007). In light of the above it is clear that PR emanates from communication.

Communication is defined as the process of transferring information from a person or group to another person or group (Botha *et al.*: 2007). How a message is communicated is as important as the message because it has to create meaning, hence the need to manage organisational communication through PR. PR helps an organisation to create an environment where stakeholders with competing interests can communicate with understanding and come to an agreement (Leatherman & Howell, 2000). In PR it is essential that communication should be two-way, that is, the organisation should send out information and get feedback because simply sending out a message does not create understanding between the sender and the recipient of the message. It is necessary to manage the exchange of information between an organisation and its stakeholders so that each side understands and knows the expectations of the other. Understanding the needs and expectations of the other helps create positive perceptions which lead to good relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders.

This study attempts to investigate the contribution of PR to an agricultural institution in Botswana. It will attempt to contextualise PR, establish its role and value to create a body of knowledge about PR in Botswana, specifically the agricultural sector. Indications are that no PR study has ever been carried

out in Botswana, therefore the researcher believes this is the beginning for PR in Botswana to be put on the map.

1.1.1 The history of PR

The origins of PR goes back a long way. It was used during the time of the Roman Empire, ancient Greece, early biblical times, ancient Egypt and in early Christianity (Skinner; Von Essen & Mersham, 2004). The Egyptians showed their achievements through word pictures on monuments and festival parades; the Romans used slogans and shows; for the leaders of Greece word of mouth communication was the medium; while St Paul communicated with the written word during early Christianity. All these were done with one aim, to win support and to persuade people to take sides or to “take a certain line of action” (Skinner, Von Essen & Mersham, 2004: 19).

Twentieth Century PR started with American politicians using it to get publicity. As it progressed other companies also started to employ journalists to gain publicity. Skinner *et al*: (2004), further note that it was later used to defend big business interests against dirty journalism and government regulation. During World War 1, the American government also formed a Committee on Public Information to tell their story to influence public opinion. It is the opinion of Skinner *et al* (2004: 20) that

“This concept of public relations as persuasive publicity still lingers on, so that even present-day public relations practitioners find themselves dealing with managers and clients holding this concept of the public relations function”.

It is due to this approach that PR is believed to have developed from the press agency model. The press agency model is concerned with giving out information to the press that the organisation wants the public to hear with the aim of persuading the public to agree with the organisation's view point. These statements do not have to be true because it was believed then that "the public could be fooled", that is the public could be told anything through the mass media and they would believe it. The aim of this model is to seek attention for the organisation in almost anyway possible. Marshall McLuhan (1964 in Macnamara, 2006) emphasised the power of the media in transmitting messages with his famous cliché, "the medium is the message". The author saw the media technology such as television and radio as being able to influence perception and thinking. The agenda setting theory (by McCombs and Shaw, 1977 in Macnamara, 2006) reinforced the idea that mass media and mass communication "acted like hypodermic needles injecting information into receivers and changing their attitudes and even behaviours in direct and substantial ways" (Macnamara, 2006: 4).

However the landmark research of Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955) and Klapper (1960 in Macnamara, 2006) proved otherwise by showing that audiences did not believe everything they heard without questioning. It was then that research in the 1970s and 1980s such as the Excellence Study came up with the integrated model where interaction of the message sender and recipient, (two-way process of communication) was recognised as the ideal way to communicate. These models showed the complexity of the communication process and why feedback is necessary in communication.

PR then moved to the public information model (Grunig & Hunt: 1984). In the public information model the organisation disseminates objective but favourable information to the organisation to gain publicity. Macnamara (2006: 6) is of the opinion that PR developed closely with journalism because of the press agency and public information models.

The author is of the view that it is probably the reason why over the years many practitioners are former journalists and why present day PR in many organisations has stagnated on a production and output focus rather than outcome.

In Europe PR only began after the world wars, with the period 1955-1980 being the most active. At the beginning it was also practiced as a publicity and propaganda vehicle. Professional bodies of PR started around the late 1940s, but the most important international organisation, The International Public Relations Association (IPRA) was formed in London in 1955.

According to van Heerden (2004) the evolution of PR can be attributed to four trends. Firstly the growing number of large institutions that needed to reconcile their activities with those of the societies they served, Secondly the need to manage information flow, thirdly the increased nature of change as well as conflict and confrontation in society and then the advent of democracy came with an increase of public opinion. All these contributed to the growing need for PR.

In exploring the contribution of PR, this study amongst other things, will seek to find out how far PR is in Botswana, whether it is in the press agency or public information model while organisations and societies they serve have moved on and demand the ideal two-way process of communication.

1.1.2 Conceptualisation of PR

Most authors believe that PR is a mature science. Botan and Hazleton (in Steyn, Uncompleted) view PR as an emerging social science disciple and Botan (also in Steyn Uncompleted) view it as an applied social science anchored on communication. Grunig and Hunt (1984) agree that, although PR

is rooted in the social sciences, the behavioural science concepts also apply. Steyn notes that the most recent debates centre on categorising of PR into management sciences. Hatfield (1994, in Steyn, Uncompleted) and Moss and Warnaby (1998), agree that PR is a management discipline. Hatfield (1994: 192 in Steyn Uncompleted) justifies this point by elaborating that the broad management skills allow the practitioner to understand the business world better. Harlow (1975 in Steyn Uncompleted) is of the opinion that of the various social sciences that exist only four affect and work for management. The author indicates these to be psychology, because it is concerned with man's mental and emotional processes and individual behaviour; sociology, because it is concerned with man's relations with society; economics, because it is concerned with man's relations with business and industry; and political science, because it is concerned with man's relations with government" (Harlow, 1975: 11 in Steyn Uncompleted).

Based on the literature the researcher concludes that PR is a management discipline which has a role to play in adding value to the organisation by strategically managing communication. When managed strategically it is aimed at changing stakeholder perceptions about the organisation, nurturing relationships with stakeholders, adding value to the organisation by creating a favourable business environment and identifying strategic stakeholders. These encompass the four social sciences that affect management. In this study, PR will be studied as a strategic management function.

1.1.3 Perspectives in PR

PR is still an evolving practise that researchers are working on to create a global body of knowledge (Hutton 1999: 200). It is of paramount importance that in order to create a global body of knowledge different perspectives of public relations should be researched. It is for this reason that the researcher

will briefly review the North American, European and African perspectives of PR.

In 1999, Hutton wrote an article titled "***The definition, dimensions and domain of PR***" which was criticised by European scholars. The scholars Vercic, van Ruler, Butschi & Flodin (2000) criticised the article, as it generalised beyond America although it used only American sources. They contend that Hutton's view completely lacks the European perspective and perspectives from other continents. They suggest that to better understand the situation in PR theory and practice, perspectives from other continents should also be considered before a conclusion can be drawn towards the meaning of the PR profession that could be globally applicable.

The European scholars responded by forming the European Body of Knowledge project (EBOK). The major aim of the EBOK project was to compile a bibliography of European PR literature and to utilise it to understand the practices of European PR. The findings of the project revealed that there is need to understand the similarities and differences in PR globally, in order to create a body of knowledge. According to Vercic *et al.* (2000), it is only after a thorough appreciation of the diversity of PR practice around the globe that conclusions can be drawn towards what the PR profession is in the world in the 21st century.

In the EBOK project for example, where Hutton saw relationships as a new paradigm for the field of PR the European Scholars argue for a reflective paradigm that is concerned with "publics and the public sphere" (Vercic *et al.* 2000). Hutton regarded the relationship management paradigm as managing strategic relationships whereas the Europeans make no distinction between communication and relationships. They mention that, in Europe, at least, even PR researchers cannot make any clear distinction between communication

and relationships. For the European scholars "what one sees as communication is what another uses the word relationships for". The European scholars therefore, do not find any relevance in the debate about communication or relationships (Vercic *et al*, 2000: 376).

In Africa not much is known about PR as a search on the available electronic databases on African PR yielded no results (Rensburg, 2002: 8). Also the existing literature on PR does not show how and where developing countries can contribute or fit into the "definition, dimension and domain of PR". Rensburg points out that it is even more disheartening that, even though South Africa is ahead in Sub-Saharan Africa in the education, training and practice of PR, and could contribute a lot to the body of knowledge in the field, the country's education and profession has been very much isolated from the rest of Africa. The author is of the opinion that this contributes to the lack of knowledge about the field in an African context. The author further alludes to the fact that as a profession, PR is still an area "in search of legitimacy".

"In spite of substantial changes in the focus and operation of public relations in the last two decades, the term public relations has been both misused and misunderstood since the early 1950s in Africa. It continues to be incorrectly associated with propaganda, press-agency and manipulation, and is still confused with advertising, marketing and promotion. Practitioners in Africa are still suspect of disseminating incomplete, distorted and biased information and being the faceless image brokers and spin doctors for rich and powerful individuals, politicians, causes and organisations (Rensburg, 2002: 9).

As a result of this lack of knowledge or little information about PR in Africa, most of the literature and research empirically verifying facts in PR still come from the developed world. A study by Sriamesh (1999: 226 in Rensburg: 2002) found that there are very few empirical studies describing the nature of PR in emerging markets. Therefore, as an emerging market, Africa needs to

find out the status of PR so that it can contribute to the body of knowledge (Rensburg: 2002).

For the same reasons that the EBOK project was started, it is important for Africans to carry out research on PR in their continent failing which PR practice from other countries and continents will be generalised to include them. Therefore, this is a challenge for practitioners and scholars in Africa to determine, understand and test PR practice according to international standards and present their case based on their own experiences and facts. This study is an attempt to determine the status of PR by exploring the contribution it makes in an agricultural institution in Botswana. It is hoped that the findings would generate more research in other areas of PR and sectors in Botswana.

1.1.4 PR education and practice in Botswana

In Botswana PR can be said to be a new phenomenon because perusal of course contents of the various programmes offered by most of the registered tertiary institutions do not offer it. The University of Botswana (UB) course calendar (2008) shows that it offers PR in the third year of the Media Studies (**UB Calendar, 2008**). Apart from UB, six-month diplomas are awarded by unregistered institutions. An unregistered institution is one where courses are not quality assured by the Tertiary Education Council (TEC) and therefore may not reflect the required standard. Ferreira's (1998) research of tertiary institutions across Africa show that although PR is offered in these unsanctioned institutions "many of the courses are superficial and often more prone towards quick fix and technical than in-depth academic education". Ferreira (Not completed: 5), indicates that Botswana is among the countries relying on the Public Relations Institute of South Africa (PRISA) for PR

education and development. It comes as no surprise therefore, that many practitioners in Botswana have no training in PR.

A search on the internet about PR practice in Botswana did not yield any results. The assumption is that no studies have been undertaken in the field in Botswana, and that may be used as a benchmark. As a result there is a problem in conceptualising PR practice in the country.

1.1.5. Contextualisation

Since it is assumed that no studies have been carried out on PR practise in Botswana, this study will be regarded as the starting point. The opinions and views of the researcher, therefore, will be based on perceptions and experiences of both the non-practitioners, the practitioners themselves, as well as the researcher as one the PR practitioners in the agricultural sector. Documents such as job profiles, establishment register and organisational structure of the Ministry of Agriculture, hereafter referred to as "MoA", will also be referred to, to get insight on the existing structures, knowledge and understanding of PR available. Due to the lack of easily accessible education and training in PR in Botswana it is the opinion of the researcher that most practitioners are not trained in PR and, therefore, lack in-depth knowledge and understanding of what the practice entails.

The profiles of staff of the Department of Agricultural Information and Public Relations in MoA, for example, show them as having qualifications in agricultural disciplines, journalism or mass media, most of them not having taken courses in PR, even as a course within journalism. These qualifications were mostly obtained from Botswana, South Africa, Britain and America.

The fact that these qualifications do not equip one with strategic PR raises a question as to how they practice it and what contribution they make to the organisation.

The same trend of employing people with no PR qualification still continues in Botswana as the Government Information and Communication System (GICS) was established in April 2007 and is still employing mostly journalists with no training in PR. Most PR Officers in the various Ministries in the public sector are former journalists with the Department of Information and Broadcasting. Even in the private sector, depending on what business the organisation is in, advertisements in newspapers still stipulate a PR Officer with a qualification relevant to that of the business. This is most probably because the assumption is that since the role of PR is publicity, someone conversant with the business language would be in a better position to impart the information. Few practitioners in the private sector have qualifications in PR.

In 2005 a group of practitioners in Botswana formed the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) Chapter in Botswana (Niekerk 2002 in Ferreira, Not completed). It is the opinion of the researcher that the initiative failed, mostly because the practitioners who had steered the initiative had qualifications other than PR, so when they had opportunities to access their areas of expertise they left the PR profession. Up to this day, the chapter is yet to take off.

The situation in Botswana is viewed by the researcher as being the same as in the rest of Africa as indicated in Rensburg, (2002: 9). There are two types of practitioners in Africa: those who occupy high positions mainly in the public sector with very little knowledge and or no tertiary education in PR and the professionals with relevant tertiary qualifications in the private sector. Macnamara (2006) points out that because a large number of practitioners

come from other fields and do not have any qualification in PR, they focus on and see their job as producing outputs such as publicity, publications and events. They do not engage in any substantial way with new media and concepts. If they do, then they will be focusing on the production of websites, “the effects that those outputs might or might not cause are an inconsequential downstream issue that does not concern them” (Mcnamara, 2006: 6). The author further points out that, as a result, the practitioners, would not be in a position to advise their organisations on the implications, impact and effects of these new media.

It is the opinion of the researcher that as a result the industry is full of technicians, “skilled technicians though they might be, they seldom belong to or participate in senior management because processes and outputs, while necessary, are not the stuff that strategic management is concerned with” (Grunig & Hunt, 1984 in Macnamara 2006: 7). It is the view of the researcher that the significant contribution of PR in many organisations is hampered by the lack of knowledge and skills of the practitioners.

The fact that PR is practiced by practitioners with qualifications in various fields totally changes the function of PR as it shows that there is no commonality on what it is. Hence, this study endeavours to establish, within the inconsistencies, the contribution of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana. It would be interesting to find out what the organisation expects from PR, what the practitioners see as their job and the value of the PR profession within the organisation. It would also be useful to consider the perceptions of both the practitioners and the organisation regarding the contribution of PR. In this way this study may make a meaningful contribution. This study will benchmark research on the current global standards and practice. In doing so, the major concepts that will be considered are the role, models of PR, value and strategic PR.

1.2. DEFINITION OF TERMS

1.2.1. Definitions of PR

“From its modern beginnings early in this century PR has failed to arrive at a broadly accepted definition of itself” (Hutton, 1999: 206), therefore, there are many varied definitions of PR some of which are listed below.

Harlow, (1976: 34-42 in Hutton, 1999) developed a working definition condensed from 472 different definitions. He defines it as

“ a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tool”.

The First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, held in Mexico City in 1978, defines PR as

“the art of and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which serve both the organisation and the public interest” (Kitchen 1997: 7 in Steyn, uncompleted).

A definition of PR suggested by Long and Hazelton, (1987: 6 in Steyn, Uncompleted) is

“a communication function of management through which organisations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organisational goals”.

Cutlip, Center and Broom, (1994: 1) define PR as

“the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between and organisation and its publics on whom its success or failures depends” .

The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) defines PR as

“the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between and organisation and its internal and external stakeholders” (PRISA 2000: 41).

What is apparent here is that there are many and varied definitions of PR, meaning that no agreement has been reached as to which definition to use. The situation still seems to be same as four decades ago when Marston (1963 in van Ruler, Vercic, Flodin, Buetschi, 2001: 170) described corporate communication as

“a brotherhood of some 100 000 whose common bond is its profession and whose common woe is that no two of them can ever quite agree on what that profession is”.

For the purposes of this study the first two definitions, namely, the First World Assembly of Public Relations Association definition and the one suggested by Cutlip, Center and Broom, (1994) will be used. The reason for choosing these two is that the researcher sees them as being the closest to studying the

profession as a strategic management function that is also concerned with the management of stakeholder relationships.

The definition of the First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations captures the notion of strategic PR but leaves out the importance of the management of stakeholder relationships, hence, the need to use the second definition to explicitly cover it. Strategic PR and stakeholder management are relevant to this study as they involve concepts that are measured to conclude what contribution PR makes to the organisation. They capture the essence of effectiveness and efficiency through monitoring, analysing and measuring, which requires knowledge of PR and shows the unique value PR adds to an organisation. The management of stakeholder relationships is relevant because the organisation relies on the goodwill of the stakeholders to continue with the operations, the management of which is done by PR. This research will examine PR as a strategic management function.

In this study the terms PR and corporate communication will be used interchangeably. The main reason for this is that, the two terms are the ones most commonly used in Botswana today. It is the view of the researcher that they are being used without there being a distinction between them.

1.2.2. Role

The patterns of behaviour or the everyday activities of a PR practitioner (Katz & Kahn in Steyn 2000: 12). May be described as particular actions linked with given positions (Katz & Kahn in Hogg & Doolan, 1999: 600).

1.2.3. Model

This is defined as “a simplified representation of reality. *Reality is stimulated* to be able to predict what will happen in the internal and external environment of an organisation”. (Botha *et al* 2007: 56).

1.2.4 Strategy

“The determination of basic long- term goals of an enterprise, and adopting the course of action necessary for carrying out those goals” (Chandler, in Plowman 2005: 132).

1.2.5 Strategic management

“Management to meet long-term goals of an organisation. It balances the goals or mission of an organisation with influences from its external environment, its strategic stakeholders. It is the balancing of internal processes of an organisation with external factors” (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig in Plowman 2005: 132).

1.2.6 Dominant coalition

This has been described by Grunig (2000: 26) as “The most powerful decision makers in the organisation”.

1.3 PROBLEM STATEMENT

1.3.1 The core of the problem

With a more knowledgeable and demanding society, PR has become a vital tool for the survival of all organisations, regardless of whether they are operating in turbulent environments or not (Gronstedt in Bruning & Ledingham 2000: 86; Plowman 2005: 137; Ekachai, 1995: 325; Dolphin & Fan, 2000: 99). The knowledge of the practitioner in PR has become vital in identifying strategic stakeholders, balancing their needs with that of the organisation and designing communication programmes relevant to the needs of these strategic stakeholders.

In Botswana, as is the problem in other parts of Africa, there is a general lack of understanding and knowledge about PR. Like in the Arab world, in Botswana “the term public relations is very often misconceived, misunderstood and misappropriated” (Kirat, 2005). The researcher is of the view that the situation in Botswana is the same as in the Arab world (Kirat, 2005) where PR is seen as a publicity and propaganda tool especially in the public sector. Organisations have PR offices, but the practitioners are still struggling to get the attention and value that they deserve and the question is why?

Research shows that management and PR practitioners’ understanding of PR differ (Steyn, 2000: 10; Bronn, 2001: 315; Duhe, 2008: 6; Grunig, 2000: 25 & 26; Dolphin & Fan 2000: 99; Moss & Green, 2001: 120; Sweep, Cameron & Lariscy, 1994: 327; Hogg & Doolan, 1999: 597). This makes it difficult for each side to understand what the other expects of them. Such lack of understanding and knowledge about PR has an effect on its practice and consequently its contribution (Sweep, Cameron & Lariscy, 1994; Hogg &

Doolan, 1999, Dolphin & Fan, 2000). This is shown by the fact that in most organisations the profession reports to other professions such as marketing, Human Resources, the Legal Department and Finance. The problem could be that most organisations do not see the profession as a management function, but as a function performed by any other department, hence the reason for making it subordinate to other professions (Plowman, 2005: 135; Ekachai, 1995: 327; Bronn 2001: 315; Rensburg, 2002: 6; Moss & Warnaby, 1998:135; Moss, Warnaby & Newman 2001:300; Ni, 2006: 280).

PR is perceived by senior management as a soft skill that can be practiced by anyone because to them it appears to require common skills as practitioners are located at the implementation level of the organisation. Seeing that top management knows that they are dealing with staff who are not formally and professionally trained and have few or no professional skills, they do not hold them in high regard and do not see them as qualifying to be part of the top management team who shape organisational strategy (Lindenmann and Lapetina, 1982 in Steyn, Uncompleted). Once a function is not regarded as being institutionally significant, then it is unlikely to be regarded as something contributing to organisational strategy.

Management see PR as an organisational necessity, but do not know how to fully utilise it as “there remains a disconnection between communication and the role of public relations” (Plowman, 2005: 132 also White & Vercic in Ni 2006: 276; Ekachai, 1995: 328; Hogg and Doolan, 1999; Dolphin & Fan, 2000: 99).

The researcher concludes that, the problem is that practitioners do not have the skills to prove their worth as they fail to rise above the measurement of their job through outputs rather than outcomes (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 10). “Every department in an organisation has to justify its contribution to the

business result” in order for it to be recognised and valued (PR Influences, July 2003). As a result of the focus on technical work the Botswana PR practitioners are re-active and not pro-active, carrying out their functions as dictated to them without question, and without even making an effort to see if they are making any contribution or impact and this has led to their being marginalised and subjugated to reporting to other functions. By being tactical and re-active they reinforce the idea that anyone can be a PR practitioner.

The above shows that, generally, too few people, if any, in the organisation, including the practitioners themselves, do not understand what it is that PR is trying to achieve (PR Influences, July 2003). Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the contribution of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana given the fact that the function exists in many organisations, including the agricultural sector in Botswana.

This will be discovered by exploring the field of PR in Botswana by establishing the role, determining the value, knowledge, and the reporting structure of the PR function in the organisation.

1.3.2 Rationale

As already indicated PR in Botswana is at a stage of development. It is practiced differently in different organisations and confusion still abounds as to what the practice entails and where in the corporate structure it should fit. As shown in the problem statement above, the role of most of the PR practitioners in Botswana “is to fire the bullets but not to get in the conflict in the first place” (PR Influences, 2003). This means they are implementers of strategy and are not involved in the formulation of strategy.

business result” in order for it to be recognised and valued (PR Influences, July 2003). As a result of the focus on technical work the Botswana PR practitioners are re-active and not pro-active, carrying out their functions as dictated to them without question, and without even making an effort to see if they are making any contribution or impact and this has led to their being marginalised and subjugated to reporting to other functions. By being tactical and re-active they reinforce the idea that anyone can be a PR practitioner.

The above shows that, generally, too few people, if any, in the organisation, including the practitioners themselves, do not understand what it is that PR is trying to achieve (PR Influences, July 2003). Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the contribution of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana given the fact that the function exists in many organisations, including the agricultural sector in Botswana.

This will be discovered by exploring the field of PR in Botswana by establishing the role, determining the value, knowledge, and the reporting structure of the PR function in the organisation.

1.3.2 Rationale

As already indicated PR in Botswana is at a stage of development. It is practiced differently in different organisations and confusion still abounds as to what the practice entails and where in the corporate structure it should fit. As shown in the problem statement above, the role of most of the PR practitioners in Botswana “is to fire the bullets but not to get in the conflict in the first place” (PR Influences, 2003). This means they are implementers of strategy and are not involved in the formulation of strategy.

This study will find out how in this situation PR is beneficial (contributing) to the organisation because it is not used to its maximum benefit. In exploring the contribution, this study will find out if the practitioners are happy with what they are doing and the way they are doing it, establish if management has explicit expectations and are happy with what PR is doing and the value they attach to it. The study will find gaps that need to be bridged to bring PR closer to expected standards as shown in the literature review. It will endeavour to identify both the positive and the negative aspects that exist in PR practice in Botswana and what it contributes to an organisation in an agricultural institution.

It is the belief of the researcher that this study will point the way forward on how PR in Botswana can be rescued from being a tactical practice. The researcher believes this study will open doors for further research in other PR areas and PR could be improved or replicated on other sectors or on a wider scale and at higher levels and consolidate the total contribution of PR in Botswana.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In order to address the problem, a literature research study was undertaken to lay the foundations for the theory. An empirical study was conducted to ascertain the roles and function of PR. To address the problem, four objectives were identified and are the following:

- To explore the field of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana; and
- To establish the role of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana; and

- To determine the value of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana; and
- To determine staff knowledge and structure of the PR function in an agricultural institution in Botswana.

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

A literature review was done to theoretically explain the contribution, roles, models and the remote-environment of the practice of PR in detail focusing on global research theory. The effectiveness and excellence of PR is discussed together with the value of PR. This was followed by an empirical study to determine the role and model used in the sampled agricultural organisation. These are necessary building blocks for this study because it would need to show whether the PR contribution in the organisation being studied is perceived as is stated in the literature or if there are any departures from existing research. The literature review can be described as a guideline and benchmark for this study.

Figure 1. Meta-theoretical, theoretical and conceptual framework of the study

Mata-Theoretical Approach Excellence Theory Theories Systems theory Strategic Constituencies theory PR roles theory	
Concepts	Constructs
1. Roles	Manager Technician
2. Models	Press agency Public Information Two-way Asymmetrical Two-way Symmetrical
Paradigm	Contributory Factors
Strategic Communication Management	Management expectations Knowledge Membership of the dominant coalition Environment

1.6 DEMARCATION OF THE STUDY

Chapter 1: Background of the study

This chapter will discuss the background and factors leading to the research being conducted.

Chapter 2: Theoretical perspectives

This section will consider the theory upon which this study will be grounded. The Excellence Study will be core here to lay the ground for exploring the contribution of PR. It will also deal with the general theory on the practice of PR which encompasses the roles and models of PR. The environment will also be introduced here.

Chapter 3: Strategic PR

This chapter will discuss the strategic roles and will show the link between models and strategy and the environment and strategy. It will also deal with stakeholder, publics and issues management in strategic communication to show how they impact on PR.

Note that there will be some overlaps between chapter 2 and 3 although chapter 2 is general and chapter 3 will be discussing everything in relation to strategic communication.

Chapter 4: Research Methodology and Design

This chapter will discuss the methodology that is, the research design, population, sampling and instrumentation strategy used in the study.

Chapter 5: Research results and interpretation

This chapter will discuss the findings and interpretation of the research.

Chapter 6: Conclusions, recommendations and limitations

This will be a summary of the findings and conclusions of the study. This chapter will also include the recommendations, limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter gives the theoretical perspectives upon which this study is grounded. It attempts to explain the importance of PR theories guiding the attainment of the objectives of this study. The theories that will be dealt with are the systems theory, the strategic constituencies theory, the excellence theory and the roles theory. These were some of the theories that were used by the Excellence team to determine the contribution of effective and excellent communication in organisations they studied. As stated in Chapter 1, PR in this research is regarded as a strategic management function, hence the need to understand various theories. These theories will, therefore, help in exploring the contribution of PR in the sampled organisation.

2.2 THE SYSTEMS THEORY

According to Steyn (2000) the systems theory helps in understanding the complete management context. It is important to understand the systems theory as a meta-theoretical approach to PR. According to Botha *et al*, (2007: 60),

“the systems theory says that a business organisation or system is made up of interrelated functions or subsystems such as public relations, marketing, human resources and production. Each subsystem as well as the system as a whole, has boundaries which distinguish it from the rest of the environment”.

A system is said to be either open or closed. The theory argues that the more open a system's boundaries are, the more influence and receptive the system will be to its environment (Botha *et al*, 2007). Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994) add that "the extent to which a system is open or closed is an indication of its (in)sensitivity to its environment, and therefore to its ability to adapt to new conditions". According to Steyn (2000) the boundary of a closed system cannot be penetrated, therefore, it cannot exchange information with its environment. An open system, on the other hand has a penetrative boundary that gives out and receives information from the environment.

According to (Grunig *et al*, 2002: 93), the systems theory was applied by Abgelopulo (1990) to find out the potential effectiveness of organisations. "Active outward orientation" is the extent to which organisational members are open. His theory was that "the greater the degree of active outward orientation, the greater the organisation's potential of effectiveness would be". That is, the more open an organisation is in dealing with its stakeholders, the more contribution PR will have in the organisation as the communication function would be used to achieve organisational goals by creating a "win-win" situation. In the systems theory, active outward orientation is based on the assumptions that the group according to Abgelopulo (1990 in Grunig *et al*, 2002) would behave as:

- An interacting, interrelated whole;
- An entity striving to maintain an awareness of the nature and potential of its relationship with the environment;
- An entity permeating all relevant subsystems with relevant information about the environment and the organisation and
- An entity existing pro-actively within its whole environment.

In the closed system managers behave as if they are independent from the suprasystem "unconstrained or unaffected by the forces in the environment

that are acknowledged in the open system” and as result departments in the closed organisational system are less coordinated and interactive than in the open system. The Excellence Study concludes that in the closed organisational system, formal communication would be “less central and more marginal” (Grunig *et al*, 2002: 93).

The systems theory has the concepts of inputs, outputs, throughput and feedback. These concepts describe the way a system behaves. Applied to PR, information is received from the environment as input, the information is then processed from the environment as throughput and sent back to the environment as output. After processing the information (throughput) from the information gathered (input) and sending it out to solve the problem (output) the system then looks for feedback from the environment to determine the impact of the information it sent out.

This shows that the PR practitioner’s role is to help with the exchange of information in the open system by scanning the environment. Environmental scanning is the thorough examination of the internal and external environment to detect opportunities or threats to the organisation early enough so that management is informed and programmes are tailored to address the external constituencies. There are two roles of the PR practitioner operating on the boundary of the organisation, namely, the mirror and the window function.

2.2.1 The mirror and window function in the system

In order for the system to be able to exchange information with its environment, it is important that it has a middleman who will be able to take information back and forth. An organisation needs someone who will give management an idea of what the external environment (stakeholders) think of it: this is the mirror function, giving the organisation an outside perspective.

There is also a need for someone to make the external environment (stakeholders) understand the viewpoints of the organisation, this is the window function. In this role of liaison between the organisation and its internal and external stakeholders the PR practitioner can be described as

“someone who stands with one foot in the organisation and one foot in the community outside the organisation. This person’s job is to tell the community what the organisation is doing, as well as to tell the organisation what the community expects of it (Botha et al: 2007: 62).

Therefore, this shows that in the mirror and window functions role, the PR practitioner operates on the boundaries of the system.

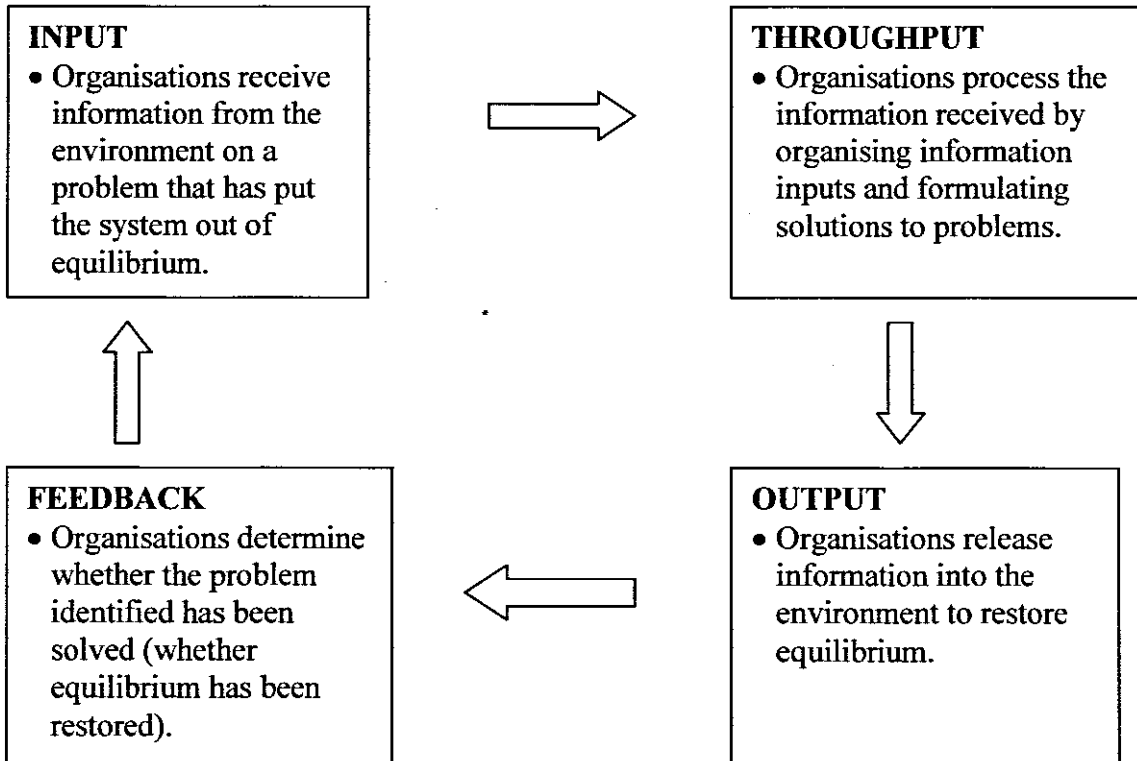
Steyn and Puth point out that it is best to plan from outside in, because changes in the environment influence the future growth and survival of the organisation. The authors point out that “an organisation can influence changes in internal issues or trends, and manage them, but external issues and trends are far less amenable to management control” (2000: 167).

It is necessary to discuss the mirror and window functions in the system because it shows the strategic role of PR in the organisation as the link between the organisation and its stakeholders (Kirat, 2005). The mirror and the window functions help this study by showing the role of PR as the eyes and the ears of both the organisation and the stakeholders, a pertinent role in exploring the contribution of PR in an organisation.

This elaboration of the systems concept clarifies strategic PR management. The systems theory clarifies and clearly shows the role of PR practice in an organisational context. As the Vice President of the Economic Development Agency quoted in Grunig *et al* (2002:93) put it, communication is considered to be a critical component of the system. If one chunk is pulled, then the system doesn't function properly. Changes in any subsystem result in changes of the organisational whole. The Excellence Study literature review concludes that the systems theory provides "a more normative than descriptive explanation for organisational effectiveness" (Grunig *et al*, 2002: 94).

This theory is important for the study as it portrays an organisational setting and shows the interdependence of the departments to achieve organisational goals and objectives through communication. It also shows that PR makes the organisation's boundary to be penetrative and allows the organisation to exist in harmony with its environment. The systems theory demonstrates that PR contributes to organisational excellence and effectiveness by being the link between the organisation and the stakeholders because it allows information to flow between the two, thus enabling the organisation to know the expectations of its stakeholders and adapting to the environment but also giving the stakeholders a voice in the organisation. Therefore, this theory is relevant to this study as it clearly demonstrates that PR makes a contribution by making it possible for the organisation to make informed decisions in the strategy formulation process, because it safeguards the needs of both the organisation and its stakeholders.

Figure 2. Systems Concept.



Source: Adapted from Steyn (2000: 50).

2.3 STRATEGIC CONSTITUENCIES THEORY

The strategic constituencies theory emphasises the relationship between the system and the organisation. It focuses on those parts of the environment which are crucial in the attainment of specific organisational goals and objectives and not the whole environment. The strategic constituencies are the stakeholder group “most able to constrain or help the organisation” (Grunig and Repper in Moss and Warnaby 1998; Grunig *et al*; Lindeborg, 1994; Botha *et al*; Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, in Steyn 2000). The manner in which strategic constituencies behave could have a negative impact on the organisation.

Grunig (in Bruning, 2002: 41) suggest that if PR is to be valued in organisations, then practitioners must be able to demonstrate that their efforts contribute to the goals of the organisation by building long-term behavioural relationships with strategic publics. The value of good relationships with strategic stakeholders helps both the organisation and the stakeholders to minimise the cost of litigation and strikes thus saving money.

“Effective communication helps an organisation to create an environment in which it can work well with influential stakeholders and achieve its goals. Good communication builds relationships with strategic publics, as a result helping an organisation manage its interdependencies with these publics” (Lindeborg, 1994: 12).

This theory is relevant in this study because it shows that it is the function of PR in an organisation to identify these strategic stakeholders and keep an eye on them so that it can advise the dominant coalition on which stakeholders to concentrate and tailor suitable communication programmes. As Grunig *et al*, (2002) point out “organisational effectiveness is determined in part, then, by identifying those key publics”. By identifying these strategic constituencies the PR function is contributing to organisational effectiveness. The strategic constituencies theory stresses the dependence of the organisation on the environment and the environment on the organisation (Botha *et al*: 2007: 60 and Grunig *et al*, 2002: 93). This theory justifies the existence of PR in an organisation (Steyn 2000).

2.4 THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

The Excellence theory is regarded as the first theory of effectiveness and excellence in PR and communication management. According to Lindeborg

(1994), "the authors of the Excellence Study believe they have produced the first general theory of public relations and communication management". The Excellence Study provides practitioners with a theory which can guide them. It addresses two issues, namely, effectiveness and excellence.

- What are the characteristics of an excellent communication department, how must PR be practised and how must the function be organised to contribute to the effectiveness of an organisation. This is the Excellence Question.
- How does excellent communication make an organisation more effective and what is the economic worth of that contribution. This is the effectiveness question (Lindeborg, 1994).

2.4.1 The Excellence Question – a literature analysis

To answer the excellence question, the Excellence Study identified three areas, namely, the role of PR, models of practice and the structure and organisation of the PR function.

2.4.1.1 Roles

The Excellence Study looks at the roles in terms of the knowledge available in the PR department to carry out the various PR activities and also to look at the expectations of the dominant coalition. It identifies six views of the role of PR in society. Of these six views the study proves that the idealistic role is the best as it is the only one explaining PR as a practise allowing for the interaction and negotiating for understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders, thereby allowing for a win-win situation. However, the study pointed out that this role is the least used by practitioners. It pointed out that in

reality the pragmatic and conservative roles are used most. The pragmatic view sees PR as practice that adds value for clients by helping to meet their objectives whereas the conservative view sees PR as a practice that defends powerful interests. The pragmatic role is pro-stakeholders whilst the conservative role is pro-organisations. In the idealistic role PR brokers peace and understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders as it manages interdependence and conflict for the benefit of all (Grunig *et al*, 2002 and Lindeborg, 1994: 7).

The way the Excellence Study looked at the roles is relevant to this research because it demonstrates that in order for PR to be excellent and make a significant contribution, it should play the idealistic role. On the other hand it brings to the attention of the researcher that it would not be surprising if the pragmatic and conservative roles are the most used. In this study, however, PR will be looked at in its idealistic role.

2.4.1.2 Excellence Theory Models

The models help in understanding the different ways in which PR practitioners carry out their functions and the reasons why the way they do it differ. The models give a detailed description of broader patterns of behaviour, rather than that of roles (Steyn, Uncompleted). The PR models as identified by the Excellence theory show the purpose and direction of PR.

The purpose describes the function of the model for the organisation. That is, whether the model is asymmetrical or symmetrical. Asymmetrical means, communication is not balanced; it tries to change the stakeholders and leaves the organisation as it is. Symmetrical means that the communication is balanced and is aimed at adjusting the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders.

The direction describes the extent to which a model is one way or two-way. One-way communication is where the organisation disseminates the information to the stakeholders only and two-way is when there is exchange of information from the organisation to the stakeholders and from the stakeholders to the organisation.

A review of the Excellence theory literature shows that symmetrical PR is more effective, ethical and socially responsible than asymmetrical PR because it brokers peace between the organisation and its publics. In the two-way symmetrical PR both the organisation and the stakeholders have the same power as each party can influence the decisions of the other (Botha *et al*: 2007).

The Excellence Study states four ways in which PR can be practiced. These are listed below.

- Press Agency/publicity – PR here is practised by journalists and is designed to produce favourable publicity for the organisation at all costs, especially in the mass media (Grunig, 2000: 32).

- Public Information – disseminates relatively objective information through mass media and controlled media. This model is an improvement on the press agency but it still uses journalists and “one-way” communication. It also controls the information disseminated and releases only favourable information when it suits the organisation (Botha *et al*, 2007: 67). According to Grunig (2000) practitioners here can be described as “journalists-in residence” for the organisation.

These two models depict the one way approach to PR as they are all disseminating information to the stakeholders without any exchange of information or feedback.

- Two-way asymmetrical – uses research to develop persuasive messages. In this model the organisation would listen to the public only to use the information that it gains to persuade the public to agree with it.
- Two-way symmetrical – is based on research and uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics. This means that in this model both the organisation and the publics listen to each other to come up with an agreement (Botha *et al*: 2007; Lindeborg 1994; Grunig *et al*: 2002).

The Excellence Study proves that in real life excellent communication programmes follows a mixed model slanted towards the two-way symmetrical model but retaining techniques from the two-way asymmetrical model (Lindeborg 1994: 8).

The press agency, public information and two-way asymmetrical model reinforce the view that PR is about propaganda and manipulation of stakeholders for the benefit of the organisation. This led to Grunig *et al* (2002) proposing that the two-way symmetrical model should be the normative theory for PR because it showcases the practice of excellent corporate communication as it

“uses bargaining negotiating, and conflict resolution strategies to bring about changes in the knowledge, attitudes and behaviour of both stakeholders and the organisation. All the four models describe and explain how corporate communication is actually practiced. They are therefore positive theories, which describe phenomena, events or activities as they actually occur”. (Grunig, 1989: 42 in Steyn, Uncompleted).

However, the two-way symmetrical model has been criticised by some authors (Van der Meiden 1993; Leichty & Springston 1993; Cancel,

Cameroon, Sallot & Mitrook 1997 in Steyn, Uncompleted) as the ideal way to practice PR. According to Steyn (Uncompleted) these critical scholars view the symmetrical world-view of communication as totally accommodating stakeholder interests and sacrificing the organisation's self interest in the process.

In defence to this criticism Grunig (1999 in Steyn, Uncompleted) noted that organisations do not have to throw away their self-interest in practising this model because each side meets the other half way in order to come up with an amicable solution. The author posits that giving in to the interests of the stakeholders would be as unbalanced as promoting the organisation's self interest.

The Excellence models will help this study because in exploring the contribution it would be important to establish the purpose and direction of the model being its practice. It is clear that the two-way symmetrical model is the ideal as it establishes and sustains long term relationships between the organisation and the stakeholders. As a result it benefits the organisation more and, therefore, contributes more to the organisation.

2.4.1.3 Organisation and structure of the communication function

The Excellence question also deals with the organisation and structure of the PR function. It shows that excellent communication departments have three important elements, namely,

- Ready access to management;
- PR functions are integrated for the facilitation of strategic management; and
- The PR function has a horizontal structure to give it flexibility to take on new strategic objectives.

These are important elements of the Excellence question that will be looked at by the researcher in investigating the contribution of PR in the selected agricultural organisation. It is clear here that in order for a PR department to make a meaningful contribution to any organisation it has to report to the highest office and be given the freedom to adapt to new challenges.

2.4.2 The Effectiveness Question

The effectiveness question deals with how excellent communication makes an organisation more effective and the economic value of the contribution. According to Steyn (2000) the effectiveness question is the foundation for a theory of PR management. The authors of the Excellence Study believe that

“the value of a communication program should be demonstrated by determining its contribution to the effectiveness of an organisation, rather than by attempting to make an accounting of how efficient the communication programme is” (Lindeborg 1994: 11).

Effectiveness can be looked at using different theories, namely, the systems theory, the strategic constituencies theory and the goal attainment theory. The goal attainment approach focuses on the communication programme helping the organisation in reaching its goals. (Note that the systems and strategic constituencies theories have already been discussed in 2.2 & 2.3). However, the authors point out that this approach only works when the goals are smart, that is, specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time bound.

According to Grunig *et al* (2002) viewing these perspectives together helps to explain the value of excellent PR because they show that when managed, communication can help an organisation to understand its environment on which it is mutually dependent.

2.4.3 The Excellence Study- the empirical study

The empirical study was first conducted from 1990–1991. The first phase consisted of a quantitative study covering 327 organisations in Canada, the United Kingdom and the United States. The second phase consisted of 25 of the original 327 (Grunig *et al*: 2002: 3). In their book the authors point out that the qualitative research is important in order to find out “the how’s and why’s behind the numbers...”(Grunig *et al*: 2002: 6).

The Excellence Study found that communication excellence is the same in different organisations and different countries because they all require the same characteristics such as the practitioners having knowledge of PR, shared expectations between the organisation and the practitioners and the most senior PR person has to be reporting to top management. However, they point out that not all excellent organisations possessed all the excellence characteristics that were measured, but would have some of the characteristics. This theory, therefore, is just a benchmark for best practice.

The Excellence question was looked at different levels, namely, the programme level (micro) that is at the level of individual PR programmes; departmental (meso) level; and organisational (macro) level. It was found that organisations that were managed excellently had common characteristics that made them to stand out from other organisations. Below are the characteristics of excellent PR at the different levels of analysis.

2.4.4 Characteristics of excellent public relations at the different levels of analysis

1. Programme level (micro level)

1. Managed strategically.

11. Departmental Level (meso).

2. Integrated public relations department
3. Separate function from marketing
4. Direct reporting relationship to senior management
5. Two-way symmetrical model
6. Senior public relations person in the managerial role.
7. Potential for excellent public relations, as indicated by:
 - knowledge of the symmetrical model
 - knowledge of the managerial role
 - academic training in public relations
 - professionalism
8. Equal opportunity for men and women in PR.

iii. Organisational level (macro level)

9. World-view for public relations in the organisation reflects the two-way symmetrical model
10. Public relations manager/director has power in/or with the dominant coalition
11. Participative rather than authoritarian organisational culture
12. Symmetrical system of internal communication
13. Organic rather than mechanical organisational structure
14. Turbulent, complex environment with pressure from activist groups.

iv. Effects of excellent public relations

15. Programmes meet communication objectives
16. Reduces costs of regulation, pressure, and litigation
17. Job satisfaction is high among employees.

Source: Grunig et al (2002: 9).

Holtzhausen (1995 in Steyn 2000: 58) expanded this general theory of excellence by referring to the corporate communication function at the programme level as the strategic communication management and at the departmental level as the strategic organisational management. The author referred to the organisational level as the strategic environmental level.

The author saw the organisational level as the level at which the strategic management of the organisation takes place because it is where senior management “interface with the organisation’s environment”. Holtzhausen notes that

“Decisions at the macro level determine the attitude of the organisation towards communication with stakeholders, create the culture and determine the management style and the general direction. The macro level also describes the external environment, i.e. whether it operates in an autocratic or democratic system, which cultural perspectives exist outside the organisation, and even the global influences on the organisation” (Steyn 2000: 58).

What Holtzhausen emphasises, therefore, like the authors of the Excellence Study, is that for PR to play a significant and strategic role it is important for the PR manager to be part of the planning team at the top because it is the decisions at the organisational level (top level) that determine how communication with stakeholders is handled and where strategies to address issues are devised.

If decisions at the macro level determine strategies about communication then without the PR, there is a danger that the organisation might not be objective in addressing issues because

the dominant coalition's perception of the external environment and the actual environment do not always correlate. Managers do not base their decisions on objective assessments of the environment, but on their own perceptions thereof" (Downey, Hellriegel & Slocum 1975 in Steyn 2000: 56).

The researcher concludes, therefore, that Holtzhausen's expansion of the general theory of excellence indicates that PR contributes at all levels although not as significantly and strategically as when it operates at the organisational level.

The above view is illustrated by Burson's PR models in organisations (PR Influences: December, 2004). The author shows that PR contributes at all levels although not equally. These three stages at which PR can contribute to an organisation are listed below.

- The delivery model (programme/technical level) – This is where PR is judged by outputs such as writing and distributing promotional material and press releases, events management, among others. PR here is judged on activity and quantity. The contribution is very small and insignificant because it is focused on outputs and does not impact on strategy in anyway;
- The positioning model (departmental/manager level) – Here PR is taken seriously as it is focused and to some extent about achieving measurable outcomes. "PR contributes to positioning, audience identification and messaging". The author states that it is here that the PR manager starts research of key audience and attitudes. Here PR shows potential and is clearer about its targets as it shows knowledge of strategic PR. The measurement of success is more on delivery of

The Excellence Study is important to this research because it shows the core elements that need to be looked into in order to show how a PR department can contribute significantly and meaningfully to organisational effectiveness and excellence. The Excellence Study, therefore, is discussed in this research because of its relevance in exploring the contribution of PR in an organisation as this study will be doing. The role, models, knowledge, organisational structure and value of PR are the core elements that this research will be looking at to establish the contribution of PR in the agricultural organisation. It emphasises the importance of the organisation working amicably with its stakeholders, thereby showing the significant role that PR plays in this regard. Therefore, the Excellence Study is a critical source. The empirical study shows that, the location of an organisation does not matter, communication excellence and effectiveness is the same throughout. It is therefore important to discuss both the literature analysis as well as the empirical study.

2.4.5 The South African “Excellence Study”

In 1997 the University of Pretoria’s Department of Marketing and Communication Management initiated a seminal study on communication Excellence. The main aim of this study was to use findings from this research as “a theoretical base for the conceptualisation of research aimed at investigating and finding solutions to corporate communication problems in the South African context” .The first phase was conducted by Groenewald (1998) focusing on the knowledge base of the corporate communication manager to determine the skills they saw as important in their positions. According to Steyn the two most important findings were that

- “Corporate communication managers in South African organisations perceived management skills to be significantly more important in their positions than technical skills; and

- The effectiveness of their training in management skills, strategic communication skills, and management communication skills was significantly lower than their training in technical communication skills”.

The second phase, looking at the shared expectations between top management and the corporate communications department, was conducted in two separate studies, one by De Beer (2001) and another by Steyn (Uncompleted). De Beer (2001) focused on communication managers’ perception of senior management’s expectations of excellent communication in South African organisations.

Some of the major finding on De Beer’s study point out that;

- Senior management expected the top communicators to make a strategic contribution to decisions at the organisation by playing the role of the corporate communication manager; and
- The top communicators believed that their positions did not favour them to influence key strategic decisions of the dominant coalition, therefore, their decisions were not valued before decisions made by the top management.

Steyn (Uncompleted) focused on the knowledge base of the practitioner in relation to the corporate communication strategist and manager role. The author alluded to the expectations and perceptions of Chief Executive Officers regarding the performance of the most senior practitioner in the roles of technician, manager and strategist.

The South African “Excellence Study” will also benefit this research seeing that it was done in an African context. This means closer alignment with the Botswana study as well as its focus being on similar areas of study. This current research will also see whether there is a shared expectation between the practitioners and management and if there is enough knowledge about PR in the communication department to make a significant contribution for PR to be valued as a resource.

2.5 PR ROLES

The PR practice is determined by two major areas, the role and the model of practice. Roles are a key to understanding the function of PR (Dozier in Steyn, 2000). Note that the models have already been dealt with under 2.4.1.2. under the Excellence Theory. Roles research has shown that there is a link between roles and the contribution of PR in the organisation (Moss & Green, 2001). Research has also shown that role enactment by PR professionals vary from organisation to organisation because it is affected by different factors in different organisational settings (Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000; Moss & Green, 2001; Sterne, 2008).

According to Toth, Serini, Wright and Emig (1998) research on PR roles plays an important part in expanding information and understanding the practice because:

- It empirically provides descriptions of the activities that PR practitioners carry out other than what was previously thought to be journalistic skills;
- It makes it possible to compare the practice and note how excellent PR departments are structured; and

- It clarifies how variables such as the purpose, research and environment link together in order to understand the strategic contribution of the function in an organisation.

Fleisher (1998: 169) notes that “roles research has been an important area of research because it provides greater explanatory insight into the work behaviour of corporate communication”. It is, therefore, clear that roles research is important in this study because in order to understand the contribution of PR in an organisation, one needs to understand the kind of activities carried out by the PR practitioners.

2.5.1 The Roles Theory

The roles theory was developed from the field of sociology (Hogg & Doolan 1999). This theory looks at the everyday activities that dictate individual behaviour in a social setting. “People are considered to be social actors who learn and adopt behaviours appropriate to the positions they occupy in society” (Hogg & Doolan, 1999: 598). What this means is that people act out roles depending on their positions and behave the way their positions dictate. The more the role is acted out, the more the individual gets the confidence and competence to commit to the role and identify with it. The roles theory saw the pioneering work of Broom and Smith’s (1979), four role typology of PR practitioners. This work was based on Steele’s (1982) typology of “basic role models” (Hogg and Doolan 1999: 598). Broom and Dozier (1986 in Hogg and Doolan 1999) asserted that the frequency in which the practitioner enacted the four roles varied. Therefore, a practitioner would enact one role more often than others and this would be the dominant role. According to Hogg and Doolan (1999), what this then assumes is that roles reside within individuals, hence roles research deals with attitudes.

Earlier research by Broom and Smith (1979 in Hogg and Doolan 1999) conceptualised four PR practitioner roles. The four roles are listed below.

- **Expert prescriber** – The role here is to conduct research, identify the problem and provide a solution. In this role the practitioner takes full responsibility for the implementation of the solution. The practitioner in this role is regarded as being the most informed in PR problems and is regarded as the best person to provide solutions. However, according to Steyn (2000), this role “leads to passive management involvement” as the practitioners are held responsible for programme results of situations that they have little or no control. As Grunig & Hunt (1984 in Steyn 2000) point out, this role can be associated with the two-way asymmetrical and publicity model since information is gained through research mainly to persuade the stakeholders to see things from the point of view of the organisation. The organisation depends on the practitioner to solve the problem by persuading the stakeholders to agree with the organisation.
- **Communication facilitator** – the role here is to manage information flow between the organisation and its stakeholders. Steyn (2000) is of the opinion that this role portrays the PR practitioners as receptive and responsive “information brokers” who remove obstacles and misunderstanding between the organisation and its stakeholders. They help both the organisation and its publics to make informed decisions by providing the perspective of both sides. In this role the practitioner’s main concern is the “quality and quantity of information flow between management and publics”. This role can be associated with the public information and two-way symmetrical model because the practitioner is portrayed as concerned with information flow and as “sensitive” to the needs of the stakeholders and the organisation.

- Problem-solving process facilitator - Sits with the dominant coalition and guides them in solving organisational problems by planning and coordinating PR activities. This model can be associated with the two-way symmetrical model because here the practitioner helps other departments to solve their communication problems.
- Communication technician – This role focuses on preparing and producing outputs needed for implementing the programmes and activities. This role provides the communication and journalistic skills of writing, editing and organising events among others. They do not deal with policy or decision making, but are just “service providers” (Steyn 2000: 46). This role can be associated with the publicity and information model because they are implementers of decisions made by top management, thereby, giving information to the stakeholders to gain publicity.

Broom and Dozier (1984 in Hogg and Doolan 1999) compressed the four roles into two, the PR manager and the technician. They concluded that the roles of expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem solving process facilitator are in fact roles played by the PR manager. The technician role remained on its own as the “service provider” who does not take part in policy and decision making. The main difference between a manager and technician is the use of research. A manager will use research while a technician does not (Steyn & Puth 2000).

The manager role is enacted at the departmental (meso) level. The main tasks of a manager are to do environmental scanning to identify threats and opportunities to the organisation, identify strategic stakeholders, strategic issues and determine the implications of these issues on strategic stakeholders, then develop a communication strategy to deal with the issues

(Bronn, 2001; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Toth *et al*, 1998; Moss *et al*, 2000; Wright, 1995; Moss & Green, 2001; van Ruler *et al*, 2001; Grunig *et al*, 2002). The technician job is enacted at the programme (micro) level of the organisation providing the journalistic skills and disseminating messages and is not part of the management team (Moss & Green, 2001; Toth *et al*, 1998; Steyn 2000; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Grunig *et al*, 2002; Bronn, 2001).

The European Academics in the EBOK study (Vercic *et al*, 2001) on the other hand have four roles slightly different from the American classification. Their four roles are managerial, operational, reflective and educational roles. The managerial and operational roles go well with the American manager and technician but differ on the reflective and educational roles, because the Americans do not have those. In the reflective role, the practitioner examines the changing values and standards of the society and feeds the organisation so that it adapts its standards and values to conform to society's expectations on social responsibility and legitimacy. The educational role on the other hand assists staff members of an organisation to be competent communicators and ambassadors of the organisation. Whereas the reflective role is aimed at top management and deals with standards and values, the educational role is aimed at staff internally and deals with their attitudes and behaviour.

In South Africa, Steyn came up with the third role, namely, that of strategist. The strategist functions at the top management level and deals with environmental scanning, issues management and analysing the results of the actions of the organisation on the stakeholders and taking part in strategy formulation (Steyn 2000). This study will focus on the manager and technician roles.

The roles theory is significant for this study because it categorises the activities undertaken by the PR practitioners and shows to what extent each role contributes to organisational excellence and effectiveness. From this theory it is clear that practitioners at manager level will only make a significant contribution if they practice strategic PR through research and not through engaging in low level technical jobs of writing and editing.

2.5.2 The roles approach

The roles approach “proposes that roles are functions of a social system made up of role senders and role receivers” (Hogg & Doolan, 1999: 599). “The role performed, at least in part, depends on others expectations of the role to be enacted (Johnson 1989 in Hogg & Doolan 1999)”. What this means is that the PR practiced depends on the expectations of society or those in charge (management). This is supported by Cutlip, Center & Broom (1985) in pointing out that

“a public relations office will only be useful to management as management wants it to be. If management thinks of the public relations operation in a small way, then it will occupy a small place in the scheme of things and its contribution will be small. If management thinks it is important, then it will occupy a prominent place, and its contribution will be significant” (Cutlip et al, 1985: 80).

According to Sypher and Sypher (1984 in Steyn 2000) a description of the role behaviour should include both the role receiver and the role sender’s perspective. This is because the way management sees the role of the practitioner is not always how the practitioner sees as their role (Steyn 2000). This is supported by Johnson (1989: 244-245 in Steyn 2000) in questioning

whether the dominant coalition perceives the same role for PR as the practitioners do.

This shows that it is possible that the PR role in an organisation could be affected by management's understanding or perception of what it is, as much as by what the practitioners perceive to be their role. However, because the top management has control they can dictate the kind of PR that is practiced in an organisation.

“Organisations choose the public relations they do because the people in power choose that behaviour” (Grunig 1992 in Hogg and Doolan 1997: 599).

It is important, therefore, to look at the practice of PR and the factors that influence it in order to understand what it contributes to an organisation.

The roles approach is necessary for this study because it demonstrates that PR practise is affected by the expectations of management as well as what the practitioners perceive as their job. Therefore, in order to understand why practitioners practice PR the way they do, there is need to understand what both sides see as PR. The roles approach is valuable to this study because it shows why PR is practiced differently in different organisations and, therefore, why its contribution will differ from organisation to organisation.

2.5.3 Factors affecting the role enactment of practitioners

A review of the literature including the Excellence Study, indicates that the practice of PR is dependent on a number of factors linked to both the organisation and the individual (Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Moss *et al*, 2001;

Toth *et al*, 1998; Moss & Green, 2001; Bronn, 2001).

“public relations practitioners...work under constraints, ... which hold the potential to control how public relations is practiced in the organisation” (Sweep, Cameron & Lariscy, 1994: 319).

The factors are described below.

2.5.3.1 Expectations by management

Research has shown that, often, the kind of PR practised in an organisation is dictated by management (Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Katz & Khan in Steyn 2000; Grunig, 2000; Dolphin & Fan, 2000; Ni, 2006). Sweep *et al* (1994: 320) note that the “role that is practiced is probably a function of many factors, including...the direction of power-control given by upper management in setting expectations or constraints for public relations performance”.

2.5.3.2 Membership of the dominant coalition

Results of a study conducted by Plowman (2005) indicated that knowledge and experience of the senior PR practitioner in an organisation is vital in being a member of the dominant coalition. The role and model practiced is determined by the knowledge of the communication department to practise them. Being a member of the dominant coalition is important because that's the decision making level where strategy is carried out. Plowman points out that “public relations is ineffective unless it is part of top management. ... Public relations in the upper levels of management is good for the organisation”. This is reiterated by Sweep *et al* (1994: 320) “to play a role in determining the organisation's predominant public relations model, the public

relations manager would need to have influence at the highest level within the organization”.

Another factor his results showed is that the background of the senior PR practitioner in an organisation mattered. This background includes such traits as “native ability, knowledge, experience and sound judgement for one to be a member of the dominant coalition”. The experience includes the ability to do strategic planning. When practitioners have knowledge and are formally trained in PR they will perform the manager role and strategic management functions appropriately and as a result they will demonstrate their worth to become a member of the dominant coalition (PR Influences, February, 2002). As a member of the dominant coalition they will be able to contribute to strategy formulation and therefore the value of PR. The person to whom the most senior practitioner report says a lot about their value and contribution to the organisation’s strategy. (Grunig *et al*, 2002; Grunig, 2000; Sterne, 2008; Fleisher, 1998; Bronn, 2001; Dolphin & Fan, 2000; Steyn, 2000; Plowman, 2005; PR Influences, May, 2003; PR Influences, June, 2002).

2.5.3.3 The organisational environment

There is no doubt that the environment within which an organisation operates influences the way PR is practiced in an organisation and is a measure of its contribution. Research has shown that the more complex, turbulent and competitive the environment, the more readily PR is recognised and accepted as a valuable contributing profession in an organisation. Sweep *et al* (1994) add that practitioners who work in participative environments are less constrained than those who work in authoritative environments. The authors further note that it is important that PR practitioners should be aware that there are various factors that could affect their practice so that they are better

prepared to face the challenges of the workplace, understanding that their efforts are dictated by various forces.

2.6 CONCLUSION

The theories elaborated in this chapter provide a roadmap for this study as they provide an explanation and link to the core elements that will be studied in exploring the contribution of PR in an organisation. The systems theory shows that an organisation is an interdependence of systems that need communication to function in harmony with its subsystems and environment. Here PR plays a major role showcasing its value and contribution. The strategic constituencies theory demonstrates that an organisation cannot cater for the needs of all stakeholders, but that it should identify through PR, those stakeholders who can make or break the organisation. The Excellence theory on the other hand provides a basis of how excellent PR should be practiced. It also provides a guideline as to how an excellent PR department should be structured in order for it to be effective. The roles theory gives an overview of the activities assigned to each role so that it sheds light on which activities should be performed by which role and at what level to make a significant contribution. The roles approach justifies why the PR practice is different from organisation to organisation. All these theories justify the need for PR in an organisation and hence its significant contribution if utilised to its full potential. The next chapter will deal with strategic PR, what it entails and how it makes the PR profession a strategic management function.

CHAPTER 3

STRATEGIC PR

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This study will look at PR as a strategic management function and what and how it contributes to organisational effectiveness and excellence. In doing so, this study will utilise PR strategic management literature to lay the ground for exploration and investigation in the sampled agricultural institution in Botswana. This chapter endeavours to show how PR can be practiced strategically to contribute to organisational effectiveness and excellence.

3.2 PR AS A STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT FUNCTION

According to Dolphin and Fan (2000: 99) corporate communication has become acknowledged as “one of the most valued strategic tools” and has also been recognised as having an essential role to play in what is called the “the total business system” by Winner (1993, in Fleisher 2000:99). However Moss and Warnaby (1998) point out that although there is a lot of literature on strategy, “a comprehensive consensus definition has remained elusive”. Moss and Warnaby (1998: 132) note that, Kerin, Mahajan and Varadarajan (1990) examined a number of definitions of strategy by various authors and offer six key aspects of strategy definition that are outlined below.

- A “means of establishing the purpose of the organisation (in terms of its long term objectives, programmes of action and priorities for resource allocation)”;

- A “competitive domain of the organisation. Thus, one of the central concerns of strategy is defining the business the organisation is in or should be in”;
- A “continuous and adaptive response to those external opportunities and threats and internal strengths and weaknesses which affect an organisation”;
- A “central vehicle for achieving competitive advantage”;
- It “engages all hierarchical levels of the organisation: corporate, business and functional”; and
- Is “a motivating force for those internal and external stakeholders who directly or indirectly receive the benefits or costs derived from the actions of the organisation”.

Steyn and Puth (2000: 17), define strategic management as “balancing internal activities with strategies for dealing with external factors”. The authors further give a detailed definition of strategy and these are indicated below.

- “the art or science of affording maximum support to adopted policies.
- an organisation’s pro-active response to an ever-changing environment: the instrument that enables an organisation to find synthesis between its goals and resources in view of the risks and challenges of the changing environment.
- an indication of an organisation’s position for the future, the *what* rather than the *how*.
- the thinking, the logic behind the actions.
- doing the right things rather than doing things right” (Steyn and Puth 2000: 29).

They mention that strategic management is relevant to PR in two principal ways namely:

- When the PR manager is involved in the strategic management of the organisation “by surveying the environment, helping to define the mission and goals, and in developing problem solving strategies for the **whole** organisation”; and
- When the PR department manages its programmes strategically by aligning communication goals to the organisation’s mission, as a result integrating and coordinating its work with that of the organisation.

In support Moss and Warnaby (1998) also emphasise that PR scholars have shown that it can be a strategic function if it plays a part in “helping the organisation to diagnose the environment and manage exchanges between environmental actors and forces and the capabilities and competencies of the organisation”.

Grunig and Repper (1992 in Moss & Warnaby 1998: 136) define the strategic role of PR as that of “building long-term relationships with an organisation’s strategic constituencies; those stakeholder groups who may limit the autonomy of an organisation in pursuing and realising its strategic goals”.

Moss and Warnaby (1998: 136) conclude that

“the distinguishing characteristics of strategically managed public relations are the focus on diagnosing the environment to make the organisation aware of stakeholders, publics and issues as they evolve and the development of programmes that can help solve such issues. In this sense, the issues management function forms the core focus of the strategic management of public relations”.

Fleisher (1998) noted that a survey carried out in the United States in 1993 suggested that stakeholder communication is viewed as strategic and an area that is capable of giving a company a competitive advantage. The study noted that characteristics of strategic PR include a “longer term, non-reactive focus”. Fleisher noted that PR is strategic if the organisation “shows a pro-active and accommodative approach when appropriate as opposed to constantly reacting to and opposing external or non-market environmental changes”. The author notes that it is also strategic if it uses systematic planning and evaluation techniques such as “integrating programme evaluation and research techniques into systematic planning process which serve as input to the organisation and function’s strategic plan” (Fleisher 1998: 166).

The results of Fleisher’s study of Canadian corporations (1998) showed that while non-strategic organisations focused on tactics, programmes executions and their outputs, the strategic ones focused on outcomes and processes and took steps to be viewed as a strategic business partner of line units. These steps according to Fleisher, (1998), include showing the impact of their activities on organisational processes and performance, “acting more similarly and using the methodological tools wielded by other strategic organisational units and becoming more involved in their organisation’s strategy development process and products”. Strategic units focus on outcomes related to the market and organisation such as changing stakeholder perception and successfully managing a crisis rather than on their own functions and units such as meeting budgets.

“Bissland (1990) suggested that corporate communication professionals need to demonstrate the business value and effectiveness of corporate communication activities, products or programmes, Lindenmann (1990) stated that strategic corporate communication performance assessment systems are an essential part of any strategic initiative, Lapco (1997) stated that units will not be truly strategic until they measurably contribute to the corporate bottom line and Robertson (1991) noted

that successful communication activities should ultimately impact on people's behaviours (in Fleisher 1998: 172)".

PR, therefore, can be strategic if it is pro-active and focused on outcomes. It can make a visible contribution to organisational effectiveness by aligning its goals to that of the organisation and contributing to strategy formulation by doing environmental scanning. It is important to point out that, for the PR function to be strategic, the practitioner needs to possess certain characteristics that are necessary for the successful execution of strategic PR.

3.2.1 Characteristics needed to practice strategic PR

Strategic decisions are defined as those that "are unique and use complex decision rules, are especially important to the organisation and are generally very complex" Schwenk (1998) in Bronn (2001: 315). These decisions, according to Quinn (1988) decide the

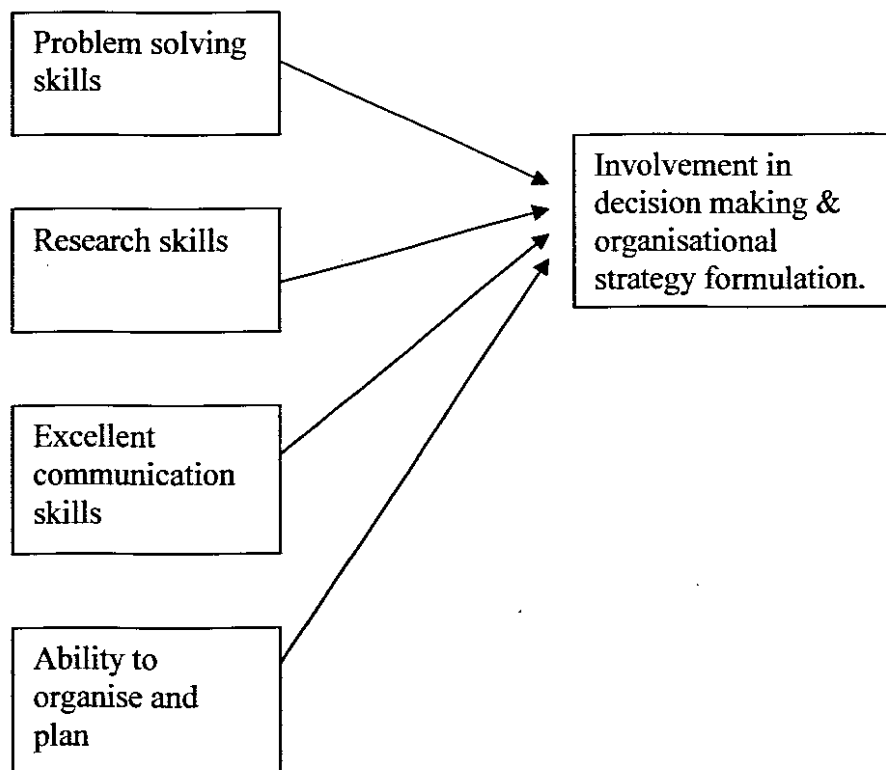
"overall direction and viability of the organisation ... in light of the predictable, the unpredictable and the unknowable changes that might occur in its most important environments".

For PR practitioners to have the ability to make these decisions they need certain characteristics which Botha *et al* (2007: 78 - 79) list below.

- Problem solving skills – The ability of a practitioner to provide innovative solutions to organisational problems. For this to be possible the practitioner should be able to analyse problems critically and then come up with solutions.

- Research skills – The practitioner should be impartial and be able to get the correct information by doing thorough research in order to get the right information to solve organisational problems.
- Excellent communication skills – Clear well articulated thoughts are essential both orally and written. Mistakes should be avoided at all costs because the credibility and effectiveness of the practitioner rests with the thoroughness of the information they provide.
- Ability to organise and plan – The ability to stick to budget and pay attention to detail in planning is crucial as it determines the success or failure of any event.

Figure 4: Characteristics required for a PR practitioner to be involved in strategic decision making.



Adapted from Bronn (2001: 316)

Therefore, a PR manager's role in strategic management can be looked at in terms of the ability to achieve the following below.

- Identify the organisation's strategic stakeholders, issues, publics and activists that are associated with the issues.
- Playing a part in the organisation's strategy formulation process by providing "strategic information" and giving the management options on how to deal with the problems or issues.
- Monitoring the changes in the environment by cultivating and maintaining relationships with strategic stakeholders.
- Coming up with communication programmes to address the main strategic issues and stakeholders.
- Being pro-active and not re-active to issues management (Steyn & Puth 2000; Steyn 2000; Moss & Warnaby, 1998; Fleisher 1998; Bronn & Olson, 1999).

Strategic PR is important in this study as it clearly shows the activities, characteristics and level at which PR can make a significant contribution to an organisation. Also, it indicates that PR can only be practiced strategically if it is practiced at the manager level and demonstrates research and analytical skills to be able to counsel management on changes in the environment. In this way the PR function plays a pro-active role in strategy formulation to carry the organisation into the future. At this level the PR function then becomes indispensable in contributing to the organisation realising its goals and objectives.

3.3 THE ENVIRONMENT IN STRATEGIC PR

Research has shown that there is a relationship between an organisation and its environment. Pearce and Robinson (1982 in Grunig *et al.*: 2002) define the environment as “the sum total of all conditions and forces that affect the strategic options of a business but that are typically beyond its ability to control”. The environment of an organisation can be said to be the total atmosphere or setting around it. It “includes everything and everyone around and inside it” (Botha *et al.*: 2007).

According to Learned, Christensen, Andrews & Guth, (1965: 62 in Grunig *et al.*: 443) Andrews brought into existence the concept of an “uncertain environment to strategic management. The environment is important in PR management because organisations do not operate in a vacuum, but operate within the internal and external environments. The organisation has complete control of the internal environment. This environment consists of all the units and departments making up the organisation. The organisation also has some control over the market (task) environment, which among others, comprise of those in the same business (competitors) and suppliers. The external or macro environment comprise of all the other forces including, social, technological, physical and international environment over which the organisation has no control.

Steyn points out that the environment, especially the external environment is important in strategic PR as it presents challenges to management because it is unpredictable. “Environmental uncertainty is the absence of information about organisations, activities and events in the environment” (Huber & Daft in Steyn 2000: 82). The manifestation of these challenges dictates a thorough understanding of the environment and constant adaptation of the organisation to the environment. According to Steyn (2000),

efforts by organisations to keep up with the ever changing turbulence in the environment is shown by the time spent by top management trying to address environmental concerns, the large PR departments and the many appearances in different media by organisation representatives.

According to Steyn and Puth (2000) the environment is not the physical surroundings but it is created from the information flowing into the organisation and it is the information to which the organisation reacts. Therefore, organisations build their environments by choosing the information that they deem important to them and ignoring all the other information that they deem as non-threatening and needing no action. The authors see the organisation's environment as a subjective invention of the organisation itself. This means that the environment of one organisation is not necessarily the environment of another, even if they are in the same business because the information that might be important to the one organisation might not be as important to the other. Therefore, how the organisation interprets the information it gathers and the quality and quantity of the information flow determines the organisational environment.

“The process of the organisation constructing an environment is often largely unreflective, disorderly, incremental, and strongly influenced by social norms and customs” (Steyn & Puth, 2000: 59).

Research has shown that an organisation that does not adapt to the environmental changes runs the risk of falling apart. This is emphasised by Grunig (1992 in Duhe, 2008: 2) in pointing out that “organisations must adapt to their environments if they are to increase their effectiveness or even to survive”. Chakravarthy (1982 in Duhe) further links strategy to environment by pointing out that the main function of strategic management is “adaptation so that the organisation can be better fitted to its environment”.

PR scholars are of the view that changing environments are more complicated than static environments. According to Hage (1980 in Duhe 2008) a complex environment is one with high levels of knowledge and technological sophistication whose services are in high demand. Robbins (1987 in Duhe 2008) further relates “environmental dynamism to environmental uncertainty”. The author points out that the more there is a likelihood of change in the environment the more there is a likelihood of change in the conditions or operating environment of the organisation that the organisation cannot control, but which can affect the organisation in unexpected ways. Steyn & Puth (2000) point out that

“Strategic management is a continuous process that involves attempts to match the organisation with its changing environment. It includes adapting the organisation itself (via internal changes) to fit the external environment. An organisation’s environment, perhaps more than any other factor, affects organisational strategy, structure and performance (Steyn & Puth 2000: 164).”

Spicer (1997: 61) also agrees that strategic management suggests that “organisations are most successful if they align their internal structures and processes with the demands of the environment”. This means that it is organisations who keep up with the changing environment who will survive. Therefore, organisations should do a thorough environmental scanning and take action to operate in line with the changing environment in order to be successful.

Research is one way in which PR managers monitor the environment. According to Steyn and Puth, (2000) environmental scanning is one of the research techniques used by PR managers to investigate or obtain information from the external environment more precisely.

“This type of research alerts organisations to turbulence or change in the environment that may affect the survival or growth of the organisation” (Steyn & Puth 2000: 16). With this information the organisation is then able to formulate strategies to adapt to the circumstances or change. Environmental scanning gives the organisation an opportunity to recognise and follow “trends that indicate business opportunities and threats” (Steyn & Puth 2000). It is an essential element in strategy formulation because “an organisation can only respond to those parts of the environment of which it is aware” (Steyn & Puth 2000: 165). In the environmental scanning process information collected from the external environment is used to identify and understand the problem to come up with strategies to address the problem.

In the role of gatekeeper, liaison and boundary spanner, the corporate communication manager or function provides top management with critical information needed to formulate strategy. In this role, corporate communication makes the biggest contribution to organisational effectiveness, therefore to the bottom line” (Steyn & Puth 2000: 166).

In support Tuominen, Rajala, Moller and Anttila (2003 in Duhe, 2008: 7) posit that “a firm can handle environmental uncertainties if its ability to process information is correspondingly improved”. Therefore environmental scanning is important in strategic PR because it is able to achieve the following:

- “It helps an organisation to capitalise on opportunities early;
- It provides an early warning signal of impending problems;
- It sensitises an organisation to the changing needs of its customers (and other stakeholders);
- It provides a base of objective qualitative information about the environment;

- It provides intellectual stimulation to strategists in decision making; and
- It improves the image of the organisation in the eyes of its stakeholders and publics” (Jain in Steyn 2000: 90).

Johnson and Acharaya (1982 in Hogg & Doolan 1999) carried out a study that showed that there is a link between practitioner roles and organisational environments. They found out that “technicians are dominant in organisations with non-threatening and static environments while managers tend to be linked to organisations with unstable or threatening environments. This research, therefore, demonstrates that PR practitioners play different roles in different organisational environments” (Hogg & Doolan 1999: 599). “The environment affects organisational internal processes and managerial decision making” (King and Cushman 1994: 16 in Steyn 2000: 82).

The discussion of the environment of an organisation in this study is relevant because, more than anything, the environment justifies the existence of strategic PR management because organisations need to monitor it in order to survive and thrive. It is the PR function that gathers and analyses the information it gets from the environment and counsels top management to make informed decisions. In this capacity PR provides critical information to management to adapt the organisation and stay in business. It shows that without PR the organisation will be making uninformed decisions, therefore, in this sense PR becomes the conscience of the organisation and the basis and determining factor for a successful business operation. In this way PR then plays a major role in contributing to organisational strategy. It guides this study in that it shows that a practitioner who is not pro-active in monitoring the environment and counselling managements on the changes is not strategic and, hence, is not making any significant contribution to the organisation.

3.4 THE ROLE OF THE PR PRACTITIONER IN STAKEHOLDERS, PUBLICS AND ISSUES MANAGEMENT IN STRATEGY FORMULATION.

Today's society demands and pressurises organisations to develop and find ways of communicating openly with them. As a result "the traditional approach to issues management where organisations decide on their plans, dictate them to stakeholders, and prepare their defence is no longer adequate" (Watson, Osborne-Brown & Longhurst, 2002: 54). The authors emphasise that issues negotiation give leaders "a powerful alternative that builds trusting relationships, turning potentially negative issues into competitive advantage". Therefore PR practitioners as management counsellors have a role to play as they contribute to strategy formulation. Understanding the role of the PR practitioner in managing stakeholders, publics and issues is important in strategic PR. According to Ni (2006: 277)

"public relations has value when it's contributes to organisational effectiveness by monitoring the environment, reconciling goals with those of strategic publics, and building relationships with them".

The stakeholder theory argues that the environment of an organisation is made up of different groups of people who all have a stake or interest in the activities and performance of an organisation (Steyn & Puth 2000). Steyn (2000) points out that these groups are called publics by PR professionals, but stakeholders by the organisations. The author further points out that there is a need to understand that even though these concepts can be used interchangeably, it is important to differentiate them in the PR context because they impact on strategy formulation in different ways.

Grunig and Grunig (2000 in Steyn 2000), in their discussion of a theory of strategic management and PR suggest that stakeholders must be identified and then segmented into active and passive publics. "Active publics, in their opinion, are the most strategic, relevant and consequential for an organisation, and it is their values that must be incorporated into organisational goals" because they pose a threat to the organisation. Stakeholders are people who are affected by decisions of the organisation and whose decisions affect the organisation but are not yet a threat.

According to Grunig and Reppep's model (in Steyn 2000) the difference between stakeholders and publics lies in whether they are in a passive or aware stage on issues pertaining to the actions or activities of the organisation. These stages are indicated below.

- The stakeholder stage – This is when the people are not aware of the "mutual influence they have on the organisation and as a result do not see the need to act or be involved with the organisation" (Steyn 2000: 74).
- Public stage – is when the stakeholders are faced with a problem created by the organisation's actions or decision. Here, however, there is a difference regarding the degree to which they are aware of the problem or issue. If they are not aware of a problem and do nothing about it they are classified as "passive or latent" and when they become aware of the problem they are classified as an "aware public" (Steyn 2000: 74).
- Issue stage – Crable and Vibbert (1985 in Steyn 2000: 75) note that issues come in to play "because an active public makes an issue out of a problem that is not satisfactorily addressed by an organisation". The

- publics then openly talk about the issue and make efforts to publicise it. Once they are openly disagreeing with the organisations such as by strikes or protest marches and mobilising other people not associated with the organisation in any way, they are called activists.

Once publics transform into being activists, they warrant special attention because they present a threat to the organisation. Steyn (2000) also notes that they also present an opportunity for PR managers “who manage strategically” by pro-actively addressing issues because they will be the first to detect the problem and warn or inform the rest of management. They will also present a strategy that can be discussed by all management as to how to deal with the problem. Strategic PR managers contribute to strategy formulation when they detect issues early through environmental scanning and provide or suggest strategies to the top management on how to deal with those issues. Steyn (2000) emphasises that this “increases the need for and the power of the corporate communication function in strategy formulation process”.

In addition Plowman (2005) reiterates that strategic PR starts when practitioners can detect “potential problems with the organisation’s stakeholders”.

“Managing such conflicts reduces future costs associated with those issues. Participation with strategic management also elevates public relations from its typical role of reacting to events to a more pro-active, responsive role of anticipating and reducing conflicts” (Grunig et al, 2002; Grunig & Repper, 1992 in Plowman, 2005: 132).

The stakeholder, publics and issues management is relevant to this study as they clearly indicate that without PR, organisations would be dealing with crisis all the time as there would be no warning system. As an early warning system and the brains behind the solutions to the issues, PR contributes to

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Once publics transform into being activists, they warrant special attention because they present a threat to the organisation. Steyn (2000) also notes that they also present an opportunity for PR managers “who manage strategically” by pro-actively addressing issues because they will be the first to detect the problem and warn or inform the rest of management. They will also present a strategy that can be discussed by all management as to how to deal with the problem. Strategic PR managers contribute to strategy formulation when they detect issues early through environmental scanning and provide or suggest strategies to the top management on how to deal with those issues. Steyn (2000) emphasises that this “increases the need for and the power of the corporate communication function in strategy formulation process”.

In addition Plowman (2005) reiterates that strategic PR starts when practitioners can detect “potential problems with the organisation’s stakeholders”.

“Managing such conflicts reduces future costs associated with those issues. Participation with strategic management also elevates public relations from its typical role of reacting to events to a more pro-active, responsive role of anticipating and reducing conflicts” (Grunig et al, 2002; Grunig & Repper, 1992 in Plowman, 2005: 132).

The stakeholder, publics and issues management is relevant to this study as they clearly indicate that without PR, organisations would be dealing with crisis all the time as there would be no warning system. As an early warning system and the brains behind the solutions to the issues, PR contributes to

organisational effectiveness and excellence. It also demonstrates the important role of PR in identifying strategic stakeholders and systematically monitoring the environment so that issues are identified and addressed before crises erupt and activists form. If the PR practitioners prevents a crisis from erupting they show their worth and indispensability. As Regester and Larkin (2005: 85 & 92) explain "the whole point of an early warning system is to monitor, anticipate and assess the likely origin and evolution of potential issues ... **because** an issue ignored is a crisis ensured". In this role PR plays a strategic role of ensuring harmony between the organisation and its stakeholders. Consequently the PR practitioners will be recognised as important partners in strategy formulation and will also increase their power to be recognised as adding value to the organisation.

By knowing "when, what and how to communicate in the issues management process, corporate communication practitioners who engage in issues management, expand their role beyond publicity and press agency. They first identify and analyse emerging issues and secondly, evaluate alternative organisational responses. ... they assist in managing organisational efforts to contend with the problem. In this way the corporate communication manager becomes part of the reconciliation process as well as the accompanying communication effort" (Steyn 2000: 78).

3.5 KNOWLEDGE OF THE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT AND STRATEGY

Knowledge and ability of the communication department is critical in ensuring that the communication function plays a strategic role in the organisation. According to Steyn (2000) and Grunig *et al* (2002) it is imperative that for the communications department to play a strategic role it should be manned by

people who have formal education in PR and who understand the managerial role and what it entails.

“Communication departments have greater potential for excellence when they are staffed by professionals, people who have learned the body of knowledge in public relations and who are active in professional associations and read professional literature. People who have gained knowledge needed to carry out the manager role through university education, continuing education, or self-study” (Grunig et al, 2002:12 & 14).

According to the Excellence theory it is essential that organisations should empower the PR department as a “critical management function” to enable it to carry out its functions strategically.

3.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter shows the importance of the PR function in the survival of the organisation. It shows that through environmental scanning and information analysis to solve organisational problems and issues, PR contributes to the organisation’s strategy, thereby helping to adapt the organisation to its environment. It also demonstrates that by continually interacting with the organisation’s strategic stakeholders PR practitioners build long-term relationships which ultimately benefit the organisation when there is an issue. This leads to the development of trust which allows both parties to negotiate and arrive at amicable solutions.

Therefore, the discussion of strategic PR is relevant to this study because it shows that strategically managed PR contributes to organisational excellence and effectiveness as it ensures organisational survival and success. It also shows how PR practitioners can demonstrate their worth and ability to make a contribution to an organisation. In this study PR will be studied as a strategic

management function. The next chapter will deal with the methodology used in this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will discuss the research strategy, design and methodology. It will also provide details on sampling, data collection and analysis.

4.2 STRATEGY

This study will use the phenomenological strategy. A phenomenological study describes how people experience and perceive their experiences of the “phenomena under study”, therefore it can be described as the meaning things have from the experiences of an individual’s point of view (Glesne, 1999: 7; le Roux, 2003: 22; Smith, 2008: 1; Cohen & Manion, 1994: 29; Struwig, & Stead, 2001: 15). Phenomenology was developed by a German philosopher Edmund Husserl in the mid 1890’s, who contended that “human consciousness actively constitutes the objects of experiences” (Glesne, 1999:7). The phenomenological strategy is relevant to this study because it aims to understand what PR contributes to an organisation from the point of view of the practitioners and managers or senior officers in MoA. Therefore this study will be drawing from the experiences and perceptions of the two groups to gain insight in to the contribution of PR in the organisation and not their behaviours or actions. As le Roux (2003: 23) points out phenomenology differs from other approaches “in that experience, and not actions and behaviour is being researched”.

A qualitative research approach will be used to tackle the research questions stated in this study. Qualitative research according to Struwig and Stead (2001) cannot be easily defined but has characteristics that differentiate it

from quantitative research. Qualitative research is investigative, analytic, informative and revealing compared to quantitative research as, in this case, it attempts to examine the perceptions and experiences of the research participants in a holistic manner. “Events or extraneous variables are not controlled – the purpose is to capture the normal flow of events” (Du Plooy 1995: 33 in Steyn 2000: 188). It therefore, provides more information than quantitative research as data is in words rather than numbers and “goes beyond the initial preconceptions and frameworks” (Miles & Huberman 1984 in Steyn 2000: 188).

One advantage of qualitative research is that researchers go to the setting in which they are based to collect data for the study. As a result this helps in understanding the context of the study because the researchers are also able to have a feel for the environment which they are studying as the belief is that activities “can be best understood in the actual settings in which they occur” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993: 381).

Fraenkel & Wallen (1993) also note that qualitative researchers are concerned with “processes as well as products”. As a result they concentrate and pay special attention to how the respondents answer questions as well as the meaning that they give to some words and actions to get the full picture. In qualitative research a hypothesis is not formulated before the commencement of the study as in quantitative research, but it unfolds as the study is being carried out. Therefore qualitative research can be said to be the construction of a picture that takes shape as data is collected and examined, not a picture that is already known before the study commences (Fraenkel & Wallen).

In this way the qualitative researcher is interested in knowing and understanding the problem from the point of view of the research participants. This is why qualitative researchers may share with the research participants their notes to check and verify that they have been accurately captured. In this way the research becomes objective as it is not meant to prove a point that is already known.

The researcher, however, is aware of the disadvantages of the qualitative strategy. A lot of data can be generated by using this method and therefore analysing the data can be a real challenge. Another factor is that because of the sheer bulk of the data that can be generated, this strategy often employs “relatively small samples”, hence the findings cannot be generalised beyond the sample. Seeing that validity in qualitative research is often ignored, there may arise a problem of not adequately analysing and interpreting results, thereby giving rise to anecdotal reports instead (Silverman, 1993 in Struwig & Stead, 2001).

The researcher chose the qualitative strategy for this study as it allows the research freedom to explore and understand the contribution of PR in the agricultural institution from the perspective of the research participants. It will also reveal a lot of information as it allows the researcher and the participants to interact thereby allowing participants to expand on statements given and hence provide a more thorough explanation (Struwig & Stead 2001:18). This relationship of the researcher and participant in the qualitative strategy will help the researcher clarify issues and understand the reasons behind what the participant is saying.

4.3 RESEARCH DESIGN

According to Cooper and Emory (1995:114 in Steyn 2000: 191), “a research design constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement and analysis of data. It is the plan and structure of the empirical investigation to obtain answers to research questions, and provides a framework for specifying the relationship among the study’s variables”.

The design of this study will be exploratory. In the Social Sciences, the goal of exploratory research is to learn what is happening in a given situation “and to investigate a social phenomenon without explicit expectations. According to Cohen and Manion (1994: 259) the researcher in an exploratory study “has a feeling for the direction in which to go” but has no clear expectations as they are not confirming or refuting hypotheses. It seeks to find out how people get along in a given situation, what meaning they give to their actions, and what issues concern them. In this research the aim will be to find out what the role and value of PR is in the agricultural institution sampled, through the eyes of both the practitioners and the managers of the various departments in the institution and why it is practiced the way it is practised. Issues such as the expectations of both the practitioners and the managers will be discussed as well as the constraints of carrying out the PR function.

According to Struwig and Stead (2001) there are three possible methods that can be used in exploratory research. It can be through “the study of secondary sources of information (literature), an analysis of selected cases or a survey of individuals who are likely to have an opinion on the subject under investigation” (Struwig & Stead 2001: 7). For purposes of this study the literature analysis will be used to understand the problem and as a roadmap for purposes of benchmarking for the study. Two different sets of open ended

questionnaires were administered to two groups of people, the PR practitioners and managers and/or senior officers from the various departments of the MoA. The PR practitioners were chosen because in order to explore the contribution, there was a need to interview the people who do the job, and those who are working with the practitioners. Hence the result of choosing these two groups because they all have an opinion on the subject under investigation.

The exploratory design is suitable for this study because of the need to give the respondents the greatest possible freedom of response as the aim is “to find or generate new ideas” (Struwig and Stead: 2001). Exploratory design also allows for flexibility and dynamism which is needed in this kind of study. What this means is that this design will allow the respondents to express their views and experiences and produce rich data. It is also cost effective in terms of time and money and because of the exploratory nature of the study, a research hypothesis will not be formulated. According to Struwig and Stead (2001) when the focus of a study is investigative there is no need for a hypothesis as nothing is known and therefore nothing is being tested.

4.4 POPULATION

A population is defined by Struwig and Stead (2001) as “all possible respondents in a research project”. Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) define the population as the larger group on which the researcher wants to apply the results of the study. It is important, therefore, in any study, to accurately identify the population that the researcher wants to target. Fraenkel and Wallen (1993) are of the opinion that a population of a research study can be of any size, but should have at least one characteristic that will set it apart from any other group. The authors further elaborate that it is also important to differentiate between the target population and the accessible population. This

is because the target population may be scattered all over the country and therefore it will be difficult to access, whereas the accessible population would be easily accessible.

In this study the population will be all full-time employees of Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) headquarters in Gaborone including the Botswana College of Agriculture (BCA), Botswana Agricultural Marketing Board (BAMB) and the Botswana Vaccine Institute (BVI), which are parastatals of the MoA who are funded and accountable to the MoA. These parastatals are included because in many ways they are part of MoA as the Chief Executive Officers report to the Permanent Secretary (Administrative head) of MoA and their strategic plans have to feed into that of MoA and are presented and represented as one at national level. District officers have been left out as they are the target population but are not accessible, it is ideal that they should be included but unrealistic. The researcher is aware that the findings can only be generalised among the sample population.

4.4.1 Selection of interviewees (Sampling Method)

A sample is the actual group of people that will take part in a study. There are two different kinds of sampling methods, the probability sampling method and the non-probability sampling method. The difference between the two lies in the fact that the population of a probability sample have an equal chance of being selected while in the non- probability sample the group chosen suits the needs of the study and posses certain characteristics. The population here does not have an equal chance of being selected (Cohen and Manion, 1994; Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993). The sampling method that was employed in this study is non-probability sampling. Cohen and Manion (1994) are of the opinion that non probability samples are suitable for small scale studies that do not intend to generalise the findings beyond the sample, because they are

not representative. However, the advantage of this method is that it is not complicated and inexpensive as long as the researcher is aware of its limitation.

The non-probability method is suitable for this study because the research is small as it is a mini-thesis and the findings will not be generalised beyond the sample.

Non-probability sampling can be placed in two broad groups, the convenience and purposive sampling, but for purposes of this study the purposive sampling method will be used. According to Struwig and Stead (2001), because qualitative research is concerned with getting as much information as possible samples are generally selected purposefully and not randomly. In addition, Cohen and Manion (1994) elucidate that researchers use their judgement to select their sample, thereby coming up with a sample suitable for their own specific needs. Therefore, purposive samples are often chosen because they possess the necessary information.

“The probability of any particular member of the group being chosen is unknown. The selection of sampling units is arbitrary as researchers rely heavily on personal judgement” (Struwig & Stead 2001: 111).

In purposive sampling a researcher would have one or more specific predefined groups that they are targeting (www.socialresearchmethods.net). The two groups in this study are the practitioners themselves and heads of department or senior officers. Purposive sampling is chosen in this study because it will allow the researcher to choose specifically PR practitioners and those who work with them directly without worrying about the sample being representative.

4.4.2 Characteristics of purposive sampling

Purposive sampling is concerned with providing a sample with a lot of information rather than a random sample. Some of the characteristics of purposeful sampling according to Lincoln and Guba in Struwig and Stead (2001: 122) are:

- “The total sample is not drawn in advance as is the case in quantitative research and the sample size is not finalised before the study commences but may change as the study progresses; and
- As additional information is required more specific sampling units are sought”.

In this study the sample was taken from two groups of people, the PR practitioners and non-PR practitioners who are managers or in senior positions in the organisation. The practitioners are included because their views are important in this study as they are the people who carry out the PR functions. The non-practitioners are chosen because they influence the practice of PR. Interfacing these two groups will allow the researcher to look at both sides of the research questions from the point of view of those carrying out the PR function and those expecting PR to serve a certain purpose in the organisation, hence, the reason for choosing the two groups and the purposive sampling method.

The sample size of this study was directed by the objectives of the research. However, considerations were also given to time constraints and the resources needed to carry out the interviews. According to le Roux (2003: 26) phenomenologists normally select “five to 10 people in their studies because they depend on in-depth interviews”. Fraenkel & Wallen (1999: 90) are of the opinion that any sample that has less than 20 to 30 people in it is too small, but they also point out that a sample should be “as large as the researcher

can obtain with a reasonable expenditure of time and energy” in order to find the answers they are looking for. As interviews generate a lot of data, this study targeted 20 respondents, 10 practitioners, and 10 from the managers/senior officers (non-practitioners) in the organisation under study. The target number took into consideration that some respondents might not honour interview appointments.

4.5 INSTRUMENT

The instrument is the specific tool for conducting the research. It is the means or device that is used to collect the information needed by the researcher (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993: 101). In designing an instrument it is important that the researcher chooses a method that will serve the purpose well in order to get the right information. The authors further note that the instrument chosen is affected by the location where it will be administered, how it will be administered, by whom and the time taken for administration. According to the authors, these elements are core in deciding on the instrument to be used for a study.

In this study open ended interview schedules were administered to both groups, the PR practitioners and Non-PR Practitioners. The interviews were on a one to one basis. Data was collected by means of note taking by the researcher and tape recording where the interviewee agreed to be recorded. Macnamara (1999:2) points out that “the recording of interviews is an acceptable practice”. Note taking is also an excellent backup for equipment failure and it also remains private except what is noted. The reason why tape recording was only utilised where possible is because the researcher was aware that some respondents could be uncomfortable with being recorded as their responses would be on record even though they were assured of confidentiality. As a result this could inhibit the interviewees’ responses and stifle them when expressing their views, opinions and perceptions freely, resulting in not so true and accurate data.

Another disadvantage of tape recording is that sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between different speakers when they are on tape.

The interview is defined by Fraenkel & Wallen (1993) as “the careful asking of relevant questions”. Cohen & Manion (1994: 271) define it as

“a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research relevant information, and focused on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation”.

The authors note that the interview is one of the most important methods used “by qualitative researchers” as it confirms, validates or even counters what is already known through observation. Reiterating the idea that an interview is an excellent method of data collection, Cohen & Manion (1994) quote Tuckman (1972) who describe it as being able to “provide access to what is inside a person’s head making it possible to measure what a person knows (knowledge or information), what a person likes or dislikes (values and preferences) and what a person thinks (attitudes and beliefs)”.

One of the main advantages of using the interview is that it allows for the interaction of the researcher and the respondents, therefore, the researcher is able to clarify or explain questions that are unclear or vague and also ask the respondent to expand on answers given. This advantage may also be a disadvantage because the interviewers may be subjective and biased in following up questions to suit what they want (Cohen & Manion, 1994). A disadvantage of the interview is that it takes longer to complete because it takes the form of a conversation as Kahn and Cannell (in Plowman 2004) note that interviews are conversations with a purpose. Another disadvantage is that the respondents may not be free to say what they really think or hold back on their true answers because of the presence of the researcher.

There are three common types of interview, the standardised/structured, semi-standardised/semi-structured and un-standardised/unstructured interviews (Struwig & Stead, 2001). The authors define the standardised interview as a set of formally structured questions where wording is not altered from one participant to the next. The un-standardised interview is where there are no pre-determined questions but discussion around a specific topic is paramount. The semi-standard interview, on the other hand, is a combination of both the standardised and un-standardised interviews. Here the respondents are asked predetermined questions in a “systematic and consistent manner”, but they are allowed to discuss and expand on the responses beyond the questions. The advantage of the semi-standard interview is that the researcher gets detailed and multiple responses for the set question (Struwig & Stead, 2001: 98). The semi-structured interview is also excellent because it allows the respondents to use their own words leading to them being key players in the study. In this study the semi-standardised interview will be used. In choosing this type, however, the researcher is aware of the disadvantages, one of which is that the predetermined questions may inhibit or influence the responses of the interviewee.

Two separate semi-structured interview schedules were prepared with two sections each. Section one comprised of biographical data of the respondents and section two comprised of open ended questions. One was administered to PR practitioners and the other to non-practitioners being managers or senior staff members of other departments at the MoA and its parastatals. The interview schedule for PR practitioners contained 20 open ended questions and for managers of other departments there were 19 open ended questions.

4.6 DATA ANALYSIS

In a phenomenological qualitative study data is analysed by categorising and identifying similar themes, quotes and observations and then coding them (Stuwig, Stead, 2001: 15). The data was summarised according to these coded themes. A detailed description of the findings was written synthesizing the information from the interviews. According to Plowman (2004), “the key is to locate a set of items – questions that arise, opinions that constantly come up, specific risk factors mentioned that can be systematically counted”. Glesne (1999: 135) points out that coding data and identifying the themes makes it easier to connect the various themes and opinions that come up with a picture of the meaning of the data. After sorting and defining the data collected a conclusion was written on the findings. The units of analysis in this study are the role of PR in the organisation which includes the model of practice and activities carried out by the PR practitioners; the value placed on the PR department by management; the knowledge to carry out the various aspects of PR including strategic PR; and the PR department reporting structures. These four units of analysis will be discussed in detail from the points of view of both the PR practitioners and the non-PR practitioners.

4.7 PILOT STUDY

The questions were pre-tested on a sample of 12 respondents between the 22nd October and 7th November 2008. For the non-PR practitioners there were 22 questions and for the PR practitioners there were 28 questions. The sample was small because the purpose was to see whether the questions could easily be understood and solicit responses. The findings showed that the questions were relevant, even though some elicited the same responses. The researcher, therefore, tied in certain questions together to avoid getting

the same response for different questions. The next chapter deals with the findings and interpretation of the research.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the two groups interviewed will be discussed separately and then compared to deduce meaning and implications in the discussion and conclusion section. A total of 27 interviews were set up, 15 with non-PR practitioners and 12 with PR practitioners. Twelve interviews were honoured by the non-PR practitioners who were either heads of their department/section or their assistants. Two more attempts were made to re-schedule the interviews with the remaining four but to no avail. Since the PR section was not big everybody involved in some sort of PR work was targeted. The result was that 12 interviews were set up, nine were honoured while three were not honoured.

5.2 THEMES ON THE FINDINGS OF THE PR PRACTITIONERS GROUP

5.2.1 Theme 1: Education

As an ice breaker, the first question requested general information. Respondents were asked to give their names, education and their position in the department/section hierarchy, their title and the length of time that they had been with the organisation and in the department/section. What emerged was that the respondents held various qualifications other than PR. These qualifications are in Media, Journalism and various agricultural disciplines.

It also emerged that even though the respondents were involved in PR, they held various titles ranging from Public Relations Officer, Agricultural Information and Public Relations Officer to Veterinary/Technical/Scientific Officer or Principal Research Officer. It became clear that some titles did not even give a hint that they were in PR.

Further probing regarding why their titles were unrelated to PR revealed that most were hired in the organisation based on the qualifications they acquired in agriculture, media studies or Journalism and then transferred to the PR Department or were expected to carry out PR duties in addition to the duties that they were employed to do. The research showed that four interviewees were transferred to the PR department, while two were expected to do PR in addition to the job they were employed to do. It also came to light that all six had qualifications in Agriculture at either certificate or diploma level and they had also been with the organisation for a while before being transferred to the PR department. They reasoned that since they held some sort of agricultural qualification, it was assumed they would be able to articulately impart information about the organisation.

The titles of five practitioners interviewed had no PR connotation. The explanation for such titles was that the organisational structure stipulates titles according to academic qualification. Those who held diploma qualification and below are categorised and progress within the technical cadre while those with degrees and above progress in the professional cadre. Of the five, one held Diploma in Media Studies; another held Diploma in Journalism; two held Diploma in Animal Health; and one held Bachelor's Degree in Agriculture. The four in the technical cadre held titles including the word "Technical", such as "Principal Technical Officer"; "Chief Technical Officer"; as well as "Veterinary Technician", even though they were in PR.

One with a degree held the title of “Principal Research Officer because he was transferred to PR after being employed in his field, hence the title. The research revealed that the titles were about conformity to organisational structure and not about the job one is doing. The research found that it is the degree holders whose titles would reflect something in the line of duty, such as “Assistant Agricultural Information and PR Officer”, “PR Officer” or “Information and PR Officer” provided one was employed directly to the PR department. Those who held these titles would have joined the organisation holding qualifications in Media or Journalism or would have been re-categorised after obtaining the degree qualification. Those who were transferred from other departments or were expected to do PR in addition to their job kept their titles from those departments that employed them.

The respondents were asked whether they think formal education in PR is necessary for one to be a practitioner. All nine unanimously agreed that it is necessary to have formal education in PR if they are to function effectively. They noted that formal education equips one with PR knowledge and teaches what is expected of them. They all agreed that with formal education they would learn techniques to deal with stakeholders and learn how to impart information to the stakeholders.

One respondent said “Yes to be able to handle stakeholders the PR officer needs to have formal education”. Another said” I do believe so, education provides a PR practitioner with knowledge and understanding of communication techniques and mediums, networking, lobbying and liaison skills and attributes that are key for a PRO”.

This question showed that all nine PR practitioners, even though they don't have qualifications in PR, recognise the importance of getting the qualifications.

Asked whether they think they are not doing justice to the profession because they don't have the qualifications they admitted that they might have shortcomings, but they believe their qualifications being closer to PR, enable them to carry out the PR function competently. One said "I believe I know what I'm supposed to do, but to be a professional to the core one needs a relevant qualification".

The interviewees were all asked about the qualification they thought necessary to be a PR practitioner. Six respondents cited a qualification at diploma or degree level in PR as necessary while three did not see a problem in a PR practitioner having a diploma or degree in media or journalism. When asked why they believed journalism and media were relevant qualifications one respondent said

"in PR one is constantly linking the organisation and stakeholders mostly through various communication mediums. To do this effectively, it is important to understand the benefits associated with using different forms of communication".

The three respondents felt that journalism or media is relevant as it equips one with writing skills and the use of various media. The three respondents also indicated that they did not mind getting a qualification in PR or Communication if it was available, but they said they would not go to the trouble of finding the programme if media or journalism is available. One of the respondents summed it up: "anybody can be a PR practitioner as long as they know how to communicate well verbally and in writing". These statements implied that because journalism and media impart these skills, they are relevant.

This question also still showed that because the practitioners held various qualifications such as in media, journalism and agriculture, they believe that the most important thing is to be fluent in writing and imparting information about the organisation. This shows that they don't have any idea about PR. It shows that the fact that they are practitioners with these qualifications, they fail to understand why it is important to acquire a relevant qualification because to them if their organisation employed them, then their qualifications should be the right ones. It also becomes apparent that to them PR is publicity and public information.

5.2.2 Theme 2: Understanding of PR

These varied qualifications and titles brought up the pertinent and most important theme, the respondents' own understanding of PR and what it means to them. The respondents came up with various descriptions which could be summarised into four, namely, external stakeholder communication, public information, publicity and the safe guarding of image of the organisation. All the nine respondents described PR as stakeholder communication, but emphasised that the information to the stakeholders has to be good information about the organisation because it is about publicising the organisation. Two respondents further said the publicity information has to be good because it is about enhancing or maintaining the image of the organisation.

Out of the nine PR practitioners interviewed only one mentioned internal communication in their understanding of PR. Only one other mentioned "two-way communication between an organisation and its publics". The following are some of the words used by the PR practitioners to define PR.

“Communicating good information to the various publics”; “improving and monitoring image and brand recognition or identification”; monitoring the public image of the organisation; managing information between the organisation and the general public”; a source of information provided to the public”.

PR practitioners were asked whether they thought the top management team has the same understanding of PR as they did. Seven of the practitioners did not think so. Their reasons varied but indicated that PR is not as effective as the practitioners would like due to the lack of involvement in PR decisions. They noted that the structures do not show that the top management understand the role of PR as they report to various departments. One said “I don’t think so because I don’t think they have the right education” and another said “the way they are carrying on you can tell they don’t have a clue of what it is”.

The two PR practitioners who said they do have the same understanding, explained that the top management provided them with information to carry out their job and went with them everywhere so that they are fully appraised and aware of what is going on in the organisation. These working together they explained build a good working relationship that leads to understanding the expectations.

Seeing that the practitioners believe that PR is about publicity and public information the two who are aware of what is happening in the organisation and have access to information believe that they are doing their best and have a similar understanding as that of management regarding what is expected of them. The seven who are not involved with management and do not get information believe management does not share their understanding of what the job entails, hence, it is difficult for them to carry out their job.

This indicates that PR understanding amongst the practitioners focused on communication, publicity and public information. It also shows that internal stakeholders are not considered as being integral to the the PR effort.

Based on this understanding the respondents were asked whether they thought PR existed in their organisation. All the nine PR practitioners believed PR does exist in their organisation. Their reasoning was that they are continuously imparting and updating information about their organisations through various media to their stakeholders and that this is a sign that PR does exist. One of the respondents further said it exists because the organisation has the department and people employed to do it. Some of the responses are listed below:

“yes it exists because we use radio, print media, television and graphics as mediums of communication, these are communication activities that show that we are doing PR”; All stakeholders that seek assistance or information are directed to the PR officer as first contact person”; “Yes. We are constantly updating the stakeholders on our operations, performance products and services, markets, policies and projects being undertaken. We monitor public opinion and where necessary take required measures to address negative publicity”.

Only three PR Practitioners agreed that although it exists, it is very minimal because it is sometimes difficult to get information from management. Therefore, “poor communication skills” is an obstacle preventing PR from being practiced at its best. One said “it’s minimal because “its effectiveness is not proven as most of the time it is the organisation communicating to its publics and not much is done to encourage the publics to communicate with the organisation”. Another said “it’s minute because management sees the need for it but they don’t know how to utilise it”. After further probing the

interviewee said management does not know how to utilise PR because the PR Officer is not involved in decision making even for issues affecting PR, adding that the PR Officer is not provided with adequate information to carry out the job.

These affirmations that PR does exist in the organisation still reinforce the idea that PR is all about publicity and public information. The responses show that PR in this organisation is all about information dissemination. Even those who see it as minimal, think so because they are not provided with enough information to pass onto the stakeholders.

5.2.3 Theme 3: Role/Function of PR

Given the understanding of PR revolving around communication, publicity, image building and public information, the PR practitioners were asked to elaborate on the role of PR in the organisation and asked to give a list of activities that they believed a PR practitioner should carry out. Five activities were identified namely, that of spokesperson, information dissemination, production of publications, events management and link between the organisation and the public. When probed further five practitioners indicated it was their job to speak on behalf of the organisation on any matter. However, they agreed that the Chief Executive Officer could speak on behalf of the organisation, as could the heads of various departments as experts on subjects requiring technical expertise.

All the nine unanimously agreed that the role of a PR practitioner is to disseminate information on the organisation to the public, come up with relevant publications such as newsletters and magazines, and produce customised publicity information suitable for radio and television programmes,

write news releases about events taking place in the organisation and address meetings and embark on campaigns and other events to promote the organisation. Two respondents summed it up as follows:

“in a nutshell the PR officer ensures that the organisation’s image is portrayed in a positive light”. Another said” the relationships the organisation has with its stakeholders depend on us. We go out there to meet the people. There are sustained meetings by the campaign staff and we issue press releases from time to time, we communicate in any way we can”.

What came out clearly here is the communicator role, which encompasses information and publicity. Also prominent is the relationship building role practitioners perceived they had played satisfactorily by interacting with stakeholders through publicity, public information and events management activities such as addressing meetings. These interactions indicate that the practitioners perceive the role of PR as building and enhancing the image and brand of the organisation through their interaction with the stakeholders. One practitioner exclaimed:

“Actually our relationship with clients is not limited to business transactions. We visit their areas to promote, improve and monitor our image and brand recognition and identification. This way we make sure they know us and promote loyal and lasting relationships”.

On this note the practitioners were asked to list the core activities for which they are responsible in the organisation. What emerged reaffirmed what had become apparent through out the interviews, namely that PR practitioners mostly concentrate on publicising the organisation such as by attending fairs and exhibitions, making programmes for radio and television, writing for publications such as newsletters, brochures and advertising. They also

prepared for events such as Farmers' day and carrying out campaigns to sensitise the public about the outbreak of diseases such as Foot and Mouth, accompanying the CEOs or Minister of Agriculture when they address public gatherings to capture what they are saying to write news releases and make programmes for radio and television.

A few practitioners who are deployed in specialised departments such as NAMPAAD, Agricultural Research and parastatals would be doing a bit of everything listed above. These specialised departments have one PR practitioner each. However, those at MoA would not be doing all of the above activities, but depending on their section, they will be concentrating on television or radio programmes, campaigns or publications. Note that unlike the specialised departments and parastatal, which are still accountable and part of the MoA, the only practitioners are those within the division of Broadcasting (television and radio), publications and the Campaigns unit, which sensitises the public to agricultural issues. They disseminate information to the public. Those in the specialised departments and parastatals also contribute or feed these units.

The core activities of the practitioners appear to be that of publicity and information dissemination in PR. It also shows that PR concentrates on low level technical functions and, therefore, is not strategic.

The respondents were also asked whether they think they have the same perceived functions of PR as the management of the organisation and whether they think this interfered in any way with them doing their job to the best of their ability. The question had a negative response from all nine respondents. They believed that because PR is misconstrued in the organisation, they find themselves doing jobs outside what they believe are

their duties, such as, attending meetings dealing with issues far removed from their duties, dealing with human resource issues and marketing. One responded said:

“whenever something comes up and they don’t know whom to assign, it always goes to PR, even the ladies at the switchboard, when a client asks for someone and they don’t know the person, they transfer them to PR”.

I believe the above responses show that although the PR practitioners are split on whether management understand PR the same way they do (note that seven PR practitioners said management did not have the same understanding and two said they had the same understating), they show that there is no common understanding seeing that management expect them to do everything and anything that they tell the practitioners to do. Consequently practitioners feel that management are interfering and not respecting their job descriptions as they make them carry out a variety of duties. This shows that there is no clear role for PR in the organisation.

5.2.4 Theme 4: Constraints

When asked whether there were any constraints in carrying out their job, Seven PR practitioners cited management’s lack of understanding of PR as an obstacle. They PR practitioners felt that they were made to do any job that needed to be done regardless of whether it was part of their job profile or not. They felt this wasted their time as they could be doing something relevant to their job. They cited examples such as attending career fairs where they are made to talk about job prospects in their organisation which they felt is the duty of the Human Resources Department.

The two who do PR in addition to their job cited lack of training as the core constraint. They felt strongly that management interferes because they are told what to do instead of being given the opportunity to develop PR skills. Also, they pointed out that the fact that management does not take a stand and allow them to focus on specific tasks is interference. One exclaimed “you would think they know that no one can focus on two jobs successfully. But then its not surprising PR is not taken as a job here”. They elucidate that doing two jobs hampers them from doing both their core jobs and PR effectively and leads to conflict.

Another constraint which they all except two respondents noted was limited finance to carry out their job. One said they interfere because “they don’t give me an opportunity to reach clients the best way I know how as they always say there is no money for PR activities”. They explained that they were never given enough financial support because of the view that they are wasting money and they are not able to show results for what they have done. The reason they gave for not showing results is that they deal with “perceptions and attitudes that are hard to measure”. They pointed out that their superiors always want them to attend fairs and exhibitions but did not want to release money to make their stalls presentable as they believed it was unnecessary. One summed it up by saying “they forget that people will only visit your stall if it is attractive”.

The PR practitioners attributed this weakness to the fact that they are often misplaced in the organisational hierarchy, reporting to people who do not understand their job. They maintained that for PR to be effective there is need for it to have its “own budget for advertising products and services of the organisation”. They also mention that they are placed under directors or

managers whom they believed “do not understand that results will not be visible in the short term”.

Another point they saw as a constraint was that the PR unit or department is generally understaffed, sometimes with one person doing a bit of everything. They contended that this led to inefficiency and effectiveness.

It is clear that these constraints are the result of a lack of clarity of the PR role and value. The fact that PR has *ad hoc* status and is understaffed shows that it is a function that is taken for granted. Consequently, it is believed that anyone can be able to practise it and carry out such responsibilities. It then becomes apparent that PR cannot make any contribution as it is taken for granted. Also, seeing that the practitioners do not measure what they do also work against the contribution and value of PR as its existence cannot be justified.

5.2.5 Theme 5: Structure

As a result of the practitioners elucidating that one of their challenges was poor reporting structures, they were asked to expound on the PR department structure and reporting lines of the most senior practitioner. Various reporting lines came to light such as Corporate Services, Human Resources, Marketing, Information and Communication Technology and the CEO. Five of the respondents said PR was under the Director of Corporate Services together with such departments as human resources and purchasing. One said PR fell under Human Resources but because he is also a Veterinary Technician he reports to the Veterinary department as well. He explained however that he is never appraised on his PR duties because it is not his core job. One person reports to the Marketing Manager, while another reports to

the Chief Executive Officer although he is also not appraised on his PR duties as he is in the Animal Production section. While yet another reports to the Head of Information and Communication Technology who in turn reports to the Director of Support Services. The one who reported to the Marketing Manager said "I report to the marketing manager, odd huh"? When asked why she thinks it is odd she responded "How can I function under a department that doesn't appreciate what I do. I have a hard time accessing finance for my job".

These reporting lines show that PR is not empowered because it is subordinated to other functions and as such cannot play a significant role in the organisation. Except for the one reporting to the CEO it clearly shows that it is operating at a very low level where it cannot make any impact in the organisation. What also comes to light is that it is not valued when people from other professions can do it and not be appraised on the duties.

In light of the above structure they were asked whether they considered themselves as a part of the management team. All practitioners did not consider themselves part of the management team. They explained that they are not involved in the management decision making forums as they were placed low down on the organisational hierarchy. They clarified that in order for one to qualify to be part of management they either have to be at the level of Director or Manager and none of them was at that level. However, two mentioned that once in a while when there is a PR issue they are invited to the meeting, and not to make a decision on the issue or anything, but just to sit in and listen to get first hand information and answer questions if any.

This still emphasise the fact that PR is taken for granted and is not seen as adding value because decision makers are not PR practitioners and yet they

make PR decisions. Therefore, PR not being part of management makes it a low level function that is not valued. As practitioners are not part of management they do not make any decisions or policies in their field.

5.2.6 Theme 6: Strategy

The PR practitioners were asked whether they strategised on how best to carry out their duties. The PR practitioners explained that organisational strategies are formulated by the management team which is made up of Directors of departments and Managers and then they are made known to the head of PR. Five noted that sometimes the head of PR would be in the team, but would still be dictated to because the other functions would be considered first and PR would only fit in to help them achieve their goals and objectives. The five stated that once the strategy is formulated, then the head of PR is responsible for delegating the responsibilities to the PR staff to make sure the organisational strategy is successful. What came to light then is that the practitioners are held responsible for that part of the PR strategy they have been assigned. Those who work alone said they were held accountable for the strategies.

The respondents were further asked whether they made any attempt to measure what they do after they are given their share of activities, specifically the measurement of the impact of their programmes. All the respondents said except for customer feedback there was no measurement of the PR programmes that they carried out because they did not know how to do it. They mentioned that if they were trained they would be able to conduct such an assessment. One respondent mentioned that she carries out a customer service survey annually to see how the organisation is rated. Probed further on whether each programme is evaluated she answered in the negative.

When asked whether they thought the PR they practice is strategic and adds value to the organisation the responses were irrelevant showing that the practitioners did not know what strategic PR is. They simply emphasised their information dissemination role to their clients.

These responses showed that the PR practitioners do not have a say in the strategies of their functions and that they are being dictated to without consideration for the problems that might arise as a result. It would appear that PR in the organisation is *ad hoc* and not strategic. It also came to light that there is no kind of measurement in all PR programmes in the organisation and therefore, the practitioners have no way of knowing whether they are making any impact or not. As a result it is difficult to know whether the function is making a contribution or not. The assumption then is that the PR practised is not strategic as it cannot be measured and that there is no contribution or there is very little or it is very insignificant because there is no justification for the existence of the function.

5.2.7 Theme 7: Potential of the PR department

Six PR practitioners, felt they were used to their potential but felt that they could offer more if trained. One practitioner said she was not being used to her full potential because she depends on the Marketing Department budget which is hardly enough to allow her to carry out her PR duties such as safeguarding the image of the organisation, disseminating information and attending fairs and exhibitions as well as generating publications and brochures. As a result she pointed out that she is unable to plan ahead as she has no budget. Two said they had no training and as such are unable to tell whether they are used to their potential as they are always told exactly what to do.

Here the respondents showed that they were happy doing technical duties because it is the only PR aspect they know.

5.2.8 Theme 8: Contribution

The practitioners felt that PR contributes to the organisation because it publicises the organisation so that it is known to the stakeholders. Also they were unanimous in pointing out that by publicising and disseminating information they build relationships with the various stakeholders who are then able to know what services they can get from the organisation. They elaborated that by so doing they enhance the image of the organisation and brand recognition.

These responses still showed that for the practitioners, the publicity and information dissemination role of PR in the organisation are the only functions that they know and work hard at.

5.2.9 Theme 9: Value of PR

Asked in what way they think the top management appreciate and value the PR profession, the practitioner responses were divided. Eight thought they believe management appreciates PR but could not elaborate why they thought so. They just said they know that they do appreciate PR. One said "If they did not appreciate us why would they hire us"? The researcher believed that was the general view of all the respondents even though others could not elaborate even when asked to. Only one said he felt management did not appreciate PR because they did not involve PR in decision making.

This shows that PR is taken for granted so that even the practitioners do not bother to work hard at making it to be recognised and valued like other professions. It may explain why the PR presence is not felt as it is subordinated to other functions.

Asked if they think other people in the organisation other than management appreciate and see the value of PR, six practitioners said they believe other people in the organisation appreciate and value PR because they visit the department if they needed information or sometimes provide feedback on where they could improve. However, three respondents out of the nine said because people don't understand what the role of PR is they do not utilise it. One of the three said

“some heads of Departments seem not to appreciate the value of free publicity. It is not easy to make Directors avail themselves to a press interview on their area of expertise”.

Another said

“PR is new, so they don't know much about it. So they wouldn't know whether it's good, bad or adding value. We still have a long way to go”.

Here it seems the practitioners believe that the lack of understanding on the part of non-practitioners is the obstacle to the proper and honest evaluation of PR in the organisation. Other practitioners believe the fact that they get feedback from the non-practitioners is a sign that they are being valued and appreciated.

5.3 THEMES ON THE FINDINGS OF THE HEADS OF DEPARTMENT OR UNIT

5.3.1 Background

This group was also asked to talk about themselves when the interview started. The researcher introduced herself and told them the purpose of the interview. In turn, they were also asked to introduce themselves and to give their first names, education, their position in the department or unit hierarchy, their title, length of time that they have been with the organisation and in the department or unit.

Out of the 12 interviewed, four held doctorates in various agricultural disciplines and eight held Masters degrees in various disciplines. They were either heads of department or unit or acting head of department/unit at the time the interview was conducted. All of them had been with the organisation for not less than seven years.

5.3.2 Theme 1: Understanding of PR

It was pertinent that the researcher gets the views and opinions of the heads of departments or units on what PR means to them in order to compare them to those of the practitioners, to find out if they have the same understanding. This is important because for PR to make any contribution there has to be understanding between the two as they work together.

The responses to this question had three general ideas running throughout the interviews being, “the organisation’s communication with the outside; selling the organisation to the public and creating a favourable image for the organisation”. The respondents believed that “PR is the organisation

communicating with the public by imparting information to the outside stakeholders”, it is the publicising of the organisation through dissemination of information”. It is about image building, relationships and creating a good image for the organisation. In disseminating the information the respondents believed that the stakeholders would know more about the organisation. The responses also showed that the respondents believed that by disseminating information PR is building a good image about the organisation. Some of the responses are;

“PR is that part of the organisation which is responsible for selling and marketing the organisation. It is that part which helps to inform customers about what is happening in the organisation”; “the management of information about an organisation and its dissemination”; “an area that seeks to inform the public of the functions of the organisation to maintain and build a good image and ensure that the institution is in touch with the public”; “Duties that link the general public through publicity, specifically the function of an organisation mainly concerned with attempting to create favourable public opinion for the organisation”.

The above responses show that the respondents, who in this case could be called management because they constitute the decision making body of the organisation, emphasised the communication, marketing and image custodian role of PR. Their understanding of PR revolved around these three roles. No one mentioned the internal stakeholders, but, as with the PR practitioners it was all about people outside the organisation. When asked what they meant by “publics or stakeholders” they only referred to those customers or stakeholders outside the organisation. The assumption here is that internal stakeholders were not “stakeholders”, that is, they do not warrant any PR effort or recognition.

Their responses are similar to those of the practitioners, and emphasise publicity, public information and image building. They differed with the practitioners on the marketing role as the practitioners did not mention it.

Based on this understanding they were asked if they think PR exists in their organisation. All the respondents agreed that PR does exist in the organisation although, eight pointed out that there is still room for improvement as they felt that the organisation is not selling itself sufficiently. Four respondents believed that PR exists and is doing well. The four explained that there are differing opinions on the role of PR in the organisation because departments do not utilise it and prefer to do their own PR. They maintained that when departments don't cooperate and utilise PR it will seem as though it does not exist.

These four justified the existence of PR by pointing out that

“the PR office does promotional activities, publications and informs the public through newsletters on what is happening in the organisation”; Another one said “the organisation always interacts with other stakeholders through the PR office”.

Like the PR practitioners the feeling here is that if there is publicity and information dissemination then PR exists. The assumption therefore, is that the role of PR is publicity and public information.

5.3.3 Theme 2: PR Role/Function

Having agreed that PR does exist in the organisation the heads of department or unit were also asked to list the activities that they perceive should be carried out by a PR practitioner. The respondents believe that the job of a PR

Officer is to be a "liaison; bridge; spokesperson; marketing; creating or promoting awareness; and produce publications.

They were further asked to describe the activities that they knew the PR practitioners in the organisation carried out. They all stated that the job of the PR practitioners in their organisation is publicising and promoting the organisation. Four specifically mentioned the production of publications; writing news releases; campaigns; and attending fairs and exhibitions. Three added that they organised press conferences and coordinate visits to the organisation and one mentioned that they spoke on behalf of the organisation.

The responses showed that there is agreement between the practitioners and the heads of departments or units that PR is about publicity and public information. However there was disagreement regarding their being the spokespersons of the organisation as all managers except one did not mention it. For the 11 who did not mention the spokesperson role, when asked if they did not think that the practitioners should speak on behalf of the organisation they stated that the PR practitioners were not part of management and therefore, did not have enough information to do so.

When asked if the activities or jobs of the practitioners in the organisation are up to their expectations they all responded negatively. They cited reasons such as understaffing of the PR department "to do a good job effectively and efficiently" and lack of access to information. They explained that the practitioners may not have adequate information because they are not part of the decision making forums. One explained that practitioners are not proactive, and that they get instructions from management on what to do.

Two of the respondents noted that they believed that because PR is new, it may not be utilised properly, therefore it would be difficult to say whether the practitioners are doing what they are supposed to. They highlighted that the problem may be that the non-PR practitioners do not know and understand much about PR. They further said there is a good chance that the PR practitioners are not given a chance to prove their worth.

It would appear that PR was not performing up to expectations because some heads of department felt it was understaffed or small, that there are information bottle necks because of bureaucracy as well as lack of knowledge and understanding on the role of PR on the part of the management. The researcher assumes that because the respondents perceive the function of the PR practitioners as publicising the organisation and providing information they rate their job as not satisfactory if they don't play these two roles as adequately as they would have liked. It is also clear that the heads of departments or unit do not have clear expectations, but the limited knowledge they have shape their perceptions.

Asked if they think the practitioners know what they expect from them, different opinions surfaced. All based their expectations on the job profile of the PR practitioner, but generally explained that because it is too general it is difficult to know whether they share the same understanding. They explained that where one person would expect the emphasis to be on one thing the other person may emphasise something else. As one respondent said "I don't expect them to have the same understanding as mine because they are trained. There will always be this thing called expectation gap".

It is therefore apparent that the responses show that there are differing view points and differing expectations as everyone is using their own standards. It may be because there are no clear roles to guide both the non-PR

practitioners and the practitioners on the role of PR and what to expect. This shows that PR is done haphazardly otherwise people would have clear expectations.

The respondents were further asked whose responsibility it is to help other departments regarding PR issues or problems in the organisation. There was no common answer here as well. Six of the respondents noted that it is PR unit that helps other departments; four did not know; one said it was the head of department; and one said it was the CEO. Even the six who mentioned that PR was responsible for helping other departments in PR issues added that they only occasionally consulted the practitioner. They pointed out that they are more senior and since PR would still consult the executive management the same way, it would be easier and faster to solve their own PR problems, where necessary, in consultation with the executive management. The four who said they did not know mentioned that it is difficult to say as each department seemed to be doing their own thing. They mentioned that the problem might be that there is a lack of understanding on the role of PR in the organisation.

The responses here show that PR practitioners are not treated as professionals as they are not consulted on issues affecting their profession. This leads to the organisation not feeling their presence as it is assumed that anyone can do what they are supposed to do.

5.3.4 Theme 3: Knowledge/Education

The respondents were asked whether in their view they think the PR practitioners in the organisation know and understand what they are doing. Once again there was uncertainty in the responses because the PR role in the organisation is not clear. All they could do was speculate that the practitioners

may know and understand what they are doing, but may be constrained by lack of empowerment to carry out their duties to the best of their ability. Nine respondents believed that people in the organisation including management in general do not really understand what PR is including the role it should play. They said there may be a need to have understanding and education on what PR is all about before they pass judgement. To quote them the respondents said

“I get the impression that the PR office is not empowered sufficiently to execute the functions it should”; “They may understand what they are doing, but they are limited in the execution of their job because of a not so supportive environment ... they are not part of the Management Consultative Committee”; “May be I’m not qualified to answer that question”.

The Management Consultative Committee is the decision making body of one of the parastatals of the MoA. Only three respondents said the practitioners knew what they were doing.

The respondents were also asked whether they thought it was necessary for one to have a qualification in PR in order to be a PR practitioner. Ten respondents indicated that a qualification in PR is necessary to perform their job effectively and efficiently. They noted that education would help the practitioner to “learn the tools of the trade” as one respondent put it. They believe that “education is crucial for any profession to be understood, appreciated and be visible”. They believed that with the relevant qualification PR would make a significant contribution because it would be visible. Two respondents, however, did not think education is necessary. One of the respondents noted that “it is not absolutely essential if the Officer is intelligent and the functions of the office are well defined”. Another one pointed out that

it might not be that necessary “because there are people who are natural in PR”.

The discerning voices in this question show that they have the same thinking as those departments where a person would be a Veterinary Technician, for example, and be doubling up as a PR practitioner as indicated in responses in the previous questions. They believe that anyone can be a PR practitioner. Although the reasons are different the practitioners also think a relevant qualification is important. It shows that both the non-PR practitioners and the PR practitioners believe any qualification is fine.

On this note the respondents were then asked if in their opinion they think the PR department in their organisation is manned by appropriately qualified people. Nine respondents noted that some of the personnel are qualified while others are not. They elaborated that where there were qualified personnel there were limitations such as under-staffing in the department where one person is a “jack of all trades” and “management not being supportive”. They believed some PR practitioners do not have the necessary skills as they have been doing the same things for many years demonstrating that they don’t have skills and initiative as “they don’t move with the times or demonstrate that they know more”. Three did not think anyone is qualified because to them PR did not demonstrate any knowledge.

These responses showed that the heads of departments realise that some PR practitioners lack knowledge of their profession, more so because they don’t seem to be showing any initiative.

5.3.5 Theme 4: Constraints

Since they kept pointing out that practitioners may be having problems in executing their roles, the respondents were asked to elaborate on the constraints or to comment whether there was any interference in the work of the practitioners. There was a general consensus that management may be interfering in the job of the PR practitioner mostly because they really do not understand their role and because PR is not part of decision making. As a result they elaborated that where other functions made decisions for themselves PR decisions were made by a group that did not know much about PR. One respondent said:

“Management prescribes what the PR office should do, to me that is not being supportive. I don’t know whether that qualifies as interference or constraint, but I think it is a question of structure”.

Another one said “It should first be clear what the PR office should do then we would be able to see whether anybody is interfering or not”.

The responses highlight the lack of clarity on the role of PR and what it stands for. What is apparent is that both the practitioners and the non-practitioners realise that there is some sort of interference even though they are not sure exactly what it is. However, they agree that lack of knowledge and role clarity within PR is a big issue.

5.3.6 Theme 5: Structure

Another theme that was pertinent was the organisational structure pertaining to a PR department. Respondents were asked to comment on the reporting structures of the PR Department. Can it deliver the way it is or does it need changing? Various opinions were expressed as the PR reporting structures

are different between departments and between parastatals. One reported to the Human Resources Manager, another to the Director, Corporate Services, one other to the Head of Information and Communication Technology and yet another to the Marketing Manager. Only one reported to the CEO. All the heads of departments or units felt that PR should report to the highest level and be made part of that office so that it is empowered to know what is happening in the organisation. They believed that it would then deliver without a problem as it would be monitored from the highest level of management and given the necessary support to carry out its duties.

What became evident is that senior PR practitioners are not part of the management team as they do not attend high level meetings and therefore, do not make decisions. As a result the executive management makes key decisions on PR issues. These responses are the same with the PR practitioners who also affirmed that they are too junior to make any impact in the organisation because they do not make PR decisions.

5.3.7 Theme 6: Strategy

When asked who decided the PR strategies, six respondents said the top management and the PR practitioner are responsible. Their reason is that management makes PR decisions and instructs the PR practitioner. However, the respondents noted that the PR practitioner holds the ultimate responsibility, hence, it is up to them to explain their problems if they are unable to carry out their duties. They emphasised that this is a structural problem and unless it is changed there is nothing that can be done to improve the situation. Four respondents said the PR practitioners are responsible because they are the ones implementing the strategies. Two respondents did not know.

The responses here are the same as those of the practitioners' as they also show that the ultimate responsibility lies with the practitioner because it is not the decision maker who matter but who ensures that the objective or goal is reached that matters.

5.3.8 Theme 7: Value of PR

Eight respondents did not think PR is making any significant contribution or adding value to the organisation for various reasons. They maintained that the organisation "remains unsold to the public". They felt that "the image of the organisation can be enhanced if the PR department is supported". The respondents noted that "the PR presence is not felt". Another group felt that PR is not making any significant contribution because its role is not yet fully understood. Four respondents believed that through publications such as the newsletters and the attendance of fairs and exhibitions PR is making a contribution, adding, that more could be done to make it valuable.

5.3.9 Theme 8: Contribution

Asked to make suggestions on what the PR department should do to make a significant contribution to the organisation they indicated that the head of PR should be part of management "and act as a clearing house for all communication with stakeholders". They believed that if it is included as part of management then it would be on par with other functions and it would be able to make decisions and demonstrate its capability. The respondents also felt that "the department should sell itself by educating all management regarding its role so that they appreciate its importance". Other suggestions were that the department should have experts in the various agricultural disciplines so that they understand issues better and can be able to market the organisations' programmes better. The respondents also suggested that

the small PR departments should be expanded so that they carry out their roles more efficiently.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The findings of this research show that PR in the organisation is mainly publicity and public information and as such it is technical and operating at low levels. No one person has any qualification in PR, but media and journalism are the most represented professions because the emphasis is on technical PR. To show that it is not valued some departments and parastatals in the agricultural institution do not even bother employing PR practitioners but use people they have with no PR experience or qualification. The structure is also not supportive as PR is made to be subservient to other professions making it difficult to be heard at the highest level because it does not have access to top management. However, the main issue appear to be the lack of understanding, knowledge, appreciation and value of PR. As stated in the literature, this is the root cause of all underestimation of PR in the organisation. This result in PR not to be valued because the practitioners also do not demonstrate any knowledge in their profession. They engage in the low level technical jobs that most people in the organisation can do and as a result reaffirm the belief that, that is what PR is all about. Their lack of knowledge also leads to lack of justification for the existence of the profession and as such their contribution is not visible and the existence of the profession virtually non-existent. The research has also demonstrated that there are constraints that the PR practitioners may be experiencing that hamper them from rising above the technical responsibilities. This shows that PR in the agricultural institution still has a long way to go to be strategic and make a significant contribution more so because the practitioners have indicated that they are happy with what they are doing. The next chapter is a conclusion of this study as well as the recommendations and limitations.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to investigate the contribution of PR in an agricultural institution in Botswana. In doing so a literature review was done to lay the ground regarding the requirements or characteristics that needed to be present in order for PR to make any contribution to any organisation. Therefore, to draw conclusions regarding the contribution of PR in Botswana the empirical findings will be compared to the literature study. In order to do this the researcher finds it imperative to redefine PR.

6.2 DEFINITION/UNDERSTANDING OF PR

As stated in the literature review, there are still various definitions of PR. This has led to misunderstanding, misappropriation and misconception of PR (Kirat, M. 2005), a situation that has been revealed in the empirical findings of this study. A study of PR at MoA in Botswana has revealed that it is haphazard, confused and lacks direction. This study has revealed that both management and PR practitioner don't have the knowledge of what PR is and what it entails and as a result there are no clear cut expectations and guidance as to what role PR should play. At the same time, PR practitioners themselves lack direction and knowledge and embark on whatever they are told to do. This is not surprising given the fact that PR has for a long time been struggling to come up with a single accepted definition of itself (Hutton 1999:206). What has surfaced in this study is that PR practitioners define it in terms of the publicity and public information activities whereas the management define it the same way but add the marketing dimension to it. Management expect PR practitioners to market the organisation and its

product to potential clients whereas the practitioners believe their role is information dissemination and publicity. With this state of affairs there are differing expectations and this leads to confusion and PR being subsumed by other functions such as marketing.

The literature (Steyn & Puth, 2000) also states that the word “public relations” has negative connotations as it is associated with publicity and public information. As a result many organisations are moving away to terms such as Corporate Communication “to keep abreast with changes and development in the field” and that show the strategic entity of the profession in its search for excellence and stronger scientific base”. In MoA PR professionals are still referred to as Information and Public Relations Officers or simply PR officers because PR is publicity and public information. Not one officer is referred to otherwise.

Therefore, this study has revealed that PR in MoA is characterised by misunderstanding and confusion of the profession. PR is also practised in the traditional publicity and public information model, and as during the very early stages of PR, all practitioners play the technical role, regardless of where they are in the organisational structure. The main aim is to disseminate good information about the organisation and to enhance its image amongst the stakeholders.

6.3 THE ROLE OF PR

As mentioned above PR in MoA means to provide publicity and public information. Practitioners are mostly former journalists and have qualifications in journalism or an agricultural field as the empirically study has revealed. Activities undertaken by practitioners at MoA are mainly technical such as producing newsletters and other communication material, covering the

Minister or CEO, writing press releases, participating in fairs and exhibitions, editing and events management. These represent low levels of operation within the organisation and do not form part of any decision making but implement decisions made by others. The literature states that technicians provide “journalistic skills” and implement policy decisions made by others, hence, the conclusion that all practitioners at MoA are technicians who do not take part in decision making.

These activities carried out by the practitioners in MoA indicate that they are in the press agency and publicity model which portrays the one way approach to PR as their aim is to disseminate information to the stakeholders without any effort to get feedback. The empirically study showed that PR approach at MoA is one way in the direction of the stakeholders only and does not flow back to the organisation. The practice of PR in MoA is similar to that of the Arab world where Kirat (2005) notes that management is not interested in the publics' feedback or public opinion. The author further elaborates that in such a scenario the result is a misconception of the profession and an insufficient attention paid to the profession by management. The findings of this study have shown that PR is not given sufficient attention as in some departments the task is done by persons for whom it is not even their core job

This implies that MoA as an organisation has a closed boundary that cannot be penetrated and, therefore, cannot exchange information with its stakeholders. This is affirmed by the study where PR practitioners said they have a difficult time accessing information within the organisation. The literature review indicates that in a closed system communication is marginal and this is what has been depicted by the findings of the study at MoA. What the findings have also revealed is that departments in MoA are not interactive and coordinated because it was demonstrated that each department did their own thing when it came to PR issues as they noted that they consult PR

sometimes as there was “no hard and fast rule” that they should. According to the literature review this is another characteristic of a closed organisational system that does not augur well for effectiveness and excellence.

What also came to light in this study is that MoA does not have anyone playing the mirror function role, that is, giving the organisation the view points of the stakeholders. Practitioners in the organisation only concentrate on giving information and viewpoints of the organisation to the stakeholders. Therefore, these PR practitioners in MoA can be said to be playing only the window role in the organisation.

According to literature, for PR to be effective and make a significant contribution in an organisation there is need for the most senior PR practitioner to be performing the manager role, which is not the case in MoA as all practitioners are engaged in low level technical activities. The result of this study shows that the role of PR at MoA cannot make a significant contribution as it is practiced at too low a level and is not part of the decision making, but implements decisions made elsewhere.

6.3.1 Factors affecting the role enactment

In drawing a conclusion it is important to highlight factors that may affect the role enactment of PR in an organisation. The literature states that more often than not management dictate the kind of PR practised in an organisation (Hogg & Doolan, 1999; Dolphin & Fan, 2000; Ni, 2006). The findings of this study affirm that PR at MoA is dictated by management because it has revealed that they make decisions on what needs to be done. The practitioners at MoA implement the decisions made by management and, therefore, end up stuck in technical roles because that is what they are told to do and that is the only role they know. That is why the heads of sections or

units pointed out that the practitioners are not pro-active, but reactive because decisions are made in forums that they are absent from.

Literature also points out that the environment of an organisation may also influence the kind of PR practiced within it (Sweep *et al*, 1994). The Heads of non-PR functions in MoA have indicated that the environment in the organisation is not supportive to encourage PR to function at its best. They pointed out that there is still a lack of understanding and support which leads to a lack of information to enable the practitioners to carry out their jobs effectively and efficiently. They pointed out that PR has not been given the autonomy to practice the profession as they see fit and to make decisions as professionals in their own right.

The literature indicates that the environment an organisation is operating in influences the PR practiced. It states that the technical role of PR is more dominant in organisations “with non-threatening and static environments and the managerial role is more common in “unstable and threatening environments” (Johnson & Acharaya, 1982 in Hogg and Doolan, 1999). The environment in MoA can be described as non-threatening and static because as a government department there is no competition or threat of any kind as its mandate is to provide a service to the masses, whether it is delivering or not, its stakeholders will still depend on it as it is a free service. Hence, the technical PR practiced at MoA could be the result of the environment as there are no challenges.

6.4 STRATEGIC PR

The literature has indicated that the only way PR can make a contribution to the organisation is if it is practiced strategically and seen as making a contribution to strategic planning. As stated in Chapter 3, strategy is about

continuously adapting the organisation to threats and opportunities in the environment and taking advantage of strengths and weaknesses which will enhance the organisation's competitive advantage. In order to come up with a holistic organisational strategy all functions should be involved in the formulation and implementation of the strategy (Moss *et al.*: 2000; Moss & Warnaby, 1998; Steyn and Puth, 2000). Therefore, to be involved in strategy formulation, the literature shows that the most senior PR practitioner should be part of the decision makers otherwise other non-PR personnel will make decisions for PR. This is what is happening at MoA, where the most senior practitioners are not part of the decision makers.

Literature also shows that surveying and monitoring the environment to identify threats and opportunities is the work of PR (Moss *et al.*: 1990; Moss & Warnaby, 1998; Steyn and Puth, 2000). Therefore, if PR does not monitor and survey the environment it means it cannot contribute to organisational strategy and to organisational effectiveness and excellence. The result of this study indicates that PR at MoA is not strategic because it does not contribute to strategy formulation through environmental intelligence. Seeing that PR at MoA is not involved in strategy formulation it means its goals may not be strategically aligned with those of the organisation as they are done haphazardly. In this case it becomes apparent that PR at MoA does not make a contribution to the organisational excellence and effectiveness.

Literature also points out that in order for PR to be excellent and effective it has to be able to identify strategic constituencies, that is, stakeholders who can influence the organisation. In MoA practitioners are not strategic because they do not identify strategic stakeholders as the results have revealed. All they do is to cover the Minister or CEOs, write news articles and news releases, among other technical duties. This means that they do not choose who should be targeted as they are not making decisions and do not cover

environmental intelligence. Consequently they do not customise programmes for specific stakeholders as they simply follow their superiors around and carry out their instructions.

The result of this study also showed that internal stakeholders at MoA are not part of the PR effort. Literature has indicated that as ambassadors of the organisation, internal stakeholders are as important as the external stakeholders or even more important as their patriotism is vital for the achievement of the organisational mission, vision and goals.

The literature states that one of the characteristics of strategic PR is “a proactive and accommodative approach and a longer term and non-reactive focus”. This characteristic is absent in MoA as PR was described as reactive by the heads of departments. Another point that shows that PR in MoA is not strategic is the fact that it is focused on technical jobs of writing, editing and production of publicity material and implementing programmes, which are all outputs. The literature suggests that strategic PR “focuses on outcomes and processes and takes steps to be viewed as a strategic business partner of line units (Fleisher, 1998)”. This is not the case with PR at MoA, it does not take any steps to be on the same level as other departments or units in the organisation by showing the impact of their activities on organisational processes and performance. They do not endeavour to change stakeholder perception as this research study shows that they are just imparting information and not evaluating to measure the impact of their campaigns and programmes.

6.4.1 Characteristics needed by a PR Practitioner to be strategic

Literature points out that there are four characteristics that are needed by a practitioner for them to be able to practice strategic PR. These skills are

problem solving skills, research skills, excellent communication skills and the ability to organise and plan (Botha *et al*, 2007: 78 -79). The results of this study have demonstrated that practitioners at MoA are not involved in problem solving because departments solve their own PR problems “as there is no hard and fast rule to consult PR”. What this shows is that the practitioners do not take steps to be viewed as the experts but let the departments function independently. They are not pro-active in approaching departments, but wait for the departments to come to them with their problems. They pass up the opportunity to demonstrate any problem solving skills they might have. The departments then do not have high regard for them and, subsequently, to do their own PR because they assume they can do no better than they could.

By their own admission the practitioners do not do any research but wait for management to tell them what to do. They depend on management for all the information they impart to the stakeholders. Their ability to organise and plan is questionable since they have indicated that they have a problem in accessing funds as they are unable to justify the success or failure of any event or programme they embark on. The practitioners were not asked if they ever checked and verified the information that they got from management. The assumption is that as journalists they would understand the importance of verifying facts. Therefore, with three skills out of four lacking it is obvious that the PR practitioners at MoA cannot practice strategic PR.

6.4.2 Issues management

Literature illustrates that issues management provides an opportunity for PR to showcase its contribution to strategy formulation. It states that PR practitioners managing strategically would be the first to detect issues and inform management and to develop a strategy to deal with them (Steyn 2000).

In this way the organisation would be entirely dependent on PR as its early warning system and thus recognise the essential role the function plays in strategy formulation. PR at MoA is not involved in issues management as it is not strategically managed and is not part of the dominant coalition, hence, it does not act as an early warning system. MoA still practices the “traditional approach” to issues management as “it decides on its plans and dictates them to the stakeholders” (Watson *et al*, 2002: 4) through the PR practitioners.

6.4.3 Knowledge of the Communication department and strategy

Another factor that is pointed out by the literature, is that for PR to play a strategic role in an organisation it has to be practiced by people who have formal education in PR and who understand the managerial role and what it involves (Grunig *et al*, 2002; Steyn, 2000; Kirat, 2005). The literature also indicates that if PR demonstrates and proves that it can offer more it will be recognised and appreciated otherwise it will remain in the low echelon of the organisation. What has been demonstrated by the results of this research is that PR at MoA is practiced by practitioners who are knowledgeable only in technical skills. Note that MoA practitioners do not have any qualifications in PR, but have qualifications in journalism, media and agriculture. As these practitioners do not have any knowledge of the manager role they cannot or are unable to practice strategic PR. Failure to practice strategic PR because of a lack of knowledge leads to PR not making any strategic contribution.

6.4.4 The structure of PR Department

The literature shows that for PR to play a significant contributory role to organisational excellence and effectiveness it should be structured such that it has access to top management and reports to the highest office. “How PR is

regarded by management is essentially related to where the function reports to" (PR Influences, May 2003). Directly reporting to the highest office empowers PR to participate in decision making and to play a strategic advisory role in the organisation. The Excellence Theory states that for PR to be excellent and effective it should not report to another function in the organisation, but should be a management function. Subordinating PR to another function will not allow it to be practiced strategically because it will not have the power to direct resources from one programme to another as the environment dictates. Note that strategic literature points out that PR should adapt the organisation to the ever changing environment, so when the environment changes PR needs to adapt and target the right stakeholders as it sees fit. This is not the case at MoA, where PR reports to other functions in the organisation such as Marketing, Information Technology, Human Resources and Corporate Services. Where PR reports to the CEO, it is not part of the dominant coalition, which still makes it difficult for PR to be strategic as it does not make decisions. Clearly, this indicates that the reporting structures at MoA are not supportive of excellent and effective PR.

The literature also shows that for PR departments to be excellent they need to be integrated so that programmes managed by different departments are coordinated. This is not the case at MoA as different departments within the organisation have their own PR practitioners reporting to different professions. This means that these PR practitioners tailor programmes for their own departments without due regard for organisational communication goals and objectives as they are scattered all over the organisation. Hence, the PR at MoA cannot be excellent and effective.

6.4.5 The value of PR

Literature states that PR has value when its programmes demonstrate that it affects the “cognitions, attitudes and behaviours” of all stakeholders. The literature elaborates that in this way PR will demonstrate that its programmes are effective and contribute to organisational effectiveness (Gruinig *et al.* 2002). In this way the organisation, including the top management, will appreciate and value PR. Literature indicates clearly that PR in any organisation should be recognised for the strategic role that it is playing rather than “for its message delivery role” (PR Influences, February 2003). The results of this study have revealed that PR in MoA is not appreciated and valued as it is still not treated as a line function because it is not able to demonstrate that its programmes have any effect on the attitudes and behaviours of the stakeholders. By their own admission, practitioners do not evaluate their programmes and as they do not tailor programmes for specific stakeholders, they are unable to prove that their programmes have an effect on the stakeholders. The research may conclude, therefore, that PR at MoA has no value to the organisation because of lack of research and evaluation of programmes which leads to ineffective planning. Strategic PR is a result of good search and understanding of the targets that needs to be achieved.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that PR at MoA does not contribute to organisational effectiveness and excellence as its role is not strategic. This is revealed by the fact that it does not conform to what the literature says about strategic PR. Not a single characteristic of excellence as laid down by the Excellence Study (noted in chapter 2.4.4), exists in PR at MoA. Note that the researcher is mindful of the fact that an organisation does not have to have all characteristics of excellence, but what is glaring about PR at MoA is that it

does not have even one characteristic, which means it is far from being excellent and effective. Therefore, this research is able to conclude that MoA PR is far from making any impact on organisational strategy and to organisational excellence and effectiveness as its role is technical and one way. The reason why it is technical is because both management and practitioners do not understand strategic PR and what it involves. Their understanding of PR has not moved beyond the early stages of PR when it was about publicity and public information and was practiced by journalists.

The PR practitioners at MoA do not have the knowledge as they are “journalists in-residence” for the organisation and lack the required professionalism to elevate PR to a more strategic role. They hold qualifications that do not empower them to practice strategic PR. This lack of professionalism by the PR practitioners which is demonstrated by the lack of research and evaluation coupled with poor management, clear defined roles and expectations by the dominant coalition is a cause for concern. The other factor is that PR is not empowered as management still looks at it as a publicity and information dissemination tool thereby perpetrating its technical role. This lack of empowerment of the PR function in the organisation is a direct result of a lack of knowledge and understanding. This deficiency is demonstrated by the fact that some departments and parastatals use staff from within the organisation who have training in various agricultural fields to be their stand-in PR practitioners. As the organisation does not train these people they are not knowledgeable of PR and cannot make any contribution to the organisation. PR needs to be practiced by people who have been formally trained and have knowledge about PR for it to make any excellent and effective contribution.

Furthermore, other departments make PR decisions as PR reports to them within the organisation. As a result these decisions are made without due

regard for the implications on the stakeholders and the resultant consequences. Literature states that where decisions are made with the input of the PR manger, the organisation considers the consequences of its decisions and actions on the stakeholders rather than those of the company. Except for one, the reporting structures at MoA are inappropriate and not supportive of the strategic management of PR. Even the one PR practitioner reporting to the CEO is still challenged in that she is not involved in decision making, a pre-requisite for PR to function effectively. These shortcomings make PR a function that is not valued in the organisation because of a lack of understanding and knowledge. As PR is not strategic its value is not seen and can be described as virtually non-existent” as one respondent said. For PR to be recognised and add value it should play a strategic role. Therefore, MoA PR needs to be re-directed to contribute to organisational excellence and effectiveness.

6.6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.6.1 Understanding

Management attitude towards PR should change. They should make an effort to benchmark and see how PR is practised and utilised in other organisations especially those outside Botswana so that they have a clearer understanding of the concept. This will empower them with better understanding and appreciation of the function and they will not treat it as a soft skill that can be practiced by anyone. A thorough understanding is essential given the fact that a majority of the public served by the organisation is knowledgeable and demanding and has explicit expectations. Therefore, it is important that management match the expectations of the public with knowledge and strategies that can only be possible if there is a strong, effective and efficient PR department. As Kirat (2005: 325) puts it the “public is more demanding

than never before. The new environment they live in requires new behaviour ... and new interaction between the people and the organisation". There is, therefore, a need for management to educate themselves about PR so that they have clear expectations and goals to guide them. A better understanding will reveal the value of PR because it will lead to better PR management and direction. PR should be benchmarked as well to see what their counterparts in other countries are doing.

6.6.2 Knowledge

PR at MoA needs to be headed by a knowledgeable practitioner who has formal education in PR. This person would then be able to educate management and demonstrate what strategic PR is about and what value it can bring to the organisation. This practitioner should be empowered to be part of the dominant coalition to play the counselling and advisory role to management. In this capacity the practitioner should be able to redirect and guide PR from the publicity and public information to strategic PR. This will enable PR in MoA to move from publicity and public information to strategic PR. PR practitioners should then be treated as professionals and encouraged to be pro-active and lead their profession by making strategic decisions for that specific function in the organisation.

6.6.3 Research and evaluation

PR at MoA needs to do research so that they target the right stakeholders and tailor relevant programmes for them. They need to treat all stakeholders equally including the internal stakeholders as this research has revealed that they have all along been forgetting or ignoring internal stakeholders. They need to know that the internal stakeholders are important as they provide the

foundation of the organisation as well as act as the liaison between the organisation and the external stakeholders.

6.6.4 Structure

PR at MoA needs to be elevated to a line function equivalent to other functions and it should have its own director or manager who will help shape PR strategies and goals and align them to the organisational strategy. In this position the PR Manager would take part in decision making and be included with the dominant coalition to enable the function to have a real influence. MoA should also integrate the PR function to allow it to be uniform in all departments so that programmes and issues are dealt with in the same manner. There should be a clear PR plan with objectives and goals to be achieved so that it is not seen as being purely technical.

6.6.5 Staffing

Staffing levels in some parastatals of MoA are very low with one person doing a bit of everything. Those with officers from other organisational functions performing PR jobs should hire knowledgeable PR practitioners to enable the function to realise its potential.

6.6.6 Budget

In order for PR to deliver it should have a budget that it can control. At the moment it does not have one. Strategic PR needs resources for research, evaluation and strategic planning. Giving PR its own budget will allow it to prioritise, juggle and utilise the funds where appropriate depending on the dictates of the environment.

6.7 FUTURE RESEARCH

An exploratory study could be conducted on the state of PR in Botswana as a whole. It would be interesting if an in-depth analysis is conducted on the understanding and expectations of management of PR in organisations in Botswana. This would reveal the extent to which PR is understood and what role it plays in organisations in Botswana.

It would also be beneficial if a study is conducted on the knowledge base of the practitioners in Botswana and the position requirements organisations stipulate when hiring PR practitioners. This way more would be known about the practice of PR in Botswana and hopefully lead to improvement of the PR profession.

Quantitative studies can also be carried out on the suggested research for data comparison.

6.8 LIMITATIONS

There were several limitations experienced in this study. The aim of this study was to record the interviews whilst also taking notes as back up. Most the respondents felt intimidated mainly because they felt they would be exposing their organisations and that would lead to a reprimand. They noted their concerns and the recording was only done where the respondent felt comfortable. As a result only two interviews were recorded while the rest was note taking.

Another limitation is that the study was specific to the headquarters of the Ministry of Agriculture and its parastatals and as such the results cannot be generalised beyond the organisation. Parastatals were included in this study

to increase the sample of practitioners otherwise there would not have been more than three practitioners taking part.

Another limitation is that literature is limited as there are no institutions offering PR at a higher level in Botswana. It was a challenge to access the e-library as the pass word was constantly rejected. However, efforts were made to access whatever literature was available.

6.9 CONCLUSION

PR is a profession that is steadily gaining momentum in Botswana's public institutions, including the agricultural sector. It is important that it is practiced in a manner that will add value to the organisation and that the role and expectations are clearly defined so that there is no confusion and misunderstanding among the practitioners and the dominant coalition. Otherwise the result of such misunderstanding could filter down to the stakeholders and PR as a frontline function will be rendered ineffective and looked down upon in the organisation.

PR practitioners should strive to keep up to date with new techniques and be on a quest to elevate the profession to greater heights by shedding the technical role. Those who got into PR from other professions should not only wait for the organisation to train them, they should make individual efforts to educate themselves on the body of knowledge of PR by joining professional bodies and attending professional gatherings. Self empowerment is the weapon that this profession can wield in the quest for recognition. This is the only way PR in the organisation can be turned around. It is time that PR professionals stand up for their profession and stop blaming management for their lack of recognition.

Measurement is key in everything, and professionals should learn to measure everything they do otherwise there will be no progress. Studies have shown that PR faces many challenges, but as Kirat (2005) and the Excellence Study point out, PR differs from country to country but the characteristics of excellence and effectiveness remain the same. PR should strive to be strategic as it is the only way it can move forward and be valued as a line function otherwise it will remain a soft skill that is abused by all professions. PR has potential for growth only if the practitioners stand up to be counted. Otherwise the profession will continue to be subjugated to other professions and it will have no voice in an organisation.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A. Letter to management of organisation

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First Name: Lesego Patricia

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72886304

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I am a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology doing an MTech. in Public Relations Management. As part of the requirements for my study I need to conduct a mini dissertation titled: **THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS TO AN AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTION IN BOTSWANA.**

I am writing to request your organisation to take part in this research process by allowing me to interview some of your staff members on the above topic. I would also request that your organisation provide a contact person. Two groups of people would be interviewed at different times. The first group would comprise of public relations practitioners in your organisation and the other would comprise of managers from other departments within your organisation not involved in public relations, but working with public relations practitioners. The interviews will be tape recorded and later transcribed to make up the findings of the research.

Answers on this study will be treated as confidential and will be released in the final document only as summaries in which no individual answers can be identified. Should your organisation wish to see the final product of the research it will be shared.

Your organisation's participation in this study will greatly enhance our understanding of the contribution of public relations in Botswana.

Kindly contact the researcher at anyone of the above addresses or telephone numbers if you have any questions or comments. The same contacts should be used to indicate your willingness to participate.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation in participating in this important study.

Lesego P. Agang (Ms)

Researcher.

Appendix B. Letter to participants (Non PR practitioners)

Researcher: Agang

First Name: Lesego Patricia

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Cell Number: (+267)

I am a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology doing an MTech. in Public Relations Management. As part of the requirements for my study I need to conduct a mini dissertation titled: **THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS TO AN AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTION IN BOTSWANA.**

I am writing to request you to take part in this research at a time to be announced. The aim of the interview is to get your opinion on the subject. You have been chose to participate in this research because your opinion is highly valued as a manager. There will be no right or wrong answers. Your participation will be voluntary, hence the need to ask you to take part.

The information you provide will be treated as confidential. You will not be identified in any document, including the research report by your surname, first name or by any other information. No one, other than the researcher will be informed that you participated in this research. Answers on this study will be treated as confidential and will be released in the final document only as summaries in which no individual answers can be identified. Should you have any queries about the research, now or in the future, you are welcome to contact the researcher at anyone of the above addresses or telephone. Should you wish to see the final product of the research it will be shared with you.

I will appreciate a positive response to take part in this research as it is anticipated that it will serve as a benchmark to help improve the practice of public relations in our country.

Kindly e-mail the researcher to the above address to indicate your willingness to participate.

I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Lesego P. Agang (Ms).

Researcher.

Consent Form

I agree to participate in this research.

.....
Date

.....
Signature

Appendix C. Cover letter to participants (PR practitioners)

Researcher: Agang

First Name: Lesego Patricia

Address: P.O. Box 502460, Gaborone.

E-mail: lagang@bca.bw

Telephone Number: (+ 267) 3650250
72886304

Cell Number: (+267)

I am a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology doing an MTech. in Public Relations Management. As part of the requirements for my study I need to conduct a mini dissertation titled: **THE INVESTIGATION OF THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS TO AN AGRICULTURAL INSTITUTION IN BOTSWANA.**

I am writing to request you to take part in this research at a time to be announced. The aim of the interview is to get your opinion on the subject. You have been chose to participate in this research because your opinion is highly valued as a public relations practitioner. There will be no right or wrong answers. Your participation will be voluntary, hence the need to ask you to take part.

The information you provide will be treated as confidential. You will not be identified in any document, including the research report by your surname, first name or by any other information. No one, other than the researcher will be informed that you participated in this research. Answers on this study will be released in the final document only as summaries in which no individual answers can be identified. Should you have any queries about the research, now or in the future, you are welcome to contact the researcher at anyone of the above addresses or telephone. Should you wish to see the final product of the research it will be shared.

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I thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Lesego P. Agang (Ms).

Researcher.

Consent Form

I agree to participate in this research.

.....
Date

.....
Signature

Appendix D. Interview Schedule for Non PR Practitioners

Instructions for completion

Kindly respond to the questions to the best of your ability.

Section 1: Biographical data.

Section 2: Questions to be filled by non-Public Relations/Communication Practitioners.

Section 1: Biographical Data.

Surname:

First Names:

Name of the organisation you are working for:

Position:

Gender:

Telephone/Cell number:

Highest academic qualification:

E-mail address:

Section 2: Questions

- 1) In your understating what is public relations?
- 2) Based on your understanding of public relations do you think it exists in your organisation? Explain.
- 3) What do you perceive to be the job of a public relations practitioner, that is what activities do you expect them to carry out?
- 4) How would you describe the job of the Public relations practitioners in your organisation? i.e what is it that they do?
- 5) Is it up to your expectations? Explain.
- 6) Would you say they understand and know what they are doing? Explain.
- 7) From your point of view do you think the practitioners in your organisation have the same understanding as you do as to what is expected from them?

- 8) Would you say management interferes in the job of the Public Relations Practitioners or are they left to do their job as professionals who know what they are doing?**
- 9) What do you think of the reporting structures of the Public relations department? Can it deliver the way it is or does it need changing? Explain.**
- 10) In your opinion is the most senior Public Relations practitioner in the organisation a part of the management team? Elaborate.**
- 11) In your opinion who makes public relations policies and/or decisions in your organisation?**
- 12) Who is held accountable for public relations strategies?**
- 13) Who is responsible for helping other departments in public relations issues/problems in your organisation?**
- 14) To what extent would you say the Public Relations practitioners in your organisation are pro-active or re-active?**
- 15) In your opinion is it necessary for one to have a qualification in public relations in order to be a public relations practitioner? Explain.**
- 16) In your opinion does formal education in public relations add to the extent to which public relations can contribute to the organisation?**
- 17) In your opinion do you think the PR department in your organisation is manned by relevant qualified people?**
- 18) In your opinion do you think the public relations department is making a significant contribution and adding value to the organisation? Explain.**
- 19) What would you suggest that the PR departments should do to make a significant contribution to the organisation?**

Appendix E. Interview Schedule for PR Practitioners

Instructions for completion

Kindly respond to the questions to the best of your ability.

Section 1: Biographical data.

Section 2: Questions for Public Relations/Communication Practitioners.

Section 1: Biographical Data.

Surname:

First Names:

Name of the organisation you are working for:

Position:

Gender:

Telephone/Cell number:

Highest academic qualification:

E-mail address:

Section 2: Questions

- 1) In your understanding what is public relations?**
- 2) Based on your understanding of public relations do you think it exists in your organisation? Explain.**
- 3) As a practitioner what do you believe should be the job of a public relations practitioner in an organisation?**
- 4) Do you think the top management team has the same understanding of what PR is as you do?**
- 5) Do you think what they perceive to be your job interferes in anyway with your doing your job to the best of your ability?**
- 6) What exactly is your job in your organisation? Describe the core activities that you do in the organisation.**
- 7) In your opinion is formal education in public relations necessary for one to be a PR practitioner? Explain.**
- 8) What qualification would you say is relevant for one to be a public relations practitioner? Why?**
- 9) What are the constraints that you see in carrying out your job?**
- 10) Which department does public relations fall under in your organisation?**

- 11) To whom does the most senior public relations practitioner report to?**
- 12) Would you consider yourself a part of the management team? Why?**
- 13) Who makes PR policies and strategies?**
- 14) Who is held accountable for all PR strategies?**
- 15) How do you measure the impact of your programmes?**
- 16) Would you say the public relations you practice is strategic? Does it add value to the organisation's strategy? Briefly explain.**
- 17) Do you think your organisation is using you to your full potential? i.e. are you happy with what you do or do you feel you could offer the organisation more. If yes what more can you offer?**
- 18) What would you say is the contribution of public relations in your organisation?**
- 19) In what way do you think the top management team appreciates public relations?**
- 20) Would you say other people in the organisation appreciate and see the value of the public relations profession? Explain.**