Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

An analysis of public relations programme's strategies for sustaining
stakeholder relationship with its key industry partners

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Master of Technology: Public Relations Management

in the Faculty of Informatics and Design

at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

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Cape Town

November 2015

DECLARATION

I, RF KASSONGO, declare that the contents of this dissertation/thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation/thesis 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.

Signature: RF Kassongo   **Date: 11 / 03 / 2016**

ABSTRACT

Public relations (PR) scholars and industry partners continue to emphasise the importance of a sustainable relationship between PR disciplines and key industry

partners. This relationship seeks to respond to stakeholders that remain despondent with the quality of engagement between the South African PR academia and industry. Existing literature in this field argues that PR departments at South African universities are experiencing adverse scrutiny by industry as many current academic programmes do not produce students who are industry ready. To address this critical concern, building and sustaining relations with key stakeholders is imperative. This study examines engagement strategies that the PR programme at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology uses to build and sustain relations with key industry partners. The research draws on two Public Relations theories: stakeholder theory and two-way symmetrical communication to make sense of the strategies used by this programme. It is based on a qualitative approach and an exploratory case study research design. Empirical data were collected through one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions with PR programme staffs, final year PR students and employees from two external PR consultancies. The data were coded and thematically analysed. The main finding of the study is that current engagement strategies are ineffective for relationship building purposes between the PR programme and key industry partners. To sustain mutually beneficial relationships, it is recommended that existing strategies be revised in order to improve relations between the PR department at Cape Peninsular University of Technology (CPUT) and its industry partners, as well as to promote the advancement of both PR as an academic discipline and a profession.

Keywords: *public relations, sustainable relationship, stakeholder, industry partners, PR Discipline, internship, work integrated learning, communication and strategies.*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the Kassongo family.
Your unfailing love, care and support is beyond human understanding.
As a member of this lovely and unique family, I found out that the love of Jesus Christ and the fear of God has enabled us to remain united beyond measure thus we have the ability to do what many cannot do.
"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ." Job 30:21, Job 42:2 & Isaiah 42:6.

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GLOSSARY

Terms/Acronyms/Abbreviations	Definition/Explanation
AIBC	Association of International Business Communication
Communication strategy	Communication strategy is defined as the "*purposeful use of communication by an organisation to fulfil its mission*". The purposeful use makes it "strategic" (Steyn, 2002).
PR Discipline	PR discipline is used to represent the public relations programme.
Key industry partners (KIP)	In this study KIP refers to industry partners including PR interns.
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
Public Relations Programme (PRP)	In this study Public Relation refers to a discipline of study at Cape Peninsula University of Technology
Public Relations	Public relations *"help an organisation and its public adapt mutually to each other"* (Skinner et al. 2010:5).
Stakeholder engagement strategies (SES)	In this case, SES refers to any strategies that PR professionals use to engage with an organisation's stakeholders.
Stakeholder	Stakeholders "any *individual or group who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives*" (Freeman, 1984). The moment they start communicating with an organisation they are considered as an active stakeholder (Grunig 1992:125).
Strategy	Strategy could be seen as *"the thinking, the logic behind the actions"* (Robert, 1992:22). *"It is an indication of an organisation positioning for future, deciding on what should be done rather than on how it should be done"* (Drucker in Steyn, 2002).
Sustainable relations	Harris (2013) states that a sustainable relationship is one that resists the test of time and daily challenges.

Work integrated learning   WIL refers to work based learning and
                                          cooperative education opportunity
                                          (Rensburg & Cant, 2011:120).

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.   Background to study

Interactions between universities and industry began many decades ago and grew prominently in the 1980's (Freitas et al. 2013:51). In spite of the interaction, Ferreira (1999) notes that there was limited research on the relationship between stakeholders and the development of PR as a practice and a discipline throughout the 19th century, although key improvements have been noticed in the 21st century. This view is further supported by Holtzhausen (2005) revealing that PR research with emphases on industry relations is not well documented in Africa. In spite of limited academic research, PR and the broad area of Communication Management are gaining support and earning academic credit as a vital field of study. For example countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Ghana, Uganda and Nigeria have demonstrated that they have the capacity to advance the PR discipline (Ferreira, 1999; Anon, 2014:127).

Despite the visible development in PR education, most existing practitioners did not receive adequate formal education in the discipline (Ferrera, 1999). As a result, the industry faces practical challenges especially in Africa, because PR as an academic programme and profession was developed from a western cultural perspective (Rensburg & Cant, 2011:58). Because of these challenges, the profession has often failed to address the disparity in theory and practice for decades, despite scholarly efforts to implant PR as a reputable discipline of study which can meet industry expectations (Holtzhausen, 2002). This failure can also be blamed on the paucity of empirical studies on the value of interaction and relationship between the PR academia and industry, as well as strategies for initiating these interactions (Holtzhausen, 2002). To this end, Holtzhausen (2002:259) argues that these challenges engender flexibility and critical thinking especially if PR academic programme is expected to be responsive to the need of industry. For the PR discipline to produce well educated students, its educational foundation should incorporate research, service and teaching whilst ensuring that theory meets the needs of professional practice (Van Rooinje (2011). In the same way Swart (2012) emphasises that work integrated learning is critical in order to align teaching with industry goals.

However, poor education in the PR discipline produces secondary knowledge and for (Venter 2004, cited in Venter, 2010) practitioners are unsure of the role they should play

in the organisation. In the case of South Africa, PR students who graduate from institutions of higher learning do not receive adequate training that should prepare them for the world of business. The lack of adequate industry preparedness contributes to negative perceptions about the PR profession. Industry readiness means more business oriented subjects which expose students to the complexities of the industry, and without these subjects industry tends to lose faith in PR graduates (Venter, 2010).

Against the backdrop of these challenges, the South African government believes that to attain the 2030 National Development Plan, a higher level of knowledge output is needed. This can only be achieved when universities of technology and private industry engage with each other (NDP, 2011: 227). For that reason, the Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) is expected to play a critical role in facilitating the need for universities to meet employer's expectations (NDP, 2011: 227). Further, Nzimande (2014) contends that universities of technology must take the onus of creating and sustaining relationship between them and industry partners. The minister of Higher Education further argues that universities should ensure that graduates are well equipped by being exposed to the world of work through internships before they graduate. To make the relationship meaningful, universities of technology should take advantage of the SETA by involving them in forging relationships with industry partners (Nzimande, 2014:4). Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT) has established an office for Work Integrated Learning (WIL) through which the PR programme in The Media Studies Department is now able to negotiate relations with industry partners and attract internship opportunities for its students. This process requires the programme leaders to consistently interact with industry partners and students. Although such interaction exists, there is limited research to validate how this interaction has contributed to the quality of students and how it has impacted on the relationship with its key industry partners. Nevertheless, CPUT has managed to break away from the academic ivory tower image and it now plays a major role in the national economy through improved levels of engagement with industry (Parekh, 2009:148).

To ensure that programmes such as PR are responsive to industry needs, the Public Relations Programme at CPUT is engaging with its key industry partners, using different strategies, including its internship programme. In this study internship programme and WIL have been used interchangeably although both concepts can be defined differently

in a different context. The internship programme is an integral part of the university's flagship Work Integrated Learning (WIL) project. This programme offers students the opportunity to be exposed to the demands of the working environment after completing their theoretical course (Rensburg & Cant, 2011:132). Although this form of learning has become a viable and significant element in the outline of courses offered by universities of technology, the success of these programmes require the enduring involvement of lecturers, students, industry partners and industry advisory bodies such as Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa and the International Association of Business communication (Orrell, 2004; Collis, 2010; Rensburg & Cant, 2011:133). Universities of technology operating in South Africa are required to regularly design their courses in-line with industry needs so to meet the pace and constant change in the industry (Rensburg & Cant, 2011:134). Therefore, the PR programme at CPUT holds advisory meetings with strategic partners to enhance dialogue and to share knowledge that can enrich the academic programme. Notwithstanding these interactions with industry partners, the PR programme is yet to formulate a succinct framework in the academic curriculum which clearly outlines its strategies and terms of reference for engaging with key partners (Parekh, 2011:147; Plewa et al., 2013:44). Also, with reference to the PR programme at CPUT and its interactions with industry partners, there is no recognisable research project that has analysed the level of industry satisfaction in terms of the current engagement strategies, or the extent to which these strategies are beneficial to all stakeholders (Ledingham, 2003:182; Venter, 2010).

This study was therefore motivated by the inadequacy of research studies which focus primarily on the relationship between PR academic programmes and industry partners, as well as key engagement strategies for sustaining these relationships. The study expands on Nzimande's (2014) emphasis on partnerships between universities of technology and industry strategies through vigorous relationships that can contribute to skills development, sustained employment opportunity for interns and graduates and ultimately economy development.

1.1. Research problem

In spite of noticeable interaction between universities of technology and industry partners, Alpert al. (2009) argues that universities continue to receive criticisms on the

nature of their relationship with industry partners. In the case of CPUT's PR programme there are two elements that could be the sources of this type of criticism. Firstly, there is no substantial research to validate whether engagement with key industry partners is mutually beneficial for both parties (Steyn & Puth 2000; Holtzhausen, 2005). Secondly, although, the PR programme leaders use different strategies to negotiate and sustain relationships with the industry partners, these strategies are not formalised and there is no memorandum of understanding between the programme and industry partners. These shortcomings are likely to affect the way staff of the PR programme build and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with industry partners. Furthermore, they have critical implications for the design of curricula that are responsive to the industry requirements (Leeper & Leeper, 2001:462)*.

1.2.   Research Aim and Objectives

1.2.1. Main research aim
- The study seeks to critically analyse the effectiveness of strategies that the PR programme uses to build and sustain stakeholder relations with industry partners.

1.2.2. Research objectives
- To investigate industry's perceptions of strategies that the PR programme uses for engagement.
- To explore students' perceptions about the PR programme's relationship with industry partners.
- To discuss the implications of a sustainable industry partnership for CPUT's PRM recurriculation process, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and PR's internship programme.
- To use the findings to provide recommendation for improving strategies to meet industry expectations.

1.2.3. Research question

Main Question
- What and how effective are the strategies used by the PR programme to build and sustain relationships with its key industry partners?

Sub-questions
- What are the industry perceptions about the strategies that the PR programme uses to engage and what are the possible implications on sustaining relations?

- How do PR students perceive the relationships between the PR programme and its key industry partners?
- What are the implications of a sustainable industry partnership for CPUT's Work-Integrated Learning (WIL), PR recurriculation process, and the internship programme?
- How can the existing strategies be improved and formalised to ensure that the relationship between PR programme and its industry partner is mutually beneficial?

Table1. **Objectives, questions and methods**

Research objectives	Research questions	Research methods
Objective 1	What are and how effective are strategies used by the PR programme to sustain relationships with its key industry partners?	Semi-structured interview document analysis
Objective 2	How does industry perceive the strategies that the PR programme uses to engage and what are the possible implications on sustaining relations?	Semi-structured interview document analysis
Objective 3	How do PR students perceive the relationships between the PR programme and its key industry partners?	Focus group discussion with PR students.
Objective 4	What are the implications of a sustainable industry partnership for CPUT's PR's recurriculation process, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and internship programme?	Semi-structured interview. focus group discussion, literature analysis
Objective 5	How can the existing strategies be improved and formalised to ensure that the relationship between PR programme and its industry partner is mutually beneficial.	Semi-structured interviews; literature review; Focus group discussion.

1.3. Significance of the study

According to Rensburg and Cant (2011:133) Work Integrated Learning (WIL) is very important not merely for student's development but for many other benefits including building relationship between academic programmes and industry. This implies that the findings from the study are vital for strengthening the partnership between the PR programme at CPUT and its key industry partners. They can also inform the practice of PR in the context of South Africa.

Furthermore, the findings could significantly enhance internship programmes and curriculum redesign. The study provides recommendations that if adopted and implemented, positive collaboration between stakeholders can be achieved. This could help the PR programme to sustain its existing relationship with key industry partners and to ensure this relationship is mutually beneficial. Also, the study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge on the PR academic discipline.

In terms of professional development, this project has empowered the researcher with knowledge of stakeholder relations management, engagement strategies and strategic communication. Finally, the researcher hopes that the findings would offer other academic programmes at CPUT significant insight into the expectations of industry partners and how programme curricula can be designed to respond strategically to those expectations.

1.4. Delineation of the study

This research focus is primarily on the PR programme at CPUT and two Cape Town Based PR agencies selected after consultation with the PR programme leadership. The selection was based on the significant number of PR interns and graduates that the Cape Town based agencies employ and the agencies level of industry knowledge. The findings reflect the opinions of the two PR agencies based in Cape Town and the key conclusions have not been generalised. Additionally, a limited number of interviewees participated in the study, therefore the purpose of this project is to make meanings from the data collected and bring them to bear on this case rather than make generalisations about the PR industry in South Africa. In this light, the two agencies are: Atmosphere communication and Magna Carta Communication. Finally, the study focuses on the PR programme in the Faculty of Informatics and Design and not any other academic department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

1.5. Chapter outline

Chapter one provides the contextual background for this study. It explains the research problem, research questions, research objectives, delineation of the research, and significance of the study, as well as a summary of the chapters.

Chapter two focuses on literature review and theoretical framework. It critically examines key literature relevant to this research topic. Furthermore, it discusses the two

PR theories used as a framework for this project. These theories are: Stakeholder Theory and Two-Way Symmetrical Communication.

Chapter three discusses the research design, methodology and the methods for collecting data. It explains the demographic of the sample population, sampling and data collections instruments, as well as the criteria that was used for interview selection. Furthermore the chapter describes the PR programme at Cape Peninsula University of Technology, and the two agencies: Atmosphere communications and Magna Carta communications. Finally it explains the process of data coding and analysis as well as ethical considerations.

Chapter four analyses emergent themes from the data and discusses the key findings. Here, the analysis and discussion are guided by the research objectives, literature and two theories.

Chapter five provides key conclusion drawn from the findings, explains the research challenges and areas for further research. It also provides recommendations for sustaining the relationship between the PR programme at CPUT and its industry partners and a general conclusion for the thesis.

1.6.   Chapter conclusion

This chapter provided a succinct background to this study which highlights some of the debates around the research topic. It discussed the motivation for undertaking the project and the research problem, showing how current debates on the topic inform this problem. In additions it has clearly outlined the main aim and objectives and research questions. It has also provided the significance of the study and the boundaries. Finally it has summarised the remaining chapters.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1.   Introduction

The main aim of this study is to analyse the strategies that the Public Relations (PR) programme uses to engage with its key industry partners. It examines staff and students perceptions of the PR programmes' existing relationship with industry partners and the implications for curriculum development. To understand how this relationship is negotiated and sustained, this chapter critically reviews existing studies in the field of PR that are relevant to a project of this nature. Firstly, it examines literature on industry partner's perceptions of PR academic programme. Secondly, it reviews literature on industry partner's expectations and PR academic development in South Africa.

Thirdly the chapter discusses existing literature on the importance of having formalised communication and engagement strategies for the purpose of building a lasting relationship between university and industry partners. By so doing, it focuses on the way earlier studies scrutinise this relationship and how they can be brought on the case of universities of technology such as CPUT. Furthermore the chapter discusses literature that calls on purposeful communication and commitment to this type of relationship. Finally, to make sense of the nature of PR's relationship with industry partners, the chapter also analyses the two relevant theories: stakeholder theory and two-ways symmetrical theory. These theories provided the lens through which to address issues pertaining building and sustaining relationships in the PR academia and industry

The chapter is sub-divided into the following sections:
- the origin of public relations;
- principles of public relations;
- the role of public relations within an organisation;
- building and sustaining relationship;
- university and industry relations;
- PRM curriculum redesigning process and its implications;
- work integrated learning and internship;
- the role of academics staff members and industry partners.

The above topics were chosen based to their direct links and significance to the research title and area of interest. The research stresses the importance of engagement strategies and relationship building. By discussing literature in the order illustrated above, the researcher is able to critically analyse strengths and weakness in current engagement strategies.

2.2. The origin of public relations

To better understand the practice of PR in Africa, a precise historical perspective on the development of PR as an academic discipline in Africa is critical to a study of this nature. This perspective highlights the fact that this discipline was pioneered by Ivy Ledbetter Lee (1877-1934) and Edward Bernays (1891-1955). Even though they are the founding parents of modern PR, the two PR practitioners had different perspectives on how to approach this profession. Lane (2007) stipulates that Lee was not interested in developing PR theories. Rather, his main focus was on developing practice. Lee believed that to practice PR one only needed creative and innovative minds. On the contrary, Bernays was interested in developing PR theories and understanding how PR practitioners can effectively influence their audiences. He was interested in a systematic approach to the study of PR that is scientific (Lane, 2007).

Lees' focus was on developing PR tactics aimed at getting short term publicity, leading to the inception of the press agentry model from 1850 to 1900. For example, he introduced the public information model (Grunig and Hunt, 1984:33 cited in Laskin, 2009:38) and argued that the only way to sustain relationships with the public was by disclosing organisational plans and concerns. His focus was on gaining short term publicity for companies, instead of focusing on theories that could sustain relations between companies and public (Yamauchi, 2001:1330). Further, Lee failed to address the needs of two - ways symmetrical communication since his emphasis was on short term goal. From this perspective, the press agentry model is characterised by the attitude of earlier PR practitioners who believed that the public could be fooled with misleading information (Botha et al., 2007:6). To overcome the weaknesses in Lee's approach and improve relationships between academia and industry, Grunig, and Hunt (1984) developed four models of PR to help enhance press agentry and public information model. Despite the efforts of Grunig, and Hunt (1984), the development in the PR discipline indicates that it remains premature to expect practitioners from other

fields of study practising PR to communicate adequately. As a result the PR industry is still dominated by press agentry, whereby the views of key stakeholders are not incorporated in the communication process (Laskin, 2009:40).

However, for Laskin (2009:41) "knowledge is the core of excellence". Therefore to be a good PR practitioner, one should be able to produce quality news releases, manage two - way symmetrical communications; conduct PR research and understand theoretical underpinnings of the social sciences. With these in mind, Lane (2007) argues that Lee and Bernays were the first PR practitioners to propose the application of dialogical conversations in the early 20th century, despite their differences in approach. Since then the discipline of PR has focused on building and sustaining relationships through strategic communication (Lane 2007). This is often achieved through normative paradigm, two-way symmetrical communication and through balancing the dynamics between partners involved in the relationship.

2.2.1. The principles of Public Relations

PR is defined as a relationship management function between an organisation and its public (Park & Rhee, 2010:2). This is based on six relationship maintenance strategies, namely: access, positivity, and openness, assurance, networking and sharing tasks (Park and Rhee, 2010:1). These strategies are referred to as a symmetrical strategy and they can generate better relations outcomes for organisations (Hunt & Grunig, 1999). Rensburg and Cant (2011:51) stress that the greatest purpose of PR professionals in the organisation is to build a sustainable and a long term relationship with key stakeholders.

Simultaneously the importance of managing the relationship is to ensure that the stakeholder's and organisation's interests are achieved and mutual benefit is gained from the association (Grunig, 2000). For Hon and Grunig (1999:11), the most productive relations are those that benefit both parties. In this light, Ledingham (2003:160) defines relationship in the context of PR as a partnership which exists between an organisation and its key public in which the action of the stakeholders impacts on the economic, social, political and cultural being of each entity. To support their definition, L'etang and Pieczka (2006:66) state that relations exist between two people when it serves a defined purpose over a period of time (Grunig 2000; Ledingham, 2003; L'etang and Pieczka, 2006).

Moreover, to solve stakeholder's issues and concerns, PR practitioners should be aware of the organisation's current image through self-assessment. The emphasis should then be given to relationship building by applying critical involvement strategies, reciprocity, reporting, responsibility and relationship nurturing (Waters, 2011:129). By incorporating reciprocity in the PR programme at CPUT, the views of stakeholders are taken in consideration (Rensburg and Cant (2011:238). In the process stakeholders are acknowledged through involvement and appreciating their participation (Waters, 2011:130). This study examines how these concepts can shape our understanding of the PR programme's strategies for building and sustaining its relationship with key partners.

2.2.2. The role of Public Relations in an organisation

There exist several strategic roles of PR within an organisation, of which some have been explored and others yet to be explored. Rensburg (2014:127) indicates that Public Relations and Communication are very developed academic fields in South Africa and certain parts of the African continent. As a result, the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) enjoys representation in various international professional bodies for its involvement in the development of PR on the African continent. PRISA has been a fundamental instrument that has contributed greatly to the development of PR practice for the past 50 years. Despite tangible development in the PR industry, the role of PR within an organisation is not yet clearly defined in the context of Africa (Rensburg (2014:127). Some scholars reaffirm that PR practitioners display different types of roles within an organisation. Traditionally, they were known for two main jobs: communication manager and communication technician (Steyn, 2000; Steyn and Nieman, 2014). Furthermore, PR practitioners play important roles in stakeholder engagement at all organisational levels (Dignman, 1990 cited in Steyn and Niemann, 2014:176). Therefore the PR academic programme is critical in preparing students that are ready for industry. The quality of this programme helps graduates to play the role of stakeholder engagement in a company. In addition, PR practitioners can help an organisation to understand the extent to which it should expose its economic and non-economic status to the stakeholders.

In the same way, PR practitioners assist the organisation in the formulation of its mission statement (Freeman, 1984:88). Consequently their role is to ensure that the mission

statement addresses broader issues around values and stakeholder expectations (Steyn & Niemann, 2014:176). Lastly PR addresses a range of business opportunities available to an organisation. It also helps the organisation to understand the consequences of stakeholder relations on its activities (Steyn & Niemann, 2014:176). To this end, Steyn and Niemann, (2014:176) stipulate that the ultimate roles of PR are:

Firstly to work as the mirror of an organisation. This entails investigating and monitoring change in the organisational environment, perceiving the implications for the organisation's policies and strategy, specifically with regards to the relationship with its key stakeholders and affected group. Secondly to contribute to an organisation's strategies development by acting as an advisor to top management about the effective use of strategic communication.

For Steyn and Niemann (2014), PR practitioners' main task is building and sustaining new relationships. This suggests that good academic training plays a key role in enabling public relations professionals to be influential and receive acknowledgement from decision makers (Cameron et al., 2008:35). Additionally good education enables public relations professionals to earn respect in the industry (Cameron et al., 2008:36). This set of strategic roles has visible implications for building and maintaining relationship between PR academic programmes and the industry.

This means that PR interns and graduates need key skills and competencies for them to be relevant and influential in an organisation. To fully play a critical role in organisations, industry and professional bodies continue to call on graduates to pay more attention to communication skills, personality traits and analytical thinking especially for communicating with various audiences (Proud and Kerr, 2005:95). In contrast, some educators believe that students have been taught relevant communication skills that are significant for the industry (Todd, 2009:74). Therefore what is needed is a sound engagement strategy between partners that could enable parties to address any shortfall. By engaging employers in the design of the course contents of PR programmes, CPUT's PR programme, for example, may avoid this mismatch (Proud and Kerr 2005:95). For Proud and Kerr (2005:95) industry considers the following skills worth learning: intellectual curiosity, problem solving, logic and independence, research, computing and interpersonal skills.

In addition, students need both theory and practice to become knowledgeable and experts in the PR field (Sarja et al., 2003:154). This is best achieved when PR students are able to transform theory learnt in classroom into practice. To achieve higher levels of output from students involved in internships, all stakeholders are supposed to engage in decision making, identification of problems and in drafting intervention responses. This can be achieved through relevant communication and engagement strategies with an emphasis on two-way symmetrical communication and dialogic conversation.

2.2.3. Building and sustaining relationship

Competent PR interns and graduates who are aware of their role within an organisation can ensure that a relationship that has been established is sustained (Grunig, 1992; Grunig and White, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig, 2006). According to Le Roux (2014:310), a strong relationship is characterised by "trust, commitment, agreement on control mutuality and communal relationship", and also by relationship satisfaction (Hon and Grunig 1999). Furthermore, sustainability is defined by the efficiency and effectiveness of the relationship. This suggests that collaboration is an intangible but vital element of relationships (Cosimo et al., 2013:48). Moreover, scholars such as Rensburg and Cant (2011:28) believe that for PR to be significant and constructive; constant communication with the stakeholder and environment scanning is required. Once a communication process has been initiated and established between an organisation and its public, it must be sustained (Rensburg & Cant, 2011:27).

Le Roux (2014:310) discusses the above mentioned aspects of relationship as follows:
- Trust, demonstrate the level of confidence that each part holds against the other with the focus on integrity, dependability and competency;
- Commitment, refers to the ability to spend energy on sustaining and growing the relationship;
- Control mutuality demonstrates the power balance within parties in a relationship that is acceptable to all parties involved and cognitively judged;
- An exchange relationship is one in which parties expect something in return, while a communal relationship is one where both parties are concerned with the wellbeing of the others.

From this premise, satisfaction exists when parties in a relationship experience positive feedback through the use of enterprise strategy (Steyn and Niemann 2014:172). Here, enterprise strategy is a significant strategy for integrating stakeholder's expectations, value and norms in the organisation's strategy development (Steyn and Niemann, 2014:172). Consequently the role of PR enterprise strategy is to provide the management with stakeholder's perspectives of the organisation's activities. This process involves gathering information that can place an organisation in the right position to adjust its strategies, organisation politics, attitude, behaviour and goals, in line with stakeholder expectations (De Beer et al, 2013; Steyn, 2007 in Styen & Niemann, 2014:173). Drawing from the aim of this study, enterprise strategy refers to the analysis of current engagement strategies that the PR programme at CPUT uses, as well as the identification of stakeholders' perspectives of the programme's engagement strategies.

To this end, organisations that want to remain competitive in the management of relationships are expected to do more than communicating. Doorley and Garcia (2007:272) note that the first steps are to identify proactive stakeholders in a relationship. The quality of relationships and the loyalty of the stakeholder is very important (Ledingham, 2006:457 cited in L'etang, 2008:254). Therefore to sustain existing relationships, organisations must constantly listen to stakeholders' feedback since the future of any business is reliant on its relationship with strategic partners. Furthermore, PR practitioners are in the business of building and fostering relationships with various publics (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009:59). To realise this objective communication is used as a tool for negotiating relationships. Also, the diffusion of information builds awareness and interest; hence it is important to develop and implement relationship building tools that are symmetrical (Center et al., 2008:12). Building sustainable relationships with strategic stakeholders should be a continuous process in which PR practitioners work to maintain credibility, to build solid internal and external relationships, and to manage issues (Wilcox and Cameron, 2009:5:58). It is therefore the responsibility of all parties involved in a relationship to identify common ground between them and nourish these, while keeping the interests of partners a priority.

In addition, the quality of a relationship is strengthened when the relationship is capable of satisfying partner's needs, which can be identified through conversation and dialogue. Broom et al. (2000 cited in Ledingham, 2003) suggest that formalisation; standardisation, complexity, gravity and reciprocity are other key characteristics of a strong relationship. Also, information and resource flow are critical in determining the value of a relationship. In response to these views Ki and Hon (2009:5) define relationship strategies as any behavioural effort by an organisation that attempts to establish, cultivate, and sustain relationship with strategic public. Hence organisations need effective communication strategies to meet strategic desired relationships with key stakeholders. A relationship in PR perspective can only be fair and equitable when all parties involved are satisfied (Smith, 2012:841). Organisations should manage issues through creating communication strategies that are aimed at behaviour change and, develop strategies to ensure that these relationships are mutually beneficial (Cameron et al. 2008:44). This approach enables an organisation to withstand emerging issues within its setting. In the South African context, communication management is used as a practice of democratic principle whereby all parties have the right to engage in a beneficial dialogue. Nonetheless the issue of macro environment has effect on how communication is managed (Sandhu, 2009:77). This means that organisations such as CPUT interested in building and sustaining relationships with stakeholders through its PR programme, need to increase their level of macro environment scanning. The effort will then enable the organisation to identify stakeholders' concerns that might take time to manifest. Also organisation should adopt proactive ways of dialogue with stakeholders who are passive (Adams and Frost, 2006:283). It is the concern of this study, to interrogate how these seemingly contentious debates shed light on CPUT's PR programme and its relationship with its industry partners.

Organisations can acknowledge stakeholders in many forms, from listing them on the website to awarding them at professional functions and having a lasting engagement (Waters, 2011:131). However, the best method of recognising partners is by sending personalised messages or through reporting as it sustains relations (Kelly, 2011 cited in Waters 2011:131). This approach enforces positive stakeholder attitude and behaviour and increases the chance for stakeholders to retain the desired stance and react positively in the future. To this end, Waters (2011:131) indicates that it is very important to keep informing stakeholders that they are very important and the organisation needs

them for its survival. This sense of appreciation recognises their participation and care about the relationship (Skinner et al., 2010; Rensburg & Cant, 2011) and organisations should become participants in the relationship (Leeper & Leeper, 2001:463; Sandhu, 2009:75).

The above discussion demonstrates that cultivating and sustaining public relationships is a goal that many organisations desire for the purpose of building lasting relationships with key stakeholders (Grunig, 1984; Duffy, 2000:298; Rensburg et la, 2011). However this desire can only be achieved through the application of significant PR theories. Although there are several relevant theories, an organisation should identify the ones that are suitable and adopt them (Duffy, 2000:298). For Duffy (2000:298), the only accurate way of influencing partners positively is through precise and honest communication. This discussion indicates that academic programme and industry partners that seek to build mutually beneficial relationships should move from the era of press agentry and start operating in line with stakeholder viewpoints. Partners in relations should ensure that a decision taken by any partners is mutually beneficial (Duffy, 2000:299; Waligo et al., 2014: 1344).

For example the South African Council of Higher Education's (HEC, 2011:57), mandate is to develop and implement a system of quality assurance for higher education. The emphasis is on programme accreditation, institutional audits, quality promotion and capacity development. It focuses on standards development and the implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). As a result HEC stresses the importance of relationship building and maintenance for the promotion of its mandate. The council recommends that following elements should be included in the relationship sustainability plan.

- to keep partners posted about academic development and opportunities
- to start a capacity building programme for partners to improve WIL;
- to write to partners in business language to thank them for their involvement and support;
- to provide partners with current information when requested.

For HEC (2011:57) curricular design should include an option where the students on internship programmes can receive regular support from both the industry supervisor and the academic staff. The academic staff in charge of students placement must always communicate with all parties involved (CHE, 2011:63). Keeping constant communication with partners helps organisation to address differences that can jeopardise the relationship (Ni, 2006:277-279).

2.2.4 University and industry relations

An industry and university relationship is defined as a relationship between university and industry entities, established to enable the diffusion of creativity, idea, skill and people with the aim of creating mutual value over time (Plewa and Quester, 2007:371 cited in Plewa et al. 2013). University stakeholders are industry partners, academic and none academic and academics are considered as the most important internal stakeholder because of their scientific output. Students are second most important because they link both internal and external stakeholder (Gokbe and Gules, 2013:283). Despite their engagement effort, Hoyle and Goffnett (2013) Universities still receive criticism in regards with the way they engage with industry and their ability to prepare students in line with employers' expectations.

The challenge is that universities are not doing enough in preparing students for industry (Holtzhausen and du Toit, 2009:156). To avoid further negative perceptions, the responsibility is on the academics programme to determine best strategy that can be used to meet employers' expectations (Proud & Kerr, 2005:95). Also, it is imperative that organisations address the issues raised by industry partners (Ricardo & Gomes, 2007:82).

To mitigate criticisms from industry, several universities of technology have started offering internships that facilitate connections between universities, employers and students (Alpert et al. 2009). For partnerships to be viable, partners must forge practical connections across diverse professional communities (Peach et al. 2012). In addition, Sapp and Zhang (2009:277) contend that the expectations of industry partners who share responsibility for preparing students for the world of work must be considered regularly. However more work needs to be done to meet such expectations because, PR research reveals little development in university-industry engagement strategy. Nevertheless there are many forms of university and industry relationships, yet there is

limited scholarly research on what the engagement strategies are and how they function (Motoyama 2014:42). Therefore, to constructively make use of other strategies, those in power must regularly collaborate with stakeholders to learn their expectations and formulate appropriate responses (Freeman, 1984).

2.2.4.1. Public relations educator and industry partners relations

To achieve higher levels of output, parties involved in an internship should keep their communication strategies updated. Information circulating between academic staff, industry partners and students need to be constructive. However many organisations are yet to meet their stakeholders expectations, even though their communication strategy claims to seek stakeholders approval in order to look legitimate (Sandhu, 2009:74). For Sandhu, (2009:75) strategic communication implies purposeful communication of an organisation, which expects those involved in the relationship to communicate decisively and discuss ways of reaching decisions that are beneficial to all parties involved.

Trends in PR education demonstrate that PR educators are increasingly recognising the significance of working closely with industry partners (Bohloko 2012:270). For example educators in the United States reveal that their relationship with their stakeholders is critical, and they proactively engage with industry partners through the attendance of professional conferences and seminars, and by inviting industry practitioners to attend academic conferences (Todd, 2009:75). Furthermore, PR programmes should listen and act in accordance with industry desire. This effort can eliminate the negative perceptions that some practitioners hold against the readiness of PR graduates (Rawel, 2003:71). However, this view fails to demonstrate the extent to which industry is willing to listen to academics (Todd 2009:72). However, the academic programmes often adhere to guidelines outlined by PRISA, which clearly spells out what skills a PR graduate should possess (Rawel, 2003:71). For these authors, to ensure that students are able to connect theory to practice; the placement of students in the industry should be done in consultation with all parties and the placement officer should visit the internship site before placing the student (Todd, 2009:82). This project uses these debates as a prism through which to critically examine strategies of the PR programme at CPUT and how these strategies have succeeded or failed to sustain its relationship with industry partners.

This exchange of knowledge can help to sustain existing relationships (Todd, 2009:84). Lack of connection between theoretical and practical learning in academic curriculum affects student's development (Sarja et al., 2003:155). Moreover, to attain high level of productivity and reach mutual understanding, curriculum redesign should be directed in line with professional development while keeping in mind students' career interest (Sarja et al., 2003:157). Similarly graduates and postgraduate students should be viewed as key internal stakeholder that can provide academics with significant information regarding employer concerns (DHE, 2011:52).

To this Sarja et al. (2003:147) argues that in many developing countries the relationship between industries and universities should be viewed from:
- the viewpoint of student learning and development of expertise;
- the viewpoint of academic department and industry partners;
- And from the perspectives of society and education system ;

For Sarja et al. (2003:147) the above points reflect the changes in the higher education landscape, globalisation, new method of knowledge output; new professional requirements and the establishment of vocational education. Universities of technology should clearly define the aim, objective and reason of engaging with industry partners. The process increases students' confidence and enables them to view themselves as well equipped for the world of work. These universities are therefore supposed to introduce new forms of teaching that facilitate theoretical knowledge to practical training for diploma and B-Tech students (Sarja et al., 2003:149).

2.2.5 Public relations management's curricula redesign processes and its implication

The term curriculum is used to refer to subject syllabus. It includes the subject content and how such content should be organised and taught, how students learn and how to assess the students (CHE, 2011:13). In the modern curricula, students are informed in advance about the outcome of the learning through an accurate learning guideline for guiding and giving feedback to students. The planning and redesign of curricular should demonstrate a strong reflection for both theoretical knowledge and the practical knowledge.

According to CHE (2011:13) educators should pay attention to the following points during curriculum redesigning:

- the nature of and current state of knowledge in the discipline;
- the nature and current state of professional practice;
- the philosophy of education, theory of teaching and educational research finding relevant WIL modality;
- the role and form of assessment and feedback; students characteristics and learning needs, interest and abilities; the practical, ideological and policy context of the academic department, institution and higher education system; and the practical, ideological and policy context of the profession (CHE, 2012:14),

A study conducted in the United States by the Public Relation Society of America (PRSA) revealed that professional advisors are not yet convinced that PR programme educators are teaching students the skills that are needed in the industry (Todd 2009:71). As a result PR curriculum redesign is expected to include new learning areas such new media. The study states that at the end of an internship programme, students should have a broad knowledge of PR theories, relationship building and transparency (Todd 2009:72). In South Africa CHE (2012:14) contends that senior students, especially those with internship experience, professional body, academic staff and industry partners representatives should form part of the curricular redesign process. To support this view, Todd (2009:81) indicates that on the one hand, many educators have no knowledge of how new media works, while on the other hand the industry desires to see new media included in learning areas. Here, the intention is to use technology to facilitate communication with external and internal stakeholders through direct two-way communication (Todd 2009:72). Also, the study argues that emphasis should be placed on the standardisation of student's portfolio of evidence and students should be given clear guidelines of what should be placed in their portfolio. In addition, for students to be relevant to the industry; communication and public relations theories should underpin the design of the curriculum. It further contends that students should be knowledgeable on the industry practice and the significance of research within the discipline. Along these lines, the educators' responsibility is to ensure students are equipped with skills that will make them relevant to industry (Todd, 2009:78). Changes in the world of business have huge impacts on the practice of public relations. PR is evolving due to rapid business

transactions and as a result, the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) identifies some key learning areas that the PR discipline should include in their curricular. All these issues are critical for building and sustaining relationships between a PR academic programme and relevant industry partners.

Generic globalisation model of public relations curricula
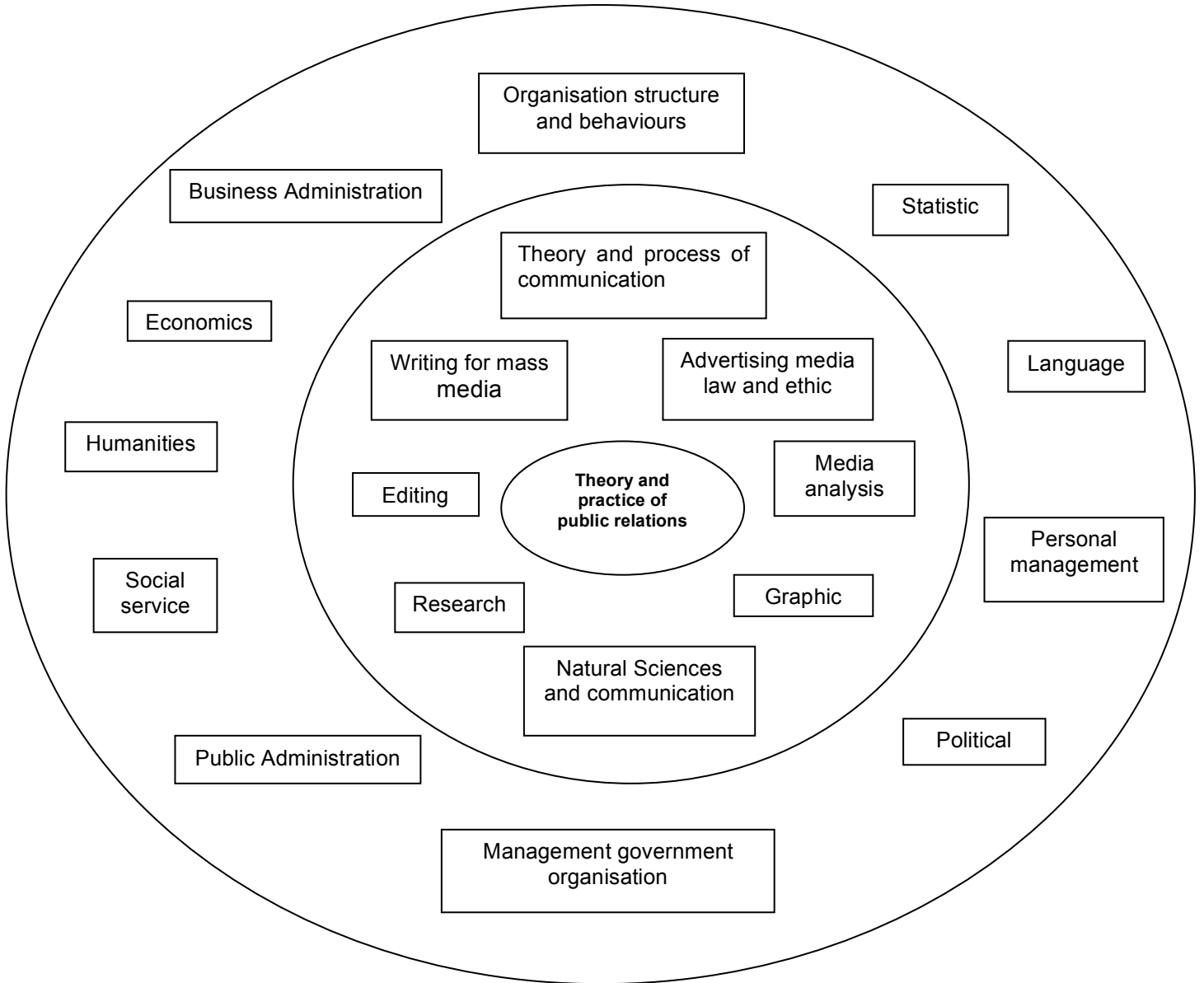
Figure 1: IPRA model of public relations education, source (Rensburg and Cant, 2011:125).

This model is not prescriptive to the design of curriculum. Rather, it offers pertinent guidelines to Communication and PR disciplines, to ensure that they are responsive to the changes in the modern PR industry. The aim is to enable academic programmes in PR to develop a PR curriculum that is concrete and takes into cognisance industry perspectives and the learning areas described in the model above. Most industry partners believed that learning areas such as; language, research, and business communication are imperative for an intern and PR graduate to be competent in the PR industry.

Interestingly, prospective PR practitioners in South Africa receive insufficient and fragmented education which does not prepare them accordingly (Venter, 2010:282). For this reason any effort that seeks to meet industry expectations require WIL to be given the same weighting in the curriculum, assessment time and monitoring of quality control like any other subject. The implication is that WIL practice would receive much attention and strong theoretical framework (Bohloko 2012:276). For Bohloko (2012:272) a curriculum is a shared set of ideas and principles which provide primary debates and discussions in the university setting. As shown above, an academic department without a well-defined curriculum struggles to cope with developments in the industry.

These shortcomings require human capital and significant resources which most universities of technology do not have. However, these challenges can be alleviated through retraining, restructuring the practice and theoretical education in PR (Venter, 2010:283). To reposition the profession, Venter (2010:284) asserts that the PR discipline should address the education deficiency in the PR curriculum by incorporating much needed critical business skills. Moreover, Bohloko (2012:276) reaffirm that WIL challenges faced by South African universities of technology are not pedagogical issues alone, but curriculum issues as well. This calls for these universities to keep up both with the government calls and change in the industry (CHE, 2012:3). This speaks to the fact that current developments in the world of work require competent graduates, yet universities of technology are finding difficulties in meeting the requirement (Bohloko, 2012:276). For these authors, traditionally PR is advancing and emerging in the world where importance is given to excellence in all aspects of work. Again this indicates that accurate communication and engagement strategies can alleviate challenges that universities of technology are facing in relations to preparing their students for the world of work. Any sound relationship that is built on trust and commitment to communication could enable all parties to meet their respective needs and build a mutually beneficial

relationship. In today's world, relationships remain a key factor to business success and growth. As a result, trust becomes an important social currency that is highly desired (Botha et al. 2007).

2.2.6. Work-integrated learning (WIL)

There is a paucity of PR studies that address the significance and value of WIL in the South African context. Some of these studies focus on PR educators' views about different teaching methods used in preparing students for industry (Daugherty, 2011; Swart, 2012:389). For example, Swart (2012:389) argues that existing research projects tend to focus on corporate perspectives and not on students' views despite industry expectations that PR graduates should be ready for the world of work. With this view in mind, the Council of Higher Education (2012:3) defines WIL as an "education approach that aligns academics and work place practice for mutual benefit for students and workplaces". This definition calls on WIL to be informed by a good theoretical framework and parties involved should be able to identify best guides for the application of theory to practice by students (Bohloko, 2012:273). Here, Bohloko (2012:276) argues that the need to strengthen relations is becoming more and more urgent as industry continues to produce secondary knowledge. As a result, universities of technology need to constantly engage with the industry for their survival. In addition, technology has brought tremendous challenges for the PR programme. Academic departments are falling behind the trends in the world of work thus making it difficult to adjust their curriculum (Todd, 2009:76).

According to Akoojee (2012:607) the South African education system has been going through structural changes, with the aim of developing an educated nation, able to cope with the shortage of skills and meet industry expectations. To speed the skill development process, the South African government has introduced a new structure of education under the auspices of the Department of Higher Education and Training (Akoojee, 2012:607). Today the South African government's priority is to invest in education as the key to skills development and economic growth (Nzimande (2014:2). However government expectations about the ability of universities of technology to produce industry ready students, who are competent and employable, are yet to manifest (Bohloko, 2012:268). Also, Sector Education and Training Authority (SETAs) inclusion in the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) was an attempt by

the Government to speed collaboration between institutions of higher learning and employers. SETA as a training body is expected to offer training to employees and to facilitate meaningful WIL to prospective employees, while developing synergies with institutions of higher learning (Akoojee, 2012:607). In addition there have been multiple considerations with regards to insufficient education and training reforms in South Africa (Akoojee, 2012). This means that participation from industry and universities is required for designing meaningful policy synergy (Kraak, 2009 cited in Akoojee, 2012). Finally HEDT proposition can be effective whereby all parties involved in WIL implement engagement strategies that are in favour of sustaining the relationship.

Jacob Zuma's decision of splitting the Department of Education into the Department of Basic Education and Higher Education resulted from the failure of universities to produce employable graduates (Genertzky, 2011 cited in Akoojee, 2012:678). The Higher Education department aims to enable universities to produce students that are marketable (DHET, 2010: ii), a strategy that was endorsed by industry (Akoojee, 2012:678). However the DHET (2011:9) states that the new development requires clearly defined key responsibilities between industry and universities for its success.

2.2.7. On the importance of WIL

Franz (2008, cited in Swart 2014:389) indicates that WIL plays two key roles. Firstly, it enables students to acquire soft skill, secondly, it helps them to advance discipline related skills. Students who have participated in a WIL programme are far likely to be employed because of experience acquired in the industry (Orrel, 2004 cited in Swart, 2012:390). CHE (2012:3) and Swart (2012:390) note that internships improve academic performance, enhance disciplinary thinking, increase motivation to learn, improve communication skills, team work, leadership and cooperation. The WIL approach helps students to identify career path, professional identity, increase employment opportunity, as well as develop positive work ethic and values. It also increases competence and knowledge of technology (CHE, 2012:3). Nzimande (2014:4) asserts that a WIL programme is beneficial to all parties involved, comprising of students, the industry and the academic department. Similarly students should be placed in the right industry which offers them the correct skills without mismatching. Skills must correlate with student's area of interest (Nzimande, 2014:6). In addition, work integrated learning or internship is

critical to this study because students are at the centre of relations, therefore making WIL an important aspect of this research.

2.2.8. Meeting industry benchmark

To meet industry expectations, academic programmes that are still fixated on traditional methods of teaching and learning should re-consider adopting new teaching methods that align theory to practice skills (CHE, 2012:3). Such a move would result in the best outcomes for all parties involved. South African universities of technology like CPUT need to engage with their international peers, to develop a curricular, pedagogical and quality management system that can enable them to build a strong WIL practice using new knowledge. This approach would ensure the identification of areas of weakness and seek to engage all parties, to work extensively with WIL experts to resolve the challenges (CHE, 2012:7). Furthermore, this approach would make it possible for South African universities of Technology to strengthen their core business of teaching, learning and research and in the process produce industry ready students.

In addition, Van Rooijen (2011:6) argues that to meet the demand of the real world of work, academic disciplines should ensure that research, teaching and service are aligned with industry expectations. Here, the issue of matching theory to practice is paramount if students are to meet industry expectation (Swart, 2012:363). Furthermore, the findings of a study conducted in United States of America revealed that there is a need to align academic research with industry practice (Watson 2008:104). For instance, in South Africa limited research has been conducted on the contribution of the PR diploma in preparing students for the world of work. This demonstrates that there is a need for academic discipline to understand practitioner's needs. Academic programmes and industry are supposed to constantly check the significance of their engagement strategy to determine whether partners' concerns are being addressed. Quality engagement will alleviate partners' doubt. For Swart (2012:363), the shortage of novelty is a contributing factor to the challenges faced by academic disciplines in determining the role of PR and whether PR students are adequately qualified and ready for industry. Through engagement, the issue of shortage of new knowledge can be addressed, thus affording the academic discipline the opportunity to understand the quality of students.

On the one hand, to effectively contribute to the survival of an organisation and to withstand the challenge that is faced by students in the industry, the PR discipline is

requested to shift its focus. Swart (2012:363) posits that the PR discipline must inquire from industry about the most important skills needed to strategically reposition the discipline. Similarly this should answer the question about the role that a PR professional is supposed to fulfil in the organisation (Watson, 2008:113). Moreover, current change in the world of work is theoretically challenging the PR educational system's continuity, as the PR industry continues to evolve. For this reason, students are faced with increasing challenges when they embark on their first job. On the other hand, practitioners are despondent by educators for not updating their curriculum to meet industry needs on time. In contrast, Todd (2009:72) noted that practitioners fail to understand the challenges that PR disciplines face in redesigning their curricula. To develop a significant curriculum requires human capacity, resources, time to learn new technological applications and funding. This misunderstanding has implications for the nature of relationships between the two partners, which can be addressed with a clear engagement strategy and policy (Akoojee, 2012).

To ensure that students receive critical training, DHET (2011) stipulates that partnership between industries, universities, training providers and SETAs are crucial. However to have a constructive partnership between universities and industry partners, each partner in the relationship is required to have a clear and defined purpose; and should be capable of driving an agenda that correlates to their occupation (Akoojee 2012:681). In addition, students' placement should follow after consulting students and the placement lecturer must discuss with students and industry about their internship expectations (Todd, 2009:73). Furthermore students should identify themselves as university of technology students participating in the enduring learning development (CHE, 2012:11). This study comes at a time when industry and DHET are concerned with the quality of students produced by South African universities of technology, thus making the need for a sustainable partnership very important. Sound engagement between academic programmes and industry partners' will address partners concerns (Chakravath, 1986:445).

For Nzimande (2014b:3), lack of internship opportunities for graduates is one of the leading factors that has contributed to the joblessness of many university graduates. Recent graduates are viewed as unqualified by employers because they lack experience. To avoid having a generation of graduates who cannot find jobs, Nzimande

(2014:3) argues that traditional universities and universities of technology should find their role in post school education and training. This argument emphasises the need of having quality relationships with all partners (Freeman et al., 2010), such as; students, industry and academics staff, whereby key strategies are identified and implemented.

2.2.9. The role of academics staff members and industry partners.

Existing literature argues that lecturers have the responsibility to facilitate learning and form a close tie with the industry (Holtzhausen & du Toit, 2009:171). This reiterates the benefit of having a strong communication and engagement strategy. Partners involved in WIL are likely to benefit should they know how to integrate WIL in teaching and learning. Currently in the case of the PR programme at CPUT, the only strategy for engagement that is noticeable is the internship programme, which determines which skills are more relevant (Holtzhausen & du Toit 2009:172).

Poor student performance during WIL process is to some extent blamed on the fact that they are taught by lecturers with traditional university background who fail to prepare their students adequately for WIL (Holtzhausen & du Toit, 2009:161). These educators claim that their sole responsibilities are teaching and research. Academic staffs from traditional university background are supposed to acknowledge that WIL benefits all parties, especially students because it offers them the opportunity to develop. To this end, CHE (2011:55) contends that industry partners have the responsibility to set learning outcomes in consultation with professional partners and create precise communication channels for all parties involved in WIL. This should guide students with their daily task during the WIL period and ensure learning areas prescribed by all parties are met. Hence good engagement strategies are critical since all necessary information that can enhance the work of academic staff and industry supervisors need to be available to all parties involved (CHE, 2011:56).

The literature highlights the fact that is possible to build and sustain a practical relationship between university and industry partners. Although a sound relationship is possible, the central argument is that universities are not doing enough to meet industry partners' needs. This conclusion is based on the poor quality of PR students, gaps in the curriculum; and lack of significant communication and engagement strategies. However,

with sustainable engagement strategies, it is possible for the partners to resolve their differences and create harmonious relationships and ultimately address the shortcomings in the learning process.

Furthermore, this body of knowledge sheds light on the role and responsibility of PR practitioners within the organisation and in building and nourishing lasting relationships. But these studies are seemingly biased because they tend to capitalise on the industry partners view point therefore not considering academics as partners in the relationship. Also students' development and competency is largely determined by a strong relationship between university and industry partners. There is an undeniable need to listen to the perceptions of all parties in a relationship for one to make a sound judgement when dealing with the issue of relationship management. This study takes into account the contribution of all stakeholders as it investigates the PR programme at CPUT''s strategies for sustaining relationships with its industry partners. Although some authors believe that universities can meet industry expectations by increasing their human resources, one would argue that a simpler way of meeting each other's needs should be through effective communication and engagement strategies. All parties have the responsibility to ensure that the needs of partners are taken care of, without entirely deviating from their core mandates.

2.3.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is framed around two key PR theories: stakeholder theory and two - way symmetrical communication. These theories are relevant to this study because they provide a framework for understanding the way an academic programme like the PR programme at CPUT negotiates a relationship with its industry partners. Both theories emphasise a dialogic communication model and indicate that organisations that fail to communicate constantly with their environment are likely to fail to sustain relationships with critical stakeholders. Here, Pearson (1989, cited in Taylor and Kent, 2002:23) posits that an organisation has an ethical obligation to establish and sustain relationships with all stakeholders that are affected by its activities, and failing to do so is morally wrong. Although both theories advocate sustainable relations, their approaches to achieving this goal are different. On the one hand, stakeholder theory places a lot of emphasis on relationship building by demonstrating elements that are needed in relationship building. However, it fails to clearly indicate channels of communication that are critical for

building and sustaining such relationships. On the other hand, two-symmetrical model of communication emphasises how an organisation should communicate by clearly suggesting communication symmetries. But, it fails to address various components of stakeholders that are critical for an organisation seeking to build and sustain its relationship. In spite of the inherent weaknesses in each of these approaches, when used together, the principles of these theories provide the tools to answer the research aim and objectives of this project.

2.3.1. STAKEHOLDER THEORY

Several studies indicate various ways of understanding stakeholder theory and as a result they identify three prominent principles (Donald and Preston, 1995; Cooper, 2003:232). Firstly the theory is descriptive, as its shows clearly how business works and how decisions are taken. This approach ensures that the views of all parties involved in a partnership are taken into consideration. Secondly it is instrumental as it capitalises on increasing efficiency, better business performance and increase profit. Thirdly, the theory is normative because it emphasises ethical behaviour and contends that shareholders and stakeholders should be treated equally (Donaldson and Preston, 2013:71). The three principles indicate that stakeholder theory values the voice of stakeholders, because organisations rely on the above characteristics in order to win public support. Therefore the normative approach is critical because it assists in interpreting organisational function and offer guidance about acceptable values for management (Donaldson & Preston, 2013:72). Furthermore, it has the power to satisfy the moral right of an individual (Evan and Freedman, cited in Donaldson & Preston, 2013:73). This means all stakeholders' views should be considered and the stakeholders should contribute to determine the future of an organisation. These points hinge directly to the aim and objectives of this study as the research concentrates on strategies for a robust relationship between the PR programme and key industry partners.

In addition, stakeholder theory is amongst the leading theories that practitioners regularly use when dealing with stakeholder relations management. The theory was developed by Ansoff, with the intention of enabling firms to meet their objectives and also to ensure that organisations and public power are balanced (Robert, 1992). In the field of PR, this balance of power is critical for the sustainability of any relationship with industry partners. Moreover Freeman, Vick and Parmar (2004: 368) reveal that the

theory advances the legitimate interest of organisations' strategic stakeholders, which can be affected directly or indirectly. It also calls on management to shift its attention from a short-term profit making approach to long term relationship building, by adopting a symmetrical model of communication (Deatherge and Huzleton, 1998:58).

For several authors, (Freeman, 1994; Grunig, 2007:10; Botha et al. 2007:69) stakeholder's theory enables organisations' management to understand principles that they should apply. In return, these principles can help them to build and sustain a relationship with key stakeholders. As a result many firms have adopted stakeholder theory to secure constant support from their stakeholders. Here, managers are at the centre of value creations by inspiring their stakeholder and creating a relationship where everyone strives for the interests of the other partner. Therefore to consolidate all stakeholder needs, organisations can organise regular meetings where key industry partners' areas of interest and concerns are identified and addressed (Kuzu et al., 2013:288; Le Roux, 2014:309).

The following key components of stakeholder theory are relevant to the main aim and objectives of this study and they are discussed accordingly in the ensuing sections.
- Stakeholder identification
- Stakeholder engagement
- Stakeholder involvement
- Stakeholder responsibility

2.3.1.1. Identifying key organisation stakeholders

Organisations can effectively address the issue of engagement strategy by identifying key stakeholders. Stakeholders can be identified through stakeholder power, legitimacy and urgent (Freeman, 1984; Lerner and Fryxell, 1994; Morgan and Hunt, 1994; De Shepper et al. 2014:1213). Academic programmes like the PR programme should take time to analyse which stakeholder should be given preference and indicate the attention needed. De Shepper et al. (2014:1213) further indicate that professional bodies have more influence on the success and survival of any academic department. This study relies on stakeholders that have impact on the survival of the PR programme such as; students, academic staffs and industry partners. These identified stakeholders have some similar characteristics and share some common interests (Rawlins, 2006:3;

Driessen et al., 2013). Organisations can identify stakeholders based on Grunig and Hunt's (1984) stakeholder identification model consisting of enabling linkage, functional linkage, diffused linkage and normative linkage (Rawlins, 2006).

2.3.1.2. Stakeholder engagement

After an organisation has identified its key stakeholders, it needs to start engaging with them. Stakeholder engagement assists the organisation to understand the nature of influence it has and what it receives from the environment, for the purpose of sustaining relationship. Harrison and John (1996, cited in Ricardo and Gomes, 2007:89) maintain that organisation should seek stakeholder partnership rather than stakeholder management for mutual benefit to materialise. Consequently any organisation determined to grow in a stable environment has the responsibility to alleviate stakeholders' discontent (Chakravath, 1986:445); and should be watchful on how to respond to the environment (Ricardo and Gomes, 2007:82). Decisions and actions that leaders of organisations' take have various implication for sustaining relationships with key industry partners. By creating a better condition for engagement, organisations build trust with stakeholders' and create positive relationships (Freeman et al., 2010). Subsequently, leaders of organisations that integrate stakeholders' interests in organisational activities create a better environment for operation.

This demonstrates that an organisation that seeks to build relationships with key stakeholders should not view their relationship from a management perspective, but from an engagement angle. It is much easier to address the issue of partnership dissatisfaction through an engagement approach instead of the management approach. In a relationship there is no one that needs to be managed; partners are more interested in engagement, which is often achieved through mutual understanding, sharing of information and dialogue (Freeman, 1984; Manetti, 2011:111). In addition PR practitioners have adopted the theory to understand organisational behaviour (Donaldson and Preston, 2013:69). Furthermore, Stephens, et al. (2005:393) argue that organisational behaviour can only be understood after adequately defining the nature of a relationship between an organisation and its stakeholders. Management of an organisation should always evaluate how they respond to stakeholders needs. To successfully respond to stakeholder needs, relevant research should feed the

organisation with information about stakeholders concerns and how to formulate responses (Walch and Jackson, 2007:181).

Additionally, organisations are supposed to have engagement strategies in place to ensure that after the process of identifying stakeholders is completed, they can start engaging immediately. King Report (2009) stresses the importance of a balanced relationship between business interest and stakeholder's interest. Meintjes and Grobler (2014:163) indicate that trust, power, satisfaction and commitment, drive stakeholders' relationship management. Ultimately, transparent and effective communication with stakeholders is important for building and sustaining stakeholders' confidence and trust (King Report, 2009:87). Drawing on the above discussions, it is critical that universities and industry use enterprise strategy in order to understand stakeholders' concerns and for addressing their expectations. Steyn and Niemann (2014:172) state that enterprise strategy was conceptualised as a level strategy which addresses the political and social rights of organisations. It is social strategy that enables organisations to achieve its non-economical goal (Steyn and Puth, 2000), through building a lasting relationship with the stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Organisations should purposefully integrate the views of stakeholders in the organisational strategies for effective communication, negotiations, relations management and motivation to take place (Seyn and Niemann, 2014:175; Waligo et al., 2014: 1343). To productively reach the desired outcome, an organisation should draw its strength from a well-designed internal communication strategy to influence the external environment (Grunig and Grunig, 1998:141; Stephens et al., 2005:393; Walch and Jackson, 2007:184). One objective of this study is to provide the PR programme and its key industry partners with recommendations for improving relations. Thus the earlier discuss outlined critical steps that partners can implement to meet each other needs.

2.3.1.3. Stakeholder's involvement

This approach recognizes that an organisation has multiple stakeholders, with each stakeholder holding different perceptions (Seyn and Niemann, 2014:175). Negative perceptions can affect the organisation's strategies and long term plans (Meintjes and Grobler, 2014:162). The success of any business depends therefore, on the extent to which the organisation can mitigate stakeholder concerns. To avoid negative effects on relationships and on the sustenance of a sound relationship, academic disciplines

should provide complete, timely, relevant, accurate, honest and accessible information (King Report, 2009:87; Meintjes and Grobler, 2014:162). Organisations should align values between the organisation and stakeholders. Aligning values assume parties involved reach an agreement through dialogue and effective communication (Meintjes and Grobler, 2014:163).

Stakeholder involvement increases organisational productivity (Waligo et al., 2014: 1343). Various universities stakeholders want to be involved in decision making processes. Their involvement can improve stakeholder confidence; as a result ease tension and pressure on organisational reputation (King Report, 2009:87). However in the South African context, the success of stakeholder involvement approach requires strategic thinking (Rensburg, 2014:129). Consequently access to valuable information is critical should an organisation want to position itself strategically for communicating its message. According to Holtzhausen (2005:411) the onus is always on the parties involved in a relationship to demonstrate how serious they value relationship. Friedman and Miles (2006) identify three types of engagement, namely; one-way, two-way and multiple-way. All three levels of engagement specify the extent to which stakeholder's involvement is influenced by power, control and issues (Waligo et al., 2014). Although Friedman and Miles (2006) identified three ways of engaging stakeholders, (Ladkin and Bertramini, 2002) argue that engagement is complicated because each party a holds different opinion on how things should be done. However partners can resolve their difference through identifying the subject that matters to stakeholders (Ricardo and Gomes, 2007). Similarly, by identifying a communication medium that is relevant for engagement, attention should always be paid to the content of the communication (Adams and Frost, 2006:283).

2.3.1.4. Stakeholder responsibility

De Shepper et al. (2014:1220) propose that stakeholder management should be conducted from the perspective of partners. All parties must be willing to review their current strategy and performance, to determine the allocation of new tasks and responsibility. An organisation that seeks to build a sound relationship with its stakeholders should focus on non-profit making aspects of the organisation. Hence organisations must be willing to relinquish its total control in decision making to allow decisions to be reached after considerable dialogue (Steyn and Niemann, 2014:175).

2.3.2. TWO-WAY SYMMETRICAL COMMUNICATION

As mentioned in the introduction, stakeholder theory is crucial for the success of an organisation. However it does not clearly indicate how an organisation can build synergies with its stakeholders in spite of advocating dialogical conversation. Consequently, this study turned to two-way symmetrical communication in order to address the gaps in stakeholder theory. As a result it makes more sense to use the two theories in a study like this one which seeks to critically analyse engagement strategies that PR and key industry partner's use. Furthermore, these theories are also used as guide for data analysis and discussion as well as for providing recommendations.

According to Yuang (2004:334) organisations with a symmetrical communication philosophy perceive communication as a tool to create synergy through interactive behaviour which attempts to understand each other's attitude. However, Yuang (2004:334) contends that it is difficult to find a true two way-symmetrical conversation in the world of business. Grunig et al. (2002:15) define two-way symmetrical communication as a model of PR which seeks to balance the interests' of organisations and stakeholders. Communication is then used for sustaining relations and managing conflict with stakeholders. In addition, Grunig and White (1992) describe the characters of symmetrical communication as inter-dependence, an open system, symmetry, equality, autonomy, innovative, responsibility and conflict resolution, as well as communication as a means to harmony.

The two-way symmetrical model places significant emphasis on the notions of transparency, ethical and mutual benefit (Grunig and White, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002). An organisation that adopts this kind of communication creates a balanced relationship that keeps the interest of all parties involved in a relationship at the forefront (Grunig et al. 2002; Le Roux, 2014:309). This model of communication supports Freeman's (1984) stakeholder theory approach which capitalises on the importance of meeting stakeholder's needs. Grunig (2004) further indicates that in applying the two – way symmetrical approach, organisations and stakeholders shares their power and can shift their opinion to create a symbiotic relationship. As a result, the effects and results of communication is not entirely determined by the mediums used but by the attitudes of those involved in the communication process (Grunig, 2006). Therefore, the motive

behind communicating should always be transparency in order to allow parties involved in the communication process to influence each other positively (Le Roux 2014:309). In the case of universities and industry relationships, partners can use two – way symmetrical model to influence each other (Grunig et al., 2002), and to ensure that the stakeholder's voice is strategically considered in organisational communication (Grunig, 2006).

2.3.2.1. Advantages of using two - way symmetrical communication

An organisation which uses two - way symmetrical communication attempts to put the interest of parties affected by its operation at the centre of its deliberation. Such an organisation believes that the interest of its partners is theirs (Leeper and Leeper, 2001:465; Rawel, 2003:72). Similarly, an organisation which seeks to satisfy its stakeholders, is likely to promote long range vision, two - way symmetrical communication and organisational value that places emphasis on people (Rensburg and Cant, 2011:238). The organisation is usually conscious of problem solving, and building a relationship grounded in ethics, trust, respect, human dignity and not on personal manipulation and gain (Leeper and Leeper, 2001:465).

The advantage of two – way symmetrical communication is the ability to create stability. When partners have a clear communication strategy which includes partner's values and interest, conflicting issues are eliminated. This can only happen when partners have respect for each other (Mutch and Aitken, 2009:96). Partners should have a clear understanding of communication channels that best serves their interests and the public (Freeman, 1984:2; Rawlins, 2006:2). Grunig (2008) noted that within the South African context, the Ubuntu approach advocates similar values and focuses on creating a harmonious community, based on respect and responsiveness, dignity, solidarity, compassion and care for individuals or groups in the community (Le Roux, 2014:308). Based on the philosophy of Ubuntu, organisations exist because of other partners that support their activities from immediate relationships, to the entire web of relationships (Kamoche, 2011). Therefore industry partners and academic programmes should understand the process of identifying stakeholder perceptions while finding out common interests. This process must mature in order to create sound dialogical relations (Smith, 2012:830). Finally Rensburg (2014:129) states that there is an increase in dialogue between the professional body and the academic discipline around means of improving

the professional image of PR in Southern Africa. As a result the emphases should be on critical communication strategies that are relevant, timely and precise for addressing current trends in the university – industry relations.

2.3.2.2. Dialogical conversation

Organisations engage in dialogue with their stakeholders through the boundary spanner. They use the boundary spanner to ensure their communication strategies are well coordinated to avoid contradiction (Driessen et al., 2013:1465). Effective use of dialogical conversations requires organisations to use several communication instruments (Driessen et al.; 2013:1469). In addition a well-designed engagement strategy is required to enable organisations to cope with changes in the external environment (Welch Jackson, 2007: 190). In the same way organisations should be willing to provide information accessible to their key stakeholders (Magness: 2007:187). In the case of an academic department such as PR and industry partners, there should be more than one way of releasing information to partners (Grunig, 1999:14). All parties involved can achieve this desire through communicating politely, cheerfully and fostering professional behaviour toward each other (Ki and Hon, 2009:6).

This stipulates that organisations that are serious about sustaining their relationship with partners should move from the persuasive strategy to dialogical strategy (Ki and Hon, 2009:9; Trapp 2014:43). The dialogic approach emphasises balanced and fair relationships which can only be achieved through mutual decision making. Taylor and Kent (2002:24); as well as Ki and Hon (2009:4) present following characteristics of dialogical communication mutuality: collaboration, mutual equality, the propinquity dialogue and risk taking. Finally, several practitioners still believe that the dialogic approach is the best model of communication (Neilson, 2001:135; Taylor and Kent, 2002:23; Lane, 2007). To reiterate his point Taylor and Kent (2002:24) echo that dialogue is highly associated with honesty. Thus, partners involved in dialogical conversations are encouraged to avoid manipulative techniques. By applying the desired communication strategies, a two-way symmetrical conversation by university and industry partners is attainable in their relationship (Ki and Hon, 2009:6). The use of a dialogic approach makes possible for partners involved in internships to establish a partnership that is built on honesty and trust. This process will enable partners to eliminate all manipulative techniques, thereby advancing each partner's interests.

2.3.2.3. Communication strategies

Some scholars (Steyn and Niemann, 2014:177; Kim 2014) uphold that strategy is a technique that practitioners use when communicating the organisation's intention to stakeholders through general language, symbols and stories, especially when attempting to change the minds of stakeholders. According to Ni (2006:277), PR contributes to the strategic development of an organisation. However, its values are solely noted when practitioners contribute to organisations' effectiveness by building and sustaining relations with industry through appropriate strategies. The focus on PR's strategies is about identifying the concerns, expectations, values and norms of stakeholders. Steensen (2014:271) identified four types of strategies that are used by organisations when engaging with their stakeholders; namely: shared strategy, hidden strategy, false strategy and learning strategy.

For King (1998:43), organisational strategy-making is best informed by a process of constant dialogue with stakeholders. He notes that an organisation must not be judged by what it does, but by the extent to which it is willing to negotiate what it does with its stakeholders. Consequently, Le Roux (2014:310) stipulates that stakeholder viewpoints are supposed to be incorporated in the process of creating strategies by inviting constant dialogue. This discussion is also supported by Steyn and Niemann (2014:176) stating that strategy development should look beyond the traditional approach, which focuses on business needs. By actively engaging stakeholders, organisations gain knowledge of stakeholder interests, legitimacy and expectations. Thus, on-going dialogue is crucial for sustaining relations and understanding stakeholders (Steyn and Niemann 2014:177). Furthermore, organisational values should be aligned with stakeholder's values through effective engagement (Meintjies and Grobler, 2014:163). Steyn and Niemann (2014:172) concur by stating that many organisations have failed to consider stakeholder values, expectations and norms during the process of developing communication strategies, thus causing damage to their relationship.

Drawing on these points, this research argues that, a meaningful relationship is determined by the correctness of communication strategy (Steensen, 2014:272). Therefore organisations can adopt various theories when attempting to create a positive

relationship with key industry partners. However this attempt can only be effective if organisations have a clear communication strategy.

2.4 conclusion

This chapter has discussed the origin of public relations, principles of public relations, the role of public relations within an organisation; building and sustaining relationship, university and industry relations, PRM curriculum redesigning process and its implications, work integrated learning and the role of academics staff members and industry partners. Furthermore, it has provided a discussion of relevant literature, showing how existing studies shape our understanding of strategies for building sustainable relationships between academia and industry. The literature indicates that to have a healthy and lasting relationship, parties involved in the relationship should learn to compromise in order to accommodate partner's needs. In general the literature shows that organisations which are serious about building and sustaining relationships should consider examining their communication and engagement strategies regularly, in order to identify areas that need improvement.

The chapter has interrogated debates that purposeful communication that incorporates the views of industry partners is significant for any kind of relationship. It argued that all forms of engagement that are crucial for partnership building and sustaining relations should be taken seriously by academic departments, industry partners and students. In the same way the designing of communication strategy should be explicit, consciously and purposefully developed, and made in advance (Mintzberg, 1978: 935). University – industry partner's relationship requires precise, timely and significant communication strategy that aims to facilitate their engagement and fortify the relationship. In order to progressively reach the desired outcome, organisations should draw strength from a well-designed internal communication strategy to influence the external environment (Stephens et al., 2005:393; Walch and Jackson, 2007:184). This chapter also examined the two relevant theories; stakeholder and two-way symmetrical theory, showing how the principles of the theories provide a framework for addressing the objectives of this project. Chapter three describes the research design and methodology, methods for data collection, participants, and the PR agencies used in this study.

CHAPTER THREE
RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Introduction

The main aim of this study is to critically analyse strategies that the public relations programme at CPUT uses to engage its key industry partners through the lenses of staff members, industry partners and students. This chapter discusses the choice of research design and methodology, and succinctly describes the research process. It outlines the steps that the researcher undertook in selecting the case study and participants, as well as well as in coding and analysing empirical data. Here, methodological issues relating to sampling, sample size, population, data collection, data analysis, coding, validity and reliability and the way they are applied in the study are clearly discussed. The chapter builds on the previous chapter, which analysed existing studies and the theoretical framework relevant to a project of this nature. In that chapter, key debates on the relationship between PR academic programmes and industry partners are discussed and brought to bear on this case. This critical review of literature and explanations of the theoretical frame for the study provides the platform for selecting the appropriate design and methodology, as well as the methods for data collection.

Since the main purpose of this study is to critically analyse strategies through the subjective views of staff, industry partners and students, a qualitative approach and case study have been selected as the most suitable methodology and design. This approach locates the project in an interpretivist paradigm, which argues that the world is understood through the multiple social realities of the actors (Henning et al., 2004:20). In this light, qualitative research is defined as an investigation which seeks to understand, describe and to explain social phenomena through the process of analysing individual or group experience, interaction, communication and document (Klave et al., 2004:11; Flick, 2009: xvi). It comprises of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible (Flick 2009: xvi). Qualitative studies achieve their aims through the use of the techniques associated with the gathering, analysis, interpretation and presentation of narrative information (Henning et al., 2004).

3.2. Characteristics of qualitative research

Qualitative research can deploy a number of different designs (Denzin 2005:95). Although it has the ability to deploy a number of designs, Mouton (2006:109) indicates that the research objectives determine the research methods, strategy and techniques. Another key characteristic of qualitative research is the ability given to the researcher to select any theory that is relevant to his study (Gray, 2009:166). For these authors, qualitative research is generally exploratory in nature even though some exemptions do exist (Creswell, 2003). Similarly, this approach can be used in the area where little is known about the phenomenon or for the purpose of gaining insight on an event that is largely known. In this case, the paucity of studies on university and industry relationships, with a focus on engagement strategies provided a motivation for adopting a qualitative approach. Moreover, the ability to gather more descriptive data that enabled the researcher to critically analyse staff and industry partners' perceptions about engagement strategies, and make meanings from them, further strengthens the choice of research design and methodology (Blanche et al. 2009:461).

3.3. Research paradigms

As stated above, the study subscribes to the interpretivist paradigm. In the social sciences, an interpretive paradigm refers to the ability of the researcher to look, observe, listen and interpret what he/she sees and listens with a lens through which a study is investigated (Creswell, 2003). To this end, interpretive studies seek to understand phenomena through the meanings that people associate to them (Antonio, 2009:43). Therefore, this study makes use of an inductive approach to better understand the meanings that public relations stakeholders have associated with the programme and the implications for sustaining relationships (Mouton, 2006:177; Gray, 2009:14). This is based on Mouton's (2007:77) definition, which considers inductive reasoning as an argument that genuinely supports the evidence which can only lead to highly probable conclusions.

3.4. Research design

The research design is determined by the research questions, objectives and the ability to interpret the answers (Yin 2003; Gray, 2009:248). As a result this study adopted an exploratory case study design in order to address the questions and the aim of the

study. The research design is a unit of analysis which helps the researcher to gather critical evidence which was required to address the questions adequately. Yin defines a case study as:

> *"An empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used"* Yin (2003:13).

Bromley (1990:23 as cited in Bloor and Wood, 2006:27) support the definition by simplifying the case study as an organised examination into an event or a set of related events which aim to explain the phenomenon of interest. This research is a case study because its unit of analysis is the engagement strategies used by PR programme for relationship with industry partners. It examines perceptions of public relations key stakeholders and the implications for sustaining relationship and curriculum design. This includes perceptions of consultancies that employ PR graduates, PR interns and PR programme staff members. The aim is to investigate how they perceive engagement and communication strategies that the PR programmes uses to engage and how that directly impacts the quality of the relationship. Furthermore Gray (2009:255) indicates that a case study consists of four types; single case study, single case embedded, multiple cases holistic and multiple cases embedded. This study focuses on a single case study (CPUT's PR programme) because the aim was to explore how it interacts with its internal and external environment.

Furthermore, in an exploratory case study the researcher makes observations and searches for a similar pattern. Conclusion is drawn from the findings after putting forward a theory about why this pattern is occurring (Creswell 2014:186). Antonio (2009:43) indicates that when applying an inductive approach, the researcher demonstrates working back and forth between the theme and the database until the researcher is satisfied with the set of themes identified. This inquiry suggests using the case study because of its relevance; as by nature, a case study focuses on one or two issues that are critical to understanding the system being examined (Yin 2003b cited in Gray, 2009). In this context, the system is the PR programme at CPUT and engagement strategies is the issue. Here, the examination seeks to understand the effectiveness or

ineffectiveness of strategies that the PR programme uses to interact with its internal and external environment.

Another factor which influenced the use of a case study design is the design's ability to adopt a contextual framework of choice. Case study relies on a sound theoretical framework to provide guidance during the process of collecting and analysing data. Theories also assist in finding rich data and for the validation of data (Gray, 2009:247; Dunn 2010:49). The researcher's choice of theories explained in chapter two, are suitable for this type of case study (Yin 2003b as cited in Gray, 2009:247).

3.5. The research journey

This section focuses on specific aspects of the journey such as sampling, data collection, data analysis and population. In a case study research data, can be collected from documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation and physical artefacts (Yin, 2003; Bloor and Wood, 2006:28; Flick 2008:57; Gray, 2009:252; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009:25; Maree, 2012:77). Skinner et al. (2010:34) state that in-depth discussion can be carried out on a respectful topic through open-ended questions in an interview format.

3.5.1. The sampling techniques

A population that is conversant with the PR programme at CPUT and PR the industry was purposively selected as participants for this study. The selection was based on participants' level of involvement in the internship programme, industry knowledge and the influences that they have in the public relations industry, particularly in South Africa. Although the intention of a qualitative study is not to make generalisations about the large population, the nature the sample should be taken into account. Given that, the researcher needs to gather rich data which could help him to make meanings about the quality of the relationship between industry and academia; all stakeholders are expected to be represented in the sample that will represent the views of industry partners, the public relations programme and students. After consulting relevant staffs and key industry players, the researcher was able to get a list of relevant participants who can provide reliable and valid data.

Lapan and Quartaroli (2009:154) indicate that qualitative design is more likely to be associated with purposive sampling. It allows researchers to select a sample which enables them to investigate the phenomenon accordingly (Locke et al. 2004:49; Lapan & Quartaroli, 2009:252). Two categories of sampling methods are highlighted in these studies, namely probability and non-probability sampling. This research uses the non-probability sampling technique because the aim of the project is to use key participants with rich knowledge of the PR programme and PR industry instead of interviewing every one with an opinion on the PR programme's activities. The choice is influenced by the view that this sampling technique uses a small number of participants to provide rich and relevant information to the research questions under investigation (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009:25). Flick (2009:27) notes that sampling is very important in a qualitative study therefore participants need to have knowledge and relevant experience of the unit of analysis. In this case, this sampling technique allowed the researcher to select participants who are able to provide rich empirical data which can be used to achieve the aim and objectives of this project.

3.5.2. Population

For Mouton (2006:135) a population is considered as a collection of objects, event or individuals having some common characteristics that the research is interested in investigating. This study uses the PR programme at CPUT as its primary case. However because the research focuses on sustaining relationships with industry partners, employees of two key PR agencies in Cape Town: participants from Atmosphere Communications and Magna Communications were also interviewed. The selection of these agencies was done in consultation with relevant PR staff members. To this end, the following indicators were used during the selection process: numbers of years the agencies have been in existence and their commitment towards offering internship opportunities to CPUT PR students. In addition, the number of students that each agency enrols as part of the internship programme per year, and the number it retains as employees after the internship programme, as well as their affiliation to professional bodies. Theoretically, this decision is informed by Locke, Silverman and Spiriduso (2004:49) as they suggest that the selection of subjects determines the quality of the result. To gather precise data the population needs to be informed and be knowledgeable about the subject under investigation (Flick, 2009:27; Lapan and Quartaroli, 2009:154). Because these agencies have been the main recipients of PR

interns from CPUT, they are very knowledgeable about the PR programme at the university. Therefore, participants from these two prominent PR agencies are able to provide the research with rich and reliable information. In addition to industry participants, key staff members of the PR programme and students also constituted the population for this study. In total, this project used twenty one participants and they are described below:

3.5.3 Description of the case study

The Public Relations programme is situated in the Media Studies Department within the Faculty of Informatics and Design at Cape Peninsula University of Technology. The programme offers National Diploma, B-Tech and Master of Technology. The National Diploma and B Tech in Public Relations Management are design to impart students with world benchmark skills and lecturers puts emphasis on teaching methodologies. The programme offers students Work Place Learning (WPL) as part of the curriculum. The Work Place Learning includes Service Learning (SL), whereby students are involved in projects on behalf of 'real' clients such as Non Profit Organisations (NPOs); as well as Work Integrated Learning (WIL) which requires third year students to successfully complete a compulsory internship. In addition the programme offers online Master's degree. Public Relations graduates are employed in a variety of organisations. Most graduates work for corporations, the media, private consultancies, and Non Profit Organisations and government departments.
[http://www.cput.ac.za/academic/faculties/informaticsdesign/departments/public-relations-management]

3.5.4 Research participants
3.5.4.1. PR staff members

From the PR programme, participants included: the former and current Head of the programme, PR programme coordinator and PR programme Work Integrated Learning (Co-op) lecturer. These participants have been staff members of the PR programme for the past 10 to 15 years and have interacted with industry partners in various capacities. They have sat on the Public Relations Industry Advisory Council (PRIAC) for several years. The board is made up of representatives from the academia and from the industry.

3.5.4.2. PR Agencies participants

Nine (9) participants were initially selected from the two PR agencies - Atmosphere Communication and Magna Carta Communication. This number was later extended to 11 after participants from the agencies referred the researcher to two other people whom they believed could contribute to the research. The two additional participants included the former chairperson of PRIAC and the owner of Hippo Communication, a PR consultancy established with a former CPUT lecturer. Interestingly, this consultancy has recently stopped accepting CPUT PR students for its internship programme. However, when the researcher invited them to participate in the study, only one accepted the invitation.

3.5.4.3. Atmosphere Communication

Atmosphere is an integrated brand and corporate communications consultancy with offices in Johannesburg and Cape Town. The consultancy focuses on strategic counselling, corporate communications, media relations, influencer relations, creative brandings and social media campaigns. The consultancy's main clients are Santam, Simba, Capitec, Kulula, Mweba, Sanlam, TileAfrica, Virgin Mobile and Johnnie Walker [http://atmosphere.co.za/about/]. Again, the researcher chose Atmosphere Communication because it employs a larger number of PR interns and graduates from CPUT. In addition, the consultancy has won several PR awards, making it a key player in the industry. As a key player, it is abreast with shifting trends in the PR industry and can offer better insight to how PR programmes should be designed, as well as how PR consultancies can sustain their relations with academic programmes like PR programme at CPUT.

3.5.4.4. Magna Carta communication

Magna Carta communication's website postulates that they are the lead PR and Communication agency in Africa. The consultancy's focus is on stakeholders and influencer relations and the management of organisational reputation through the use of traditional and new media. The consultancy was founded in 1994 and it claims to understand the importance of stakeholder engagement, value of freedom, liberty and partners responsibility [http://atmosphere.co.za/about/]

Both consultancies have provided internship opportunities to CPUT's PR students for the past five years and are still doing so. The fact that they take public relations students on a regular basis implies that they are important industry partners of the PR programme.

3.5.4.5. Past and current PR Students

The researcher conducted a focus group discussion with seven (7) PR students that have participated in the internship programme. The selection of students was done through a constructive consultation with the programme course coordinator and the lecturers responsible for Work Integrated Learning. Four of these students are currently doing their Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree and they were selected by the programme coordinator. The other three students were selected by the Co-cop lecturer. The selection of students was done by the public relations programme. These students have some understanding of the PR programme and industry. Their views are important because students are an important stakeholder in the relationship between academia and industry. In addition, the findings of this study are likely to have strong implications for future interns and graduates seeking employment in the PR industry. To this end, investigating their perceptions shed some light on the PR strategies for sustaining its relationship with industry partners.

3.6 Data collection methods and instruments

To collect data, the study used three research methods: semi structured interview, focus group discussion and document analysis. Each method was selected based on its relevance to the objectives of the study. The use of semi-structured interviews and a focus group discussion made it possible for the researcher and respondents to engage freely (Corbetta, 2003). The researcher had the opportunity to probe pertinent issues that emerged from guiding questions. The interview process was more flexible although few questions were put in place to direct the research, but this did not prevent participants and the researcher from discussing other relevant issues that arose during an interview (Corbetta, 2003; Yin, 2003).

3.6.1. Semi-structured interview

Semi structured interviews allowed the researcher to prepare possible questions in advance. The interview guide provided a clear set of instructions for the interviewer,

which can led to reliable and rich data. The method is mostly used when chances of interviewing the same participants for the second are limited and the researcher has several participants to interview (Johansson, 2003; Flick, 2009; Yin, 2003; Maree 2010). It offered the researcher the ability to observe, conduct informal and unstructured interviews. In addition the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to gain more understanding of the topic under investigation. The use of open-ended questions allowed the researcher to identify new ways of seeing and understanding the topic under discussion (Johansson, 2003; Flick; Yin, 2003; Maree 2010). Another benefit of using semi-structured interviews was the ability given to participants to participate freely. Lastly because of the amount of preparation that the researcher had to do, it made the research to look confident during the interview process (Johansson, 2003; Flick 2009; Maree 2010).

The following steps were used during data planning and data collection: Firstly the researcher contacted the two selected PR companies to request for permission to conduct interviews. After receiving approval the researcher contacted each participant individual via e-mail and telephone. Secondly, face-to-face interviews were conducted at respective PR consultancy location and at CPUT for PR internal stakeholder. Thirdly, it is important to note that interview durations differed from one interview to another. However, the minimum time spent on each interview was thirty five minutes and maximum was one hour. The interviews were one-to-one with no other participant present. Finally, all interviews were recorded with the use of a voice recorder with the consent of participants and the voice recording later transcribed for analysis. During the interview process, participants were informed about the nature of the research and the process of the interview. Also they were informed why this research was critical and why they were selected. Also, participants were told about their rights and they were requested to sign participant consent forms. Furthermore, participants were informed that they have the right to indicate whether they would like their names, words and images to be used in research report. Finally, participants were given the opportunity to ask question and express themselves freely.

3.6.2. Document analysis

The researcher analysed a Memorandum of Understanding used by the PR programme when signing a WIL agreement with industry partners and students. Also analysed were

minutes of the meetings where academic staff, students' representatives and industry representative participated. The PRIAC minutes comprises 2014 and 2015 council meetings. Another document which was analysed is CPUT Co-operative education policy. However documents that stipulate how industry and universities must engage based on guidelines provided by public relations professionals were not obtained. The researcher requested engagement strategy guidelines from PRISA Cape Town and Johannesburg offices without getting any substantial documents. This request was done on several occasions and evidence of e-mail correspondence and their responses are recorded. PRISA management failed to produce formalised documents that stipulate how all academic programmes that are registered with this professional body should engage with their key stakeholders.

Furthermore, the researcher requested similar documents from the International Association of Business Communication (IABC), Cape Town branch to no avail. Based on the responses received, one can conclude that the IABC board does not function effectively. This is because those serving in management are volunteers. More on these critical institutes is discussed in the chapter four. Industry partners that participated in this study are discontent with the level of service rendered by these two key professional bodies. Moreover, journal articles, books and conference papers were analysed. Among other reasons, these documents were analysed for the following reasons: Firstly, the aim was to analyse communication contents used by the public relations programme when engaging with stakeholders. Secondly, to analyse PRISA and IABC guidelines of engagement strategies for organisations practicing public relations and those affiliated with academic institutions. Lastly to analyse the PR Programme's curriculum documents, CPUT WIL/Co-op policy and minutes of meetings.

3.6.3. Focus group

For this study, a focus group discussion was useful because it offered detailed information about participant and group viewpoints on the issue under discussion. Also its gives the researcher the ability to collect more data in a single setup and still generate relevant empirical data, which saves time and finance (Johansson, 2003; Flick, 2009; Yin, 2003; Maree 2012). By using a focus group, the researcher managed to get a full understanding of students' perceptions of strategies that public relations programme uses to engage the industry. They openly expressed their view on current relations

between the public relations programme and industry partners and their frustration with regards to the current public relations curriculum.

Focus group participants comprise seven students, 3 undergraduates who were doing their internship programme at the time of this study; and 4 postgraduates. The selected students were believed to possess the quality of participants that the researcher wanted to interview. After receiving the names and their e-mail addresses, the researcher contacted all them to set up the interview date and time. The focus group discussion was conducted by the researcher. The focus group guidelines were introduced and explained before the start to allow for any questions. The idea was to enable all participants to engage freely and avoid a scenario where only a few students become lead participants, which could have affected the outcome of the focus group discussion. To generate rich data through focus group discussion, the researcher adopted non-directive questions (Maree, 2012).

3.7.   Data analysis strategy

There are several approaches to data analysis. This study adopted a thematic data analysis technique.

3.7.1   Coding and interpreting data

Strauss and Corbin (1990, cited in Flick 2009:307) indicate that in the process of interpretation, several procedures need to be followed for working with text with the open coding, axial coding and selective coding being notable. He further noted that the process of coding data always starts with open coding and ends with selective coding. According to Flick (2009:307) coding includes the constant comparison of phenomena, case, concept and the formulation of questions that are directed to the text. After reading the transcripts and becoming familiarised with the data, the researcher was able to identify similar themes and patterns. The themes and pattern were grouped based on the research aim, objectives and questions. This was done through process of identifying similarity and dissimilarity within the content.

3.7.1. Thematic data analysis

Thematic data analysis is a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns, (Braun and Clarke, 2006:6). Thematic analysis differs from other analytic methods that seek to describe patterns across qualitative data such discourse analysis, thematic decomposition analysis and grounded theory. A thematic inductive approach does not prescribe the researcher to follow a theoretical framed when coding data (Patton, 1990 cited in Braun and Clarke, 2006:12). In contrast Braun and Clarke (2006) stressed that researchers cannot automatically avoid using theoretical frameworks and epistemological commitments because data cannot be coded in epistemological void. Similarly Teddlie and Tashakkori (2009:7) indicate that thematic data focuses on category, strategies and contextualising distinctive result in themes. In thematic analysis two principles that exist are similarity and contrast principles. The similarity principle indicates that the meaning of symbol can be discovered by identifying how it is similar to other symbols. The contrast principle stipulates that the meaning of a symbol can be discovered by finding out the discrepancy from the other symbols.

Furthermore, themes in the data were identified to help draw common patterns across data sets. In this study, the themes were drawn based on the research objectives. During data analysis patterns and themes were then allocated to each objective, while considering the theories underpinning this study. In a nutshell, theories also enabled the researcher to ensure that all identical themes are placed within similar categories and relevance (Mouton 2006:111; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009:253; Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

3.7.2. Trustworthiness of empirical data

Unlike in quantitative research whereby reliability and validity of data are considered as non-negotiable indicators of credibility, qualitative researchers tend to use the term trustworthiness of the data (Henning et al., 2004). However, to establish trustworthiness of qualitative research, we still rely on the concept of reliability and validity as the point of departure. For example, in terms of validity Mouton (2006:109) indicates that is quite challenging to validate a study but the researcher can consider applying few criteria before conducting the research so as to ensure that the findings are valid. For Mouton (2006), the concept of validity includes identifying key dimensions of validity and

eliminating all foreseeable threats to validity in the research process. Consequently, to avoid a scenario where data are invalid the research should:

- Define the theme of his study at the beginning;
- Select various sources of inquiries;
- Establish a chain of evidence during data collection process;
- Evaluate the draft case study report though feedback from the key informants. In the process of collecting data and analysis the researcher took the above points into consideration (Gray 2009:260).

In term of reliability in case study research, the researcher is expected to follow a case study protocol, research instruments and data collection and procedures, for using the instrument. Yin (2003b) suggested that to collect rich data and avoid generalisation an overview of the case study project which includes study objective and theoretical framework should be in place. The study had objectives and theories in place.

For Yin (2003b), field procedure, case study questions, templates for data collection and the possible sources for answering each question must be clearly defined. Also, a good structure and guide to the final report must be outlined. In light with the guiding principles, the researcher clearly explains the objectives and theories, as well as the objectives and template of data collection in chapter one and two. In this chapter, the study applied the concept of triangulation to ensure trustworthiness, by making use of more than one method for data collection. As explained above, these methods included semi- structured interviews, focus group discussion, and document analysis. Finally the use of more than one theory and the involvement of senior public practitioners and public relations lecturers further enhanced the credibility of this study.

3.8. Ethical considerations

Ethics in qualitative research can be discussed from a number of angles. Firstly, quality is considered to be the pre-requirement for ethically sound research. Secondly the researcher is requested to ensure sound data protection, to avoid causing harm to participants and respecting perspectives and privacy (Flick 2008:8). Ethics are guidelines or a set of principles for good professional practice, which serve to advise and steer researchers as they conduct their work (Wood and Bloor, 2006:64). Looking at the nature of this research, the researcher was not able to invest much time into developing

relationships with the selected population. However the researcher presented himself in a manner that kept the respondents at ease and encouraged participants to talk openly about their view and experiences about the topic under investigation (Wood and Bloor, 2006:85). To maintain a high ethical standard, the research purpose, procedure, confidentiality and statement of consent were described in-depth. All respondents were thanked through relevant channels and transcripts from CPUT staff and students or industry partners were confidentially handled.

In case study research, the issue of consent is very important especially for ensuring all participants are informed about the nature of the research (Blanche et al. 2009:292). In writing a case study project, the researcher is expected to link the report to the original data and the evidence should be consistent with the questions (Gray, 2009:255). In this study participants were given the chance to sign a consent form confirming that they participated in the research voluntarily. To ensure fair participation, all participants were advised to give their opinion liberally without any influence, and they were not forced to participate. All information provided was kept confidentially. Gray (2009:61) indicates that research ethics concerns the appropriateness of the researcher's behaviour in relation to the subject of research or those affected by it. To avoid any chance of mismanagement of data and any act that can put the respondents' life at detriment, the researcher acted responsibly and made sure that ethical principles were not compromised.

In line with the principles of ethical researcher behaviour, the researcher explained that the study poses no threats to participants' lives and he ensured that

- The participants were informed about the research purpose so that they can make an informed decision about their participation.
- The privacy of participants was respected and they have remained anonymous unless they gave consent that the researcher can reveal their real names in the transcript and final project.
- The participants were fully informed about the nature of the study, the time and place of the interviews and they consented to the use of a voice recorder during the interviews
- Accurate information that led to the success of this study was made available to participants.

Findings were not used to generalise about the PR industry in South Africa and other CPUT faculties and departments are not mentioned in the conclusions drawn from the findings. Some of the participants agreed that their names should be used in the report but I chose not to do so. Instead I used interviewee, followed by suffix number from one to twenty one. So, in this study the participants referred to as interviewee (1) to (21), where they are quoted directly. Excerpts from focus group discussion are simply referenced as focus group discussion.

3.8.   Chapter Conclusion

The chapter has outlined the research design and methodology as well as the methods for data collection. It has provided a motivation for selecting a particular design and approach. Furthermore it has described the entire research journey, sampling techniques, case study and the participants. Finally it has addressed ethical considerations, explained the data collection and analysis process. Chapter focuses on data analysis and discussion of key findings from that data. In the next chapter, the researcher tries to make meanings from empirical data and brings the meanings to bear on the research objectives. Here, the analysis of data is supported by theoretical conceptions from the literature.

CHAPTER FOUR:
DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1. Introduction

The research aim was to critically analyse engagement strategies used by the public relations programme at CPUT for sustaining relationships with its key industry partners. To achieve this main aim, the project analysed the strengths and weaknesses of those strategies and presents industry and students' perceptions of strategies used by the public relations programme to engage with industry partners. Furthermore, it attempts to establish the implications of a sustainable industry partnership for the PR programme curriculum development. The research was motivated by the disturbing fact that there is no substantial research to validate whether engagement with key PR industry stakeholders is mutually beneficial for different parties (Steyn and Puth 2000; Holtzhausen, 2005). It was also inspired by the fact that although, the PR programme leaders use different strategies to negotiate and sustain relationships with industry partners, these strategies are not formalised and there is no memorandum of understanding between the different stakeholders. The study was framed around two prominent PR theories: stakeholder theory and two-way symmetrical communication.

As comprehensively explained in chapter three, to collect data for this project the researcher decided to use a case study research design and a qualitative approach. This approach gave him the opportunity to conduct in-depth interviews with twenty one participants selected from the PR programme, comprising of staff and students, as well as from staff of two major PR agencies in Cape Town. Through sustained semi-structured one-to-one interviews and a focus group discussion with students, the researcher was able collate rich descriptive information about the nature of the relationship between the PR programme and its industry partners.

In this chapter, the researcher returns to the data and provides an analysis of the participants' voices, as well as provides a critical discussion of key findings that have emerged out of the data. The discussions in the chapter are aligned to the main aim and the objectives to ensure that they do not veer from the central focus of this project. To this end, the aim and objectives have been used as the driving sections in the chapter. To make meanings from the empirical data, the researcher has interlaced his

discussions with rich descriptions from interviews, relevant literature and the key principles of the theories.

4.2. Strategies used by the public relations programme to build and sustain stakeholder relations with industry partners.

As stated in chapter two, stakeholder engagement is defined as a process of involving stakeholders in the process of making decisions that would transform the business affairs. This involves the identification of the relevant stakeholders and the measurement of and their level of involvement (Sloan, 2009). The process seeks to ensure that stakeholders are included in an organisation's decision making process (Sloan, 2009). Therefore, stakeholder engagement helps organisations to assess their social responsibility status within the society. However, in the business world where trends are constantly impacting on organisations, the formulation of strategies for sustaining stakeholder engagement is critical. In the case of the PR programme and its industry partners, one of the participants outlined the following strategies:

> *All lecturers are required to be members of PRISA, internship programme, appointing industry members on the departmental industry advisory council (PRIAC), Getting involved with student conferences organized by PRISA; inviting industry members as guest lecturers and Friday Forums are arranged where industry members address groups of students on trends and issues within the industry – as well as the expectations of industry* (participant, 2)

This participant is a staff member of the PR programme and considers membership and participation in forums a central to engagement with industry partners. For them, participation in the forums provides space for interaction between stakeholders (Botha, 2007). However the above quote contradicts with the views of key industry partners that were interviewed. One of the industry interviewees, who have been employing PR students for the past 5 years, states that:

> "*Internship programme is the only engagement strategy that is widely known. Also I don't think whether relationship between our company and CPUT exists*" (Participant, 1).

Although the participant claims that there is no strategy, they however mention a key engagement strategy which emerged repeatedly in the interviews - the internship

programme. Reflecting on her personal experience as a CPUT graduate and now an employer, the interviewee expressed her unhappiness with the nature of relations between her company and public relations programme. The interviewee's argument was that in spite of the number of students that her company employs annually, there is no engagement taking place. This view is supported by Bohloko (2012:270), who postulates that although PR academics have started engaging, industry partners are yet to appreciate their level of engagement.

The two excerpts above show that academic and industry partners have contrasting perceptions on engagement strategies that the PR programme uses. Furthermore they have completely different views on the nature of the relationship between PR and its key industry partners. These contradictory views are captured in the following quotations by two participants, one from a PR company and the other, a staff member at the PR programme:

> *The relationship existed however things has changed. Personally I still have relationship with CPUT because I graduated at CPUT; and I still keep contact with lecturer. As a result I don't know whether there is an official communication between CPUT and us, unless such communication does go to Johannesburg our head office (P*articipant, 1).

> *I invite industry partners to my classroom from July, for PR classes, I invite about 5 to 6 speakers, and they actually come to do a presentation. After that students can ask questions. So I keep industry involved at all times of what we are busy doing. So far so good, because a lot of companies came on board and they are still on board (*Participants, 7).

In the first quote, the participant disregards their personal communication with the leaders of the PR programme as an engagement strategy. For them, any sustained strategy should transcend personal relationship, especially given that the participant is a former student. In the second quote, the participant capitalises on guest presentations as an engagement strategy, although this seems to be their own initiative and not a formalised teaching and learning exercise (Steyn and Niamann, 2014). Despite contrasting perceptions they all admitted that the internship programme is the only engagement strategy that is known widely. For instance, one of the participants states that:

> *When you say strategy I'm thinking about communication strategies. The only programme that I'm aware of that brings CPUT with other public relations agencies as you mentioned as key partners is the internship* (Participant, 5).

This excerpt from this participant's interview supports scholars' views that the internship is a practice that is gaining acceptance in South Africa (Alpert et al.' 2009; Rensburg and Cant, 2011:132). In addition, participants identified other strategies. These strategies are Public Relations Advisor Council (PRIAC) and Alumni programme. However several participants claimed the strategies are not effective.

Consequently to consolidate all stakeholder needs, organisations can organise regular meetings where key industry partners' areas of interest and concerns are identified and addressed (Kuzu et al., 2013:288; Le Roux, 2014:309). Basing the argument on the literature and from the evidence above, the researcher can argue that the existing strategies are not driven by interest in sustaining the relationship between the PR and industry partners. This point is discussed further in chapter 5. According to Freeman (1984) stakeholder theory outlines the principles necessary for those in relationships to actively manage and sustain their relationship. An organisation is supposed to engage and communicate with stakeholders in order to identify their concerns and issues that need the organisation's attention. Organisations can also create a model of mutual understating through sharing of information and dialogue (Manetti, 2011:111). But this is not the case in this study. Evidence from interviews suggests that there are no sustained strategies for engagement, and there is lack of political will from respective parties to address this challenge. This has had severe implications for the quality of the relationship between the PR programme and its key industry partners. Two participants state the following, which supports this point:

> *At the moment, I think there is a gap between Industry and CPUT Public Relations. I feel that CPUT needs to be more active, and have more communication between them and industry to fill the gaps and to make sure that the curriculum prepares students for industry* (Participant, 1)

> *Industry members feel that they are not making a dynamic input into the PR programme. Industry members often do not have the time to attend PRIAC meetings (*participant, 12).

The quotes above show that there is clear lack of leadership from parties to address the issues challenging the relationship between the PR programme and its industry partners.

Instead of collectively devising strategies, key parties are involved in 'blame game' (Sandu, 2009). Further the above quotes demonstrate that the gap exists, and something needs to be done; partners should be proactive instead of being reactive. The stance of participant 12 which indicates that industry should do more is possibly a sign to acknowledge that should both parties rethink their engagement strategies; they should be able to establish a long-lasting mutually beneficial relationship. Therefore one could assume that what is needed is a practical engagement solution that could rebuild and sustain the relationship. For this to happen, the PR programme also needs to take responsibility, rather than being defensive. For participant 12, building a relationship with industry partners is not the programme's responsibility. This position is highlighted in the following quote by a staff member of the PR programme:

> *The discipline focus should be on the core business which is teaching and learning. Also it is important that the discipline starts the Alumni link whether this will be online or face to face. The discipline's Alumni are the ambassadors; therefore the discipline must lean on them to take the institution forward* (Participant, 9).

Failure to outline how the PR programme plans to remedy the current communication and engagement challenges identified by industry partners, students and other academic staff, leaves unanswered questions on the programme's ability to deal with industry perceptions. This confirms Venter's (2010) view that universities remain behind on the issue of engaging with their partners. Based on stakeholder theory and crisis communication, decision makers within organisations should constantly respond to the needs of partners that are disgruntled and for Skinner et al. (2009:287) crisis is a hostile threat that can affect the reputation and integrity of the organisation. This view is further supported by Clawson-Freeo (2001:1), who argues that crisis is a situation that threatens the integrity of an organisation and it is usually a result of unhappy stakeholders.

In the preceding section, the data seems to suggest that there are several informal strategies and just three clearly recognisable formalised strategies - the internship programme, membership with PRIAC and the alumni programme. Although, the section outlines some of the contentious views about these strategies or the lack thereof, there is a need to engage with perceptions of the industry in detail. This is one of the

objectives of this study and it should provide the reader with a deeper understanding of the discrepant views discussed above.

4.3. Industry perceptions about strategies that the public relations programme uses for engagement

Hoyle and Goffnett (2013) demonstrate that practitioners are still in doubt about the ability of universities of technology to engage with industry partners. Despite universities attempts to engage, as mention earlier, the gap continues to exist because both parties' expectations are not met satisfactory (Perekh, 2011). In the context of the PR programme and key industry partners; the three main strategies that are used to engage and sustain relationship industry partners are.

- Internship programme;
- Public Relations Advisor Council (PRIAC);
- Alumni programme.

Although several strategies have been identified, for industry partners, there are various factors that contribute to the weakness of these strategies. Therefore this section presents key industry partner's perceptions of each strategy.

4.3.1. Internship programme as an engagement strategy

The internship programme is the most widely known engagement strategy that has been identified by interviewees. The internship is an opportunity in which students are exposed to the demands of the working environment after completing their theoretical course (Rensburg and Cant, 2011:132). An internship is considered a viable strategy to assist undergraduate students to gain market related skills and prepare them for the world of work. Through internship, students become more independent, learn to prioritise and focus (Daugherty, 2011)

This form of learning has become a viable and significant component of universities of technology courses outline (Collis, 2010; Orrell 2004). Internships require enduring involvement of lecturers, students, industry partners and industry body of knowledge (Rensburg and Cant, 2011:133). Universities of technology operating in South Africa are required to regularly design their courses in-line with industry needs in order to meet the pace and constant changes in the industry (Rensburg and Cant, 2011:134). However

this is not the case in the PR programme at CPUT. During the interviews, participants from industry had mixed feelings about CPUT's ability to administer internships in line with industry requirements.

> *There is a huge gap between CPUT and the PR Industry; I think in terms of internship, communication should be improved, I remember the Co-op lecturer use to visit the industry to check how are students doing and whether students are happy. But I do not remember her coming to us* (Participant, 1)

The participant, who is an industry partner further reflects on her past experiences as a student when the co-opt lecturer used to visit employers to check on students' development. Based on the interviewee she is not satisfied with the nature of engagement. She still believes that co-opt lecturers should be visiting organisations that employ public relations students. However, staff of the PR programme believes that industry partners are involved.

In this regards communication should be prioritised, in order to improve the internship programme. Partners should be committed to communication and find ways to create ongoing relations that could lead to positive expectation from all parties involved in the internship programme (Akoojee, 2012; Hoyle and Goffnett, 2013). The PR programme interviewees are of the opinion that students participating in internship programmes cannot perform equally because they come from different background. The study findings reveal that educators are unhappy with how Western Cape public relations industry fails to address the issue of demographic. According to PR programme interviewees, to resolves the issue of demographic, employers can examine the ratio of students they employ from CPUT PR programme, in comparison with other colleges. Employers can then learn their historic background and schooling history, this process can help all parties to become knowledgeable about the status of students and at the end, make reasonable judgements.

The sub-sections presented below are not engagement strategies but factors that contribute to a weakening internship programme. As result, these factors continue to influence how industry partners perceive the internship programme as engagement strategy.

4.3.1.1. Public relation programme capacity

Failure to meet industry needs is attributed to lack of adequate resources and time to learn new technology (Todd, 2009). Some of challenges that the public relations programme is facing include the lack of significant resources to prepare students for the changing world of work (Venter 2010:283). According to industry participants, the PR programme has failed to enrol the number of students that they accepted in previous years because of capacity. Lack of capacity contributed to decline in the quality of students and engagement ability, as well as a drop in the number of students accepted for internship in the last five years: One of public relations participant states:

> *Students who would have not been accepted because of their poor matriculation marks were given the opportunity to register. Further, co-op lecturer has been doing well. She tried her best to go to all various employers visiting students which is not easy for one person. She also deals with second year students and has to place them. So the institution is under the premise that the coordinators are handling their portfolios. It should be working and I hope it will still be working for the more years to come because I do not see how we will be able to place the students without the coordinators* (Participant, 11)

Lack of engagement capacity from the department led partners to view the internship programme as an ineffective strategy. The effectiveness of the internship as an engagement tool depends on many factors. From the PR programme, the Co-opt lecturer is one of the contributors that has the power to ensure that certain developments take place during the internship programme (CHE, 2011:63). However in the case of this study, the co-opt lecturer seems to be overwhelmed with workload.

In response to industry perceptions, interviewees from the PR programme claim that the co-op lecturer visits all organisations. This claim was dismissed by agencies that employ PR graduates from CPUT:

> *We do not remember seeing the co-op lecturer visiting us to find out whether they are coping with the workload and how is their relationship with their employers* (Participant, 4).

4.3.1.2. Students' competence

According to industry partners, another factor that negatively affects the PR internship programme is the incompetence of students. Poor students' performance makes industry partners to further believe that the internship programme is a weak engagement strategy. Student's incompetence emerged to be the lead factor that is affecting the relations between industry and the public relations discipline. Scholars' examples have stressed this issue and have requested PR programme at various universities to improve their teaching methods, in order to meet industry needs (Peach et al., 2012). To this, Rawel (2003:71) argues that to eliminate the negative perceptions that some practitioners' hold against the readiness of PR graduates, the PR discipline needs to listen and engage. Findings from PR consultancies revealed that many PR students are struggling to cope with industry pressure during their internship programme and beyond. For example, lack of connection between theoretical and practical knowledge in academic curriculum is the main hindrance of students' development (Sarja et al., 2003:155). For industry partners to attain high levels of productivity and meet mutual understanding, curriculum development can be directed in line with professional development while keeping in mind student's career interest (Sarja et al., 2003:157).

> *I'm sure there could be more engagement because I feel that PR students are lacking in quality as year goes by. Maybe good students are going to other agencies, or maybe they do not want to come here. I have no idea; because the one that I have interviewed it was a struggle, it seems like students lack commitment, its looks like they are not motivated to study, they just study to please their parent, I said the quality is lacking* (Participant, 1).

Although industry partners perceptions of the PR's internship programme as engagement strategy was generally negative, they failed to take into account the challenges facing higher education today. Staff participants pointed out that industry is not aware of the challenges and realities that lecturers face on a day-to-day basis. Examples include lecturer's workloads; students' indifference; low standard generally of school leavers; lack of student discipline; students' full time tables and challenges with regard to facilities. This lack of capacity in the PR discipline is echoed strongly by Todd (2009). Academics respondents further stated that in normal state, students who pass with 50% would have been considered failed but in this case were given a chance to graduate. The negative pass rate is a result of poor education system at basic education

level (Modisaotsile, 2012). To address the negative perceptions from industry, staff participants challenged students to take responsible and play a leading role in connecting the academia and industry. This is evident from the following quotations:

> *It is very difficult to come with new strategies if you look at our students, as you know the industry is crying that our students cannot write. Again we also get matriculate students that come from very poor schools and we try our best. So industry should not expect that all 90 students that the programme sends out will be the same. Also, students would be different because higher education itself has different rating criteria's* (Participant, 11).

> *You will find out they do everything quickly and when they start working here is like everything that they have learnt in class is nothing and we just need to train them from the scratch* (Participant, 2).

For interviewee 11, challenges in the PR programme which negatively affect the internship programme are beyond curriculum issues. It has to do with the South African education system and the university enrolment policy. In the same way Modisaotsile (2012) findings on policy and the state of education in South Africa, states that in spite of the South African government spending 18.5 percent of its annual budget on education, the education system remains mainly in poor status.

The participants argued that industry does not have to follow the same criteria that higher education imposes on academic disciplines. However, they would prefer to work with competent students and not those who enter the industry with 50%: One interviewee commented:

> *There are those who want 80% because they want to fill positions. Remember some of these employers are not looking at grooming students but want a replacement. So if you are taking an intern you are actually formalising that you are willing to groom the students. The problem comes when industry partners and students are unhappy; unfortunately that is not my portfolio* (Participant, 11)

Although this section focuses on industry perceptions, the quotation from an academic staff is relevant because it reiterates the responsibility of both parties in sustaining the relationship. For this participant, an amicable solution is possible should all parties accept that they have a responsibility to play in grooming students. Industry should show that they are willing to train students instead of expecting to employ industry ready students (HEC, 2011:57). From the interviews, it was evident that both parties are aware

of the challenges but there is inadequate commitment to address these challenges. Here, a collaborative approach with industry and the staff of the PR programme is needed to sustain their relationship. One industry participant commented:

> *So I think it is good to look at how company such like this can partner with CPUT to ensure that training is happening than just throwing graduates in the system without follow-up* (Participant, 4).

This quotation aligns with HEC (2011:57), which indicates that partners should ensure that they provide adequate teaching and training to students. The interviewee believes that failure to follow up on students' progress is equal to throwing students in to the industry without the support of universities. Failure to address students' competency can lead to negative perceptions on the part of the PR programme and the PR profession. Parties can mitigate the negative perceptions by working together (King Report, 2009:87).

The findings revealed that although the internship programme is a recognisable strategy for engagement, it is not always an effective strategy. Thus partners involved in the internship programme need a close collaborative approach to ensure internships help to sustain academic engagement with industry (Rawel, 2003; Todd, 2009). This can be achieved through a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the parties which clearly outlines the responsibilities of each party. By adopting a Memorandum of Understanding as a strategy that clearly indicates how parties should engage, this approach could alleviate some factors that contribute to a weakened internship (CHE, 2011). Boundary spanner plays a critical role in an organisation as they stand as the voice of the organisation (Holtzhausen, 2005). Such a document will formalise the relationship and serve as a guiding document to the co-opt lecturer on how to engage with industry and to stand as a point of reference in time of change. One of the participants' states that;

> *There is not a formalised strategy for engaging but I have been using telephone, e-mail and face to face meetings to interact with industry. I would say that if there is a written strategy that would be interesting because when the views of industry change then we have something to build on. You can find out whether there is a written strategy or maybe you will be given a job of writing the strategy* (Participant, 7).

On many occasions organisations that seek to sustain their relationship with stakeholders are required to have a communication strategy (CHE, 2011:56; Steyn and Niemann, 2014:177; Kim 2014). However all industry participants admitted that they are not aware of any strategic communication strategy used by their partners for engagement purposes: "*As mentioned earlier on, I do not remember any other strategies used by the public relations programme to communicate with us beside of internship programme*" (Participant, 3).

Strategic communication is critical for the functioning of any organisation. Scholars believe that effective internal or external communication is fundamental as a result, organisations use strategic communication to influence change in stakeholders' minds (Steyn and Niemann, 2014:17). This view indicates that an academic programme is supposed to have a well drafted and formalised communication strategy for the purposes of communicating with industry partners. However the participants confirmed that there is no formalised communications strategy between the parties. This is somewhat contradictory because engaging through PRIAC should be based on formal communication.

Nevertheless, industry participants could not identify communication tools extensively viewed as critical for sustaining their relationship with the PR programme. This view correlates with the perceptions of an academic staff participant, who argued that the department does not have a carefully formulated engagement strategy or policy that guides how it should interact with industry partners. Furthermore, this view hinges on the position that more works needs to be done in terms of university and industry engagement (Alpert et al., 2009).

It was evident from findings that PR agencies continue to employ PR students because it is cost effective to the employers and as sign of corporate social responsibility.

> *We need cheap resources to support the team that is one of the reasons that keeps us coming in. But we would rather employ graduates than interns because they might have the quality to work for a PR agency* (participant, 1).

The industry participants quoted lack of commitment, respect, motivation and poor writing skills as the key weaknesses of current PR students (Pompper, 2011). In spite of

the negative image of PR students, employers need cheap labour. Therefore, employing PR interns does not automatically mean a relationship exists between the company and the academic department.

However, some participants from industry equally commented that PR consultancies have started reconsidering their choice of employing public relations student interns because of the poor quality of their work and the lack of work ethic. This suggests that in future these agencies might not be interested in cheap labour. The following quotation confirms this point.

> *If you are referring to internship programmes and what I have heard from public relations agencies, they do not trust CPUT public relations interns any longer. It is very difficult to hire students from CPUT. They are excluding students and that will make it difficult for CPUT to provide jobs for its students. The questions is asking why and the answer is that students are not ready to take on the role* (participant, 5)

For this respondent, leading PR agencies are now sceptical to offer internship programmes to PR graduates from CPUT because undergraduate students are incompetent. The view of employers' concur with the findings from prior research about student's inability to meet industry expectations (Swart, 2014) and to avoid this trend, the PR programme should proactively engage industry partners. Finally Meintjes and Grobler (2014:163) argue that organisations need to have more knowledge of their partners in order to sustain the relationship. To gain more knowledge about partners; parties need to respect each other's interests and values.

Interestingly, internship programmes which are regarded as an engagement tool that could promote mutual benefit between industry and the PR programme have become one of the reasons for relationship dissatisfaction. However, both parties can reach mutual understanding through sound collaboration and further promote the internship programme. Notwithstanding their differences the PR programme and industry partners can alleviate some of the challenges through retraining, re-examining and restructuring PR education and practice. This is because the lack of capacity of the PR programme and the poor competence of students are key factors that contribute to industry partners' perceptions about the ineffectiveness of the internship programme as an engagement strategy.

4.2.2.2.   Public Relations Industry Advisory Council (PRIAC)

The aim of stakeholder inclusive approach is to sustain mutual dialogue between partners, ensure confidence that is restored without necessarily raising tension between partners or asserting pressure on organisational reputation. This would ensure that the organisation's opportunities are not affected and partner's expectations, opinions and concerns are taken into account (Meintjies and Grobler, 2014). From the research findings, the role of PRIAC is to advise PR academic disciplines and evaluate the capacity and the quality of students. To this end, participants cited PRIAC as another engagement strategy used by the PR programme to relate with industry. As an organisation that is supposed to represent the views of public relations programmes, employers and students, industry participants claimed that PRIAC serves only the interest of a small group of PR consultancies.

In addition, literature on PR and stakeholder relations stipulates that it is very important for parties involved in any partnership to value each other's needs regularly. This body of knowledge contends that parties should appreciate partner's effort and time. For example Waters (2011:131) indicates that it is very vital to keep reminding stakeholders that they are very important and the organisation needs them for its survival. Therefore, organisation must appreciate stakeholder participation and care about its activities (Skinner et al. 2010; Rensburg and Cant, 2011). In the same way organisations should become key participants in the relationship *(*Leeper and Leeper, 2001:463; Sandhu, 2009:75*)*. It was evident from the findings that although PRIAC is used as an engagement strategy, the PR programme should constantly affirm to key industry partners that they are valuable stakeholders of the programme (CHE, 2011). One of the industry participants commented on this issue as follows:

> *I think it is more of the responsibility of the institution than it is for the consultancies. My take would be that they have to do more work than the consultancies because already they have a lot of competition. We get students from other universities. I would say they need to be more creative and they need to have forums. Forums where they can invite the industry council, ask them what are we doing wrong and where can we improve* (Participant, 5).

The interviewee's quotation suggests that there is supposed to be a symbiotic relationship between the PR programme and key industry partners, rather than a

competitive one. Data from industry partners stressed that the PR programme should engage the industry as a way of enhancing the entire PR course. For them, engagement would close the huge gap that exists between the PR programme and the PR consultancies (Waligo et al., 2014; Steyn and Niemann, 2014. However, this initiative should be taken by all parties involved in the PR internship programme.

Furthermore, the data revealed that partners are expected to have a clear mandate and they should be aware of their responsibilities in the partnership. This concurs with the argument that current trends in the organisational setting are putting pressure on academic institutions to start involving their stakeholders in decision making and in organisational activities (Hoyle and Goffnett 2013). According to Waligo et al. (2014: 1343) the notion of stakeholder involvement increases organisation productivity and Stakeholder Theory argues that stakeholder involvement is first and foremost a space for collective action, empowerment and organisation building (Waligo et al., 2014: 1343). Therefore it is very critical for all parties to be willing to participate in the PR programme planning that can affect their own activities. Limited participation by academic staff is professional organisations is captured succinctly in the following excerpt:

> *Also another thing is that I never see public relations attending any forum organised by public relations organisation, the like of PR-Net* (participant, 5)

This interviewee from one of the agencies explained that after graduating with a diploma in PR from CPUT, she chose to work and study for her degree part time because it is not always easy to get a job in the PR industry because of lack experience. She further mentioned that she is very involved in PR activities in Cape Town but there is hardly an event that seeks to update academics about new trends in industry (Hoyle and Goffnett 2013).

In addition, it was evident from the data that employees in the PR companies have unrealistic expectations from the PR programme. This view is based on the fact that some PR participants expect PR academic staff to attend PR forums, especially those organised by PR-Net (a Network of public relations agencies from Cape Town). However, industry fails to understand that PR is an academic programme regulated by the Department of Higher Education and Training. For academic staff, the programme's

core business is to impart knowledge to students rather than participate in every PR industry activities organised in Cape Town. They contended that the PR programme is supposed to participate in activities that are coordinated by PRISA or IABC and not any PR industry activity. Similarly, the discipline can participate in industry forums that are organised by a PR body that is recognised by PRISA or IABC (CHE, 2011:57). However, they agreed that, there is a need to engage with industry through different platforms such as the Industry Breakfast programme. This programme provides space for interactions with industry and recognition of student achievements. Their view is supported by participants from one of the PR agencies.

> *In previous years the university would invite us for breakfast sessions where the department, industry and students would come together for celebrating the collaboration, thank the industry and award students that have finished their internship with exceptional performance* (Participant, 1)

Similarly the suggestion was supported by a PR participant who strongly believes the programme should reinstate its previous activities, if it hopes to sustain its relationship with key industry partners.

> *This practice worked before therefore it must be reintroduced again. I strongly believe we need to start it and bring relevant media on board and not only PR Companies. It really worked, nevertheless when we moved from business faculty we never host it again. Similarly, I think the best ways of interacting is through the advisory committee, but all representatives must be on board* (Participant 7)

> *But to sustain relationship, you have to work on it, you have to keep them involved, and I was thinking maybe we have to invite the industry for small function in the evening. In the past the former HOD used to invite industry partners. It was really nice experience, as we also did workshops. It is very important to have a very good relationship with industry because without them there will not be cooperative education (*Participant, 7)

The excerpts from participant 1 and 7 suggest that the old system worked better for partner's engagement. Therefore reintroducing previous engagement activities could be a strategic call for continued partnership with the industry. For these participants, this approach could restore faith in the industry partners and students questioning the quality of current level of engagement. The effort would dispel negative perceptions from industry partners which continue to affect the image of the PR programme (Sapp and

Zhang, 2009:277; Swart, 2014). Nevertheless, industry participants still believe that the PR programme should be doing more to sustain the relationship: One interviewee noted:

> *They are supposed to engage with industry to find out what does industry want. It really worries us because is not like we are a new company, my partner have been in the industry for the past 15 years, she was a lecturer at CPUT so it makes me worry a lot I think you guys have failed, the department have failed you, they are failing the students and people are paying lot of money for nothing* (Participant, 8)

This interviewee draws her argument on the previous relationship that her company had with the programme and argues that if the programme could fail to engage with a former employee of CPUT and thereafter an employer of PR graduates, it is very unlikely that it would engage with other companies. For her the PR programme should do more than sending students to industry and the relationship should be based on a two-way symmetrical communication (Skinner et al., 2010). By implementing a two-way symmetrical communication approach, a new relationship dimension can take place (HEC, 2011:57). The process can lead to partners earning each other's trust and faith. In the same way, an internship programme should not be expected to replace an engagement strategy that consists of all steps of communication strategy (Ni 2006).

The above findings suggest that partners need to listen to each other on a regular basis through relevant engagement strategies that would enable them to learn what each partner considers important (Waters, 2011:131). To sustain any relationship between the parties, full representation from the industry needs to form part of PRIAC and help to evaluate current curriculum and to identify what works, spot out the gaps and consolidate the findings. However the Public Relations Industry Advisory Council (PRIAC) is ineffective since it does not serve its purpose. For instance, one of the respondents from the PR programme stated that industry involvement in PRIAC is inconsistent. Therefore, they should not expect the programme to meet all their needs whereas they do not participate in PRIAC noted a programme participant:

> *Industry members feel that they are not making a dynamic input into the PR programme. Industry members often do not have the time to attend PRIAC meetings. Even though they do not attend meetings, I think they appreciate receiving well skilled students* (Participant, 12)

This discussion explains how all parties view the role of PRIAC. They all see PRIAC as an ineffective body which needs to be restructured. On the one hand, industry's failure to attend PRIAC meetings is a major impediment to addressing the subjects mismatch and professional development (Proud and Kerr, 2005:95). On the other hand, academics failure to address their concerns to industry openly, affects student development because one of the roles of PRIAC is to set learning guidelines. Furthermore, the moment partners play the blame game, the chances of resolving misunderstandings are very low. In the case of the PR programme and its key industry partners involved in the PR internship programme, this game widens the gap between the programme and industry partners. However, this unpleasant situation can be resolved through dialogic conversation (Trapp, 2014:43).

The data revealed that industry partners and PR staff feel that the role of Public Relation Industry Advisory Council should be reviewed and its responsibilities clearly spelled out to all stakeholders. For them, the council is ineffective because members are not participating in its activities.

> *I don't know other PR agencies that sit in PRIAC. There are a lot of PR consultancies out there even small ones that can sit on the board and add value than having one well-known brand* (Participant, 6)

This perception can further cause division within the public relations industry its self. For example, participants from the consultancies that offer internship positions to CPUT PR students felt that their views are not respected in the council that is why they are left out of PRIAC meetings. However, academic staffs who were interviewed recognised and appreciated the efforts of these bodies, although they argued that more work needs to be done and PRIAC in particular needs to be restructured.

> *There seems to be too much gap between industry and the students' involvement therein during their training (unlike disciplines such as engineering, architecture etc.). Perhaps the whole composition/implementation of internships needs to be revised: students could be placed in industry for shorter periods during their studies and not only for one long period in their third year* (Participant, 12)

> *Like I said previously the gap exists, because is something to have a curriculum that is theoretical base, and have certain element of practical component but not relevant to what is happening today* (Participant, 6).

According to these interviewees, the gap between industry partners and the programme is widening and PRIAC seems to have failed in its mandate to ensure that PR and Industry maintain a good working relationship. The ineffectiveness of PRIAC has negative consequences on the way the PR programme and Industry partners engage, although it has the ability to bring all parties involved in internship programmes together (Trapp, 2014). The misunderstanding about what students should learn and what they should be taught in the PR programme is one of the responsibilities of PRIAC. A strong PRIAC that consist of all partners is pertinent for sustaining the relationship (Akoojee, 2012). Moreover, data from interviewees in the industry showed that industry partners would want to be involved in the process of developing the PR curriculum.

> *Industry should be involved in the setting of curriculum and teaching materials, to organise workshop, meeting and communication mediums, I do not know why the students are so bad, the department need to be relooked first and find out why things are going the way it's* (Participant, 1).

This respondent blames the poor quality of PR students on the exclusion of industry from the curriculum development process. Although there was evidence that was marginal inclusion of some industry partners, the partners are not the leading players in the industry and the voices do not represent those of PRIAC members. For Holtzhausen (2005:411) South African appreciate a two-way symmetrical communication and value relationship building effort and this can be achieved through an inclusive approach to curriculum development. Access to valuable information positions organisation in a strategic position for communicating its message. Finally lack of access to critical information from PRIAC is hindering the relationship between the public relations programme and key industry partners (Le Roux 2014).

For the participants, the relevance of PRIAC needs to be reviewed and a new formal structure with clear mandate should be set up. Aligning value and mandate assume parties involved would reach agreement through dialogue and effective communication (Meintjes & Grobler, 2014:163).

> *I still think is greatly worth working close with all public relations organisations to make sure that the module that students are studying are relevant to the industry* (Participant, *10).*

What students were thought that a public relations industry was; it is not, what they learnt at these institutions is not what the industry is doing. The issue of inept is not only a CPUT issue but a national crisis however that should not be the reason for CPUT public relations not to engage (Participant, 6*).*

These industry interviewees acknowledged that poor student performance is not a CPUT PR programme issue but a nation crisis. Although respondents believe it is a nation issue, they remained adamant that working together is the best way to resolve the gaps in PR curriculum. Their views correspond with Bohloko (2012:276) stating that internship challenges faced by South African universities of technology are a curriculum design issue and not only pedagogical one. As a result dialogical conversation could eliminate these challenges in that academic disciplines would ensure research, teaching and service is aligned to industry expectations (Van Rooijen, 2011:6). De Shepper et al. (2014:1220) propose that stakeholder management should be conducted at least from the perspective of partners. Also all partners should be willing to review their current strategy and performance to determine the allocation of new task and responsibility. In a partnership, execution of responsibilities happen when all parties understand their role; perform allocated tasks and report on the progress (Steyn and Niemann, 2014:175). This would normally take place when partners create an enabling platform which is mutually beneficial for stakeholders. On the issue of responsibility the PR programme believes that their staffs are generally and they would appreciate some recognition from the industry:

I think is very important for people to understand that we have to work together. You will find that some of the people that you have interviewed do not share this aspiration. Rather than working together with the public institution in order to provide best people for South Africa, for growth and development in our country they want to compete with us. Industry is there to make money and their own prestige (Participant, 9).

Nevertheless one participant from industry is of the opinion that the public relations programme has acted irresponsibly by failing to communicate and respond to their inquiries on time. However, a participant from the public relations programme argues that public relations consultancies are there for their financial gain and prestige, whilst the academic programme is serving the government requirement which is completely different to what industry is pursuing. This debate illustrates the argument that this

research has identified, whereby all partners involved in PRIAC are shifting the blame on each other instead taking responsibility.

> *I think as a company that is training and measuring the students we need to work together so that both parties are tracking how well and not well the students are doing because at the end of the day, both parties would like to see the student succeeding. Dialogue can resolve the issue of disconnect* (Participant 13).

This participant indicates that the role of partners in an internship programme is far beyond students' placement and student's recruitment but an on-going monitoring effort. PRIAC would be more effective if all members understood that they have a distinctive role to play. Furthermore, universities of technology should keep up with the government calls and change in the industry (CHE, 2012:3).

With regards to students' competence, the process of decision making within the public relations programme might have been at the centre of some challenges that contributed to the programme not having formalised a strategy for communicating with industry. A participant in the PR programme states that:

> *I also feel we are in the second term now and the HOD has not scheduled the meeting. However, I'm also involved with PRIAC on another project because we are looking at developing two short courses for the industry. I have about 5 informal meetings with PRIAC for this planning, even though we are not sitting formally. I also believe that even though we have not engaged the industry, I am still engaging* (Participant, 11).

Therefore the weakness in internal communication is another factor that negatively affects students' competence. Yet the principle underpinning stakeholder theory indicates that managers need to pay attention to a wide range of stakeholders, beyond their primarily stakeholders and have the obligation to listen to their concerns (Freeman, 2010). Stakeholder theory recommends flexibility in decision making; failure to respond to disgruntled stakeholders on time can negatively affect the reputation of an organisation. However this basic principle of communication is a challenge to the PR programme. The following excerpt by an academic staff illustrates this point:

> *So now industry are making claims about lack of engagement but if you check having only one coordinator who has to share all this new programmes, that is a challenges that can be changed from the top down. What power do we have to change it?* (Participant, 11).

The participant's experience is nothing other than frustration that is a result of the poor state of communication and the programme capacity. The issue of communication channels is widely discussed in the public relations field. According to Drisessen, et al. (2013:145), organisations engage in dialogue with their stakeholder through boundary spanner. Organisations use boundary spanner to ensure their communication strategy is well coordinated, thus avoiding contradictions. But this has proven to be a challenge for the public relations programme because the boundary spanner, who is supposed to engage the industry is not equipped with relevant resources, thus lacks capacity to actively engage industry regularly.

Despite all the negative impressions from the industry, the participants recognise that a good relationship can have a positive impact on teaching and learning and accurate communication can help the university in developing a model that would ensure that students are ready for industry when they graduate. Yet for them, the university is not preparing students' accordingly (Holtzhausen and du Toit, 2009:156). To prevent further negative perceptions, the responsibility is on the PR programme to determine the best strategy that can be used to meet employers' expectations (Proud and Kerr, 2005:95). For these participants the PR programme leaders should address the issues that are being raised by industry partners (Ricardo and Gomes, 2007:82). Similarly, good understanding between the programme and its key industry partners can sustain the partnership. For example making sure students are well taught, can facilitate the placement of students in the industry. In the same token, industry should be willing to train and offer paid internship to PR students.

> *I think that we might both be missing out something because both need each other. The companies need the institution, because the companies need employees and in order for you to be an employee, you need to study and get the qualification. So maybe there must be platforms where workshops, conferences, maybe having a six month review or some kind of interaction between the consultancies and the institution so that both know what does the institution and agencies want. They can discuss ways for benefiting each other so that if the institution has to change curriculum to meet what is happening in the industry it can do so. The industry needs to understand that the institution is coming from the academic background and that will be the case, and maybe constant communication* (Participant, 2).

This respondent stressed the importance of regular communication that is aimed at creating and sustaining relationships. For them, on-going communication would not only serve the interests and needs of industry partners, but also those of PR professionals. This can be achieved through formulation and implementation PR internship programme MoU that would guide the nature of the engagement. Hoyle and Goffnett (2013) postulate that universities continue to receive a lot of criticism regarding the way they engage with industry and in the case of the PR programme, failure to meet industry needs can be attributed to lack of will in the leadership.

This industry perception hinges on one aspect of stakeholder theory which states that organisations should ensure timely engagement between them and their stakeholders, especially stakeholders on whom the existence of the organisation is dependent (Freeman, 1984). Interestingly, responses from the PR programme participants' points to students, staff members and government as their primary stakeholders, despite the role that the industry is expected to play in the academic programmes. For DHET (2011:52) graduates and postgraduate students as primary stakeholders should establish the link between academia and industry, providing academic programmes such as the PR programme with vital information about employer concerns: A participant from the PR programme states that:

> *You must understand that this is a university and being such, we have to be guided by what is our business and we are in the business of higher education. And the mission of the university is first and foremost excellence in teaching and learning, in research activities, in community outreach and programme and then to some extend liaising with professional industrial bodies. Attention in this regards should focus on how the primary stakeholder (students) will benefit out of this relationship, then relationship with industry and the impact of relations to all parties (*Participant, 9).

The findings from industry participants suggest that key industry partners are unhappy with the quality of the relationship. Therefore the PR programme must evaluate their sphere of influence and the impact of their influence on the reputation of the organisation, and then find ways to start a dialogue with discontented stakeholders for the benefit of the programme (King Report, 2009).

According to stakeholder theory, it is the responsibility of an organisation to foresee the urgency in emerging stakeholders that can affect the organisational activities. Further, Rawlins (2006:5) indicates that stakeholders have power if they can influence other

group to take action against the organisation. Legitimacy happen when stakeholder claims legal and moral influence that can change the functions of an organisation (Steyn and Niemann, 2014:177).

4.2.2.3.   Alumni programme as an engagement strategy

Alumni programme is another form of engagement that was identified by academic staff. The respondents indicated that they were constantly engaging with their alumni. They work relentlessly to ensure that the current batch of PR students become PR programme ambassadors in the industry. The findings reveal that the PR programme maintains a strong relationship with the industry through alumni and the PR alumni sometimes create internship opportunities for CPUT graduates if they are in senior positions (Bender, 2008; DHE, 2011:52). One participant states that:

> *Also I have a strong relationship with industry through Alumni. So I always tell the Alumni department that our relationship with Alumni need to be very strong because the create job opportunity for our students. So we can further enhance the relationship that we have with Alumni. They create opportunity for employability and building the reputation further. They also share with people the quality of our programme to ensure that we will always have internships for our students* (Participant, 11).

In this quote, this academic staff reiterated the key role the PR alumni play in building and sustaining relationships with industry partners. Despite this, existing literature argues that to build a strong Alumni programme the PR programme should start working closely with the most disgruntled PR graduates (Bender, 2008; DHE, 2011:52). This stems from the fact that. Current feelings among Alumni are that the programme does not engage and there is no two-way symmetrical communication with both parties. An Alumni from one of the PR consultancies succinctly captures this point when she states that:

> *There is no two way symmetrical communications, because I'm the only person that goes to CPUT when I need CV. To be fair I don't care whether I get communication or not. I'm an Account Director, I have no time. If we need an intern I know the process to follow to get one and that is my end result* (Participant, 1).

These responses concur with Leeper and Leeper (2001:465) that by using a two-way symmetrical communication, an organisation would be conscious of problems, solve them, and build relationships that are grounded in ethics, trust, respect, and human

dignity, and not on personal manipulation or gain. For this participant, since the industry dismisses the PR programme's engagement strategies, an 'I don't care' attitude seems to reign and this is counter-productive for any attempts to build and sustain a good relationship. The nature of stakeholder relationship is also defined by the power, legitimacy and urgency (Rawlins, 2006:5). Stakeholders assume power if they can influence the organisation or any other group to take action against the organisation, while legitimacy happens when stakeholders claim legal and moral influence that can change the function of organisation (Rawlins, 2006:5). Therefore programmes like the PR programme are supposed to understand the types of influence that stakeholders hold over them and use that information in managing relationships with them. According to a participant from a PR consultancy:

> *I must say there is no communication from CPUT public relations programme to Magna. Lack of communication may affect the relationship that exists because organisational relations depend on the effectiveness of communication strategies. Besides the internship programme, there are no other strategies in place* (Participant, 5).

According to this respondent, the facts that industry partners, most of them PR alumni have failed to identify another engagement tool besides the internship programme creates doubts about the PR programmes readiness to engage. This evidence advocates the application of a two-way symmetrical communication for engaging with industry (Steyn and Niemann, 2014). For the respondent, constant engagement would enable partners to eliminate the confusion between theory and practice because as stated above, industry perceptions are that the PR programme is too academically structured, thus failing to meet industry expectations. Consequently Sriramesh (2009) states that a combination of both theory and practice is needed to have grounded public relations practitioners.

4.2.3. PR programme students' perceptions about the PR programme's relationship with industry partners.

This section discusses student perceptions about the relationship between the PR programme and industry partners. It is based on data collected from a focus group discussion with selected students. The details about student participation in this study have been explained in chapter three.

According DHET (2011) students are an internal stakeholder of academic programmes including the PR programme. Their opinions about the relationship between industry and academia are therefore, critical for the development of the academic offerings and the relevant profession. In this study, student perceptions were framed around their involvement in the internship programme as an engagement strategy and the implications for sustaining the relationship between industry and the programme. The views expressed here are those of PR Alumni that have participated in internship programmes and students who were doing their internship at the time of this research. They provided the following responses when asked about their views on the engagement strategies used by the PR programme:

> *Apart from us working here I don't know whether a relationship exists. No relationship exists, unless that which I don't know. My perception is that it does not exist. At the moment; I feel there's no relationship and that is the reason I raised my first question. As I said before; there's need to be a structured kind of relationship because they both need each other I feel university should work on maintaining the relationship with industry by sending students for internship programmes (*Focus group discussion).

Here, respondents believe there's no sustained relationship between the two stakeholders and they immediately advocated for one. During the discussion students could not really indicate any sign that relationship exists beyond the internship programme. Their perceptions were that the programme and industry need to work together for the betterment of the programme and students.

Swart (2012:363) noted that in South Africa; most studies on PR have been conducted from the employers' perspective, thus not incorporating students' views. The researcher noted that students who participated in the focus group were frustrated but have no place to address their concerns due to lack of engagement strategies suitable for students. Furthermore students also noted the internship as the engagement strategy widely used but not effective. When asked them about their involvement in PRIAC; the majority indicated that they are not aware of PRIAC and have never been invited.

> *We do not remember attending those meetings we would love to sit in those meetings because we know for the facts at the end of the day the industry is changing. New stuffs are coming up especially with technology* (Focus group discussion).

Interestingly, while some of the students had never heard of PRIAC, two interviewees from the focus group (participants 13 and 14) indicated that they had been part of PRIAC, however this happened two years ago. They also said they felt that the platform was not conducive for students to raise their concerns. Another concern was that at the time they were only in their first year of study so they had no idea of what is required of them. Finally one can argue that students need to be informed about their role in attending PRIAC. Respondents that have participated in the PRIAC meeting could not point out the value of PRIAC because of deficient preparation before PRAIC meeting. Even though students are not happy with their participation in PRIAC and the level of engagement between their employers and the PR programme, they have a positive attitude towards the internship.

> *Internship is good because its helps students to understand the significances of the course and the expectations of the industry members* (Focus group discussion)

Therefore, in spite of the positive attitude towards the opportunity to participate in an internship, the lack of clear engagement strategies that are designed for engaging students is affecting their learning ability, and possibly affecting their performance during employment.

In addition CPUT public relations graduates feel the course outline should be reviewed to align with the changes in the industry. The public relations industry has grown dramatically over the past years. Therefore second year students who are expected to participate in the internship programme are not equipped with the knowledge and skills to take up an internship position in the industry. The argument corresponds with Swart (2012) indicating that students are faced with increasing challenges when they embark on their first job. This is because employers' expectations of public relations students outweigh the capacity of students executing their internship programme. Furthermore, employers' negative perceptions of CPUT public relations programme makes students be unsure of their internship position.

Consequently PR graduates expect the university to keep contact with them with the purpose of checking their progress during their internship programme. Also, they expect

the programme to create opportunities for collaborating with industry partners on future projects. They expressed their expectations of the PR programme as follows:

> *I would likely think that they need to have a much more structured, a much more tangible strategy that would ensure that channel of communication between the consultancies and the public relations programme is more open for long terms effects (*Focus group discussion).

> *I'm not aware of public relations programme's communication design for public relations agencies* (Focus group discussion).

These students believe that the PR programme should do more with regards to preparing them for the work place. Their current experience of the work place does not reflect what they anticipated whilst studying at CPUT. As result they felt the gap between conceptual and practical knowledge is broad. Consequently students anticipate that the PR programme will create a favourable environment to prepare them leading to PRIAC given that there is not adequate preparation. Subsequently the students' find that nothing solid comes out of meetings.

> *For me is a two ways straight, I was exposed to see what is happening at the same time I was not happy because I was not necessarily informed ahead as of time what kind of questions or what kind of issues these people are likely to address* (Focus group discussion).

The above quote concurs with the view of a lecturer who noted that there must be another platform that is designed for student engagement. Students will not be free to express themselves when they meet managers or directors and lecturers. Students' perceptions as the primary stakeholder of the PR programme should be critically considered. Good relationship with students will mean good relationship with industry partners because students are at the centre of all parties. Furthermore, the issue of curricula should receive attention for the purpose of relationship building.

> *The university needs to take a back step, to look at the curriculum and say this has been working for the past 10 years. Check what has changed in the industry and adapt to what industry needs from the institution. Adjust the curriculum and make sure that they are on the same page with public relations consultancies needs* (Focus group discussion).

Respondents stressed that more work needs to be done in terms of bridging the gap between theory and practice of the world of public relations. A similar view is held by

Van Heerden (2004) who argues that practitioners need necessary theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to service the communities. In the same way Sriramesh (2009) postulates that to meet industry demands, conceptual learning should be complemented with practical learning. Students believe that ongoing engagement will enable the public relations programme to be aware of what is happening in the industry. Students state that most of what they do in the class room is not what is happening in the industry. The latter is acknowledged only when employers start complaining about the weaknesses in students' ability and competency. Students have realised that some modules that they spent years learning were irrelevant to what is required of them by their employers. Therefore, constant environmental scanning is critical for ensuring that all parties are aware of what is happening in the business world, and developing courses in line with industry needs. Similarly creating strategies that can enable partners to empower students with skills that industry deems significant is of utmost importance.

Data from the focus group discussion indicates that the current PR course outline seems to contribute to their frustration. For them, students are failing to meet employer's expectations and to cope with workload. One student noted:

> *My most important point will be that they need to constantly update the curriculum especially looking at the current situation, the work load, the company that we go work for, the type of work that we do, I mean our year was the first year where social media was officially included in the portfolio as part of digital media* (Focus group discussion).

The issue of redesigning the PR curriculum has been mentioned by both internal and external stakeholders. Students that participated in the study felt that the curriculum does not meet their employer's expectations. For them, changes in the business environment is putting pressure on academic disciplines like the PR programme to ensure that its curriculum is updated regularly because of the uncertainty in the world of business (Bhloko, 2012). The data therefore suggests that incorporating significant practical knowledge into the programme as part of the national diploma or degree could increase the level of satisfaction, increase collaboration and partnership. This would contribute in building relations with industry partners and mitigate further reputation damage. All the above points can easily be achieved through the creation of a model of mutual understating that advocates the sharing of information through dialogue (Manetti, 2011:111).

According to these students, the design and teaching of the PR curriculum should be responsive to the demands of the industry. It should provide students with both theoretical and practical knowledge. As quoted below, all learning areas are vital.

> *I also think that we need to be educated academically so that whether you are in corporate, agency, NGO, you know what to do or you know how to communicate with the people because it is not all the time that you will end up in agencies. People will end up in different places or different industry but the information will still be relevant then* (Focus group discussion).

The respondent claims that she finds conceptual learning very interesting especially when it comes to conducting PR research. She opines that conceptual learning would better prepare students to work in various industries rather than relying on practical knowledge alone. For this student, conceptual learning prepares students for a broader industry and not only the PR profession. According to Van Heeden (2004), industry practitioners should understand that organizations are constantly affected by change in their macro-environment. As a result they need a broader understanding of fields for practicing PR in a global arena. However the findings from the focus group discussion with students seem to suggest that practitioners often ignore the fact that the PR industry transcends the sphere of PR agencies and educators would like to see the PR profession developing beyond practice. For this reason, the development of the profession should be viewed from several learning methodologies and focuses (Van Heeden, 2004). Students' perceptions point to the conclusion that the current relationship between the PR programme and industry partners is ineffective. However, building and sustaining a relationship in this context, is paramount because it can contribute to student's performance through lectures that are industry focused (Holtzhausen and du Toit, 2009:171).

4.2.4. The implications for CPUT's PRM recurriculation processes, Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) and PRM's internship programme

The value of theoretical and practical knowledge is not well understood among partners; as such it has affected how both parties interpret their relationship. Academics in the PR field contend that PR activities practised by practitioners need to be established on academic knowledge (Grunig, 1990). This argument indicates that anything that is done practically without a theoretical framework may lead to tragedy. However the stakeholders involved in this study seem to have inadequate knowledge about how to

integrate the theoretical and practical knowledge (Cornelissen, 2000:315). Furthermore, research evidence from this study, shows very clearly that the profession is continually affected because of the lack of a strong conceptual knowledge. Lack of this critical knowledge has led industry practitioners to consider academics' knowledge of the PR discipline as largely abstract and conceptual in nature. For Cornelissen (2000:324), practitioners believe that PR students cannot do technical work and this perceived students' ineptitude is therefore blamed on the PR programme's inability to prepare students for the current world of PR.

From this study, it is clear that people enter in a relationship with different expectations, whether good or bad. Therefore when a partnership is mutually beneficial and partners' values are clearly defined, the effort invested in the communication strategy is likely to be more effective (Freeman, 1984:2; Akoojee (2012:681). The findings revealed that professional advisors are not convinced that PR students actually learn skills that are needed in the industry (Todd, 2009:71). For example, industry participants claim that they are unfamiliar with the teaching and learning taking place in the PR programme and further argue that lecturers should have some industry experience. This should have implications for the recurriculation process, the WIL and internship programmes. For them, a lecturer with a Masters of technology in PR, but no industry experience is not suitable to lecture on the PR programme. This view hinges on the argument that educators should have at least four years of industry experience (Todd, 2009:73). Two industry participants concur as follows:

> *I can tell you when I had my honours degree in communication, and got my first job in PR Company it was through UNISA I did not understand the work, I did not understand the industry at all, its takes me time* (Participant, 6).

> *I also, know that some of the CPUT lecturers never had industry experience which is big problem and major setback because if you have not worked in the industry you know nothing about what is happening* (Participant, 8).

Mindful of the fact that this study focuses on engagement strategies that the public relations programme uses to engage with its industry partners for the purpose of building and sustaining relationships, these respondents seem to argue that a lecturer with industry experience understands the intricacies of the industry and the values of engaging with the different stakeholders. For them a bachelor degree with adequate

industry experience is appropriate to lecture PR (Pompper, 2011). Because of the perceived lack of sustained relationship, industry participants claimed that they are not familiar with the PR curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning. One of them states that:

> *I don't think the course prepares students for the public relations industry, most students arrive with very little knowledge of how we do things and they learn everything on the job. These students coming in have basically zero knowledge, very little, they are of no use unless they are very smart we train them quickly and if they are great then they will be offered a job. I do not think they are prepared in a very good way (*Participant, 6).

This interviewee blames the underperformance of PR students in the industry on the curriculum and teaching strategies. For them, the programme does not provide key critical skills to students and this puts industry partners under pressure to train the students (Sarja et la., 2003). During internship, supervisors are expected to spend more time on teaching and mentoring students to ensure that they complete their assignments and /or portfolios as per the PR programme requirements. They also assess whether students meet the company retention criteria's (CHE, 2011:55).

The above debate has negative implications for relationship building initiatives. Therefore, concerns over the quality of the work that has been done to ensure that students are equipped and relevant for industry requires all parties to work together. Having identified these weaknesses, the PR programme may use the recurriculation processes as an opportunity to strengthen its relationship with industry partners CHE, 2011). Evan and Freedman (cited in Donaldson and Preston, 2013:73) state that stakeholders' view should be considered and stakeholders should be involved in determining the future of any organisation. In addition, to meet the demand of the real world of work, academic disciplines should ensure that research and teaching corresponds with industry requirements (Van Rooijen 2011:6). Data from industry interviews illustrates that the PR programme can create case studies around industry partners to enable students understand what is expected of them. A participant from a PR consultancy states the following:

> *They need to improve the relationship by learning what the industry needs; and what students should be able to do as soon as they get in the industry. So designing case studies around PR agencies would help students to learn more*

about the industry. Similarly this would show that the university value whatever industry does (Participant, 10).

According to participant 10, the case studies can indicate to industry partners that the discipline values their participation. In the same way ensuring that the case studies stand as an engagement strategy that is designed to build relationships, and not simply a teaching and learning methodology for preparing students mentally for the industry (Van Rooijen, 2011). Stakeholder expectations are common in relationship building processes. As a result stakeholder theory explains in detail how to deal with organisational stakeholder expectations (Freeman, 1984). Stakeholder theory asserts that an organisation's stakeholders would always have certain kinds of expectations. Therefore the organisation's responsibility is to foresee those expectations and work on diminishing its impact (Freeman, 1984). For that reason two-way symmetrical communication is very important because it allows parties involved in any form of partnership whether in a curriculum design process, WIL or internship programme to ensure regular feedback from all parties. An industry participant pointed out the lack of communication as follows:

> *As part of our responsibility in helping students complete the internship we are yet to understand the course component and what students are studying at CPUT* (Participant, 15).

This research finding shows that partners' expectations pertaining to core teaching components are not satisfactorily met. In this context, Industry partners believe that they create time for engagement but the PR programme is not fully committed to this initiative. In contrast the PR academic staffs indicate that they take instructions from the Department of Higher Education and Training, and therefore they are not obliged to embrace all industry proposals. This attitude has different implications for the way the programme is designed and how the WIL and internship programmes are negotiated (DEHT, 2010). This conflicting view further echoes the need for parties to communicate openly (Steyn and Niemann, 2014; Le Roux, 2014). Should this happen, the industry would understand the pressures that the academic programme leader absorbs from the government, students and from the industry itself. The following quotation from staff participant asserts this point:

I know the people that you are talking to. Three quarter of them do not have public relations qualification. So for them to make judgement on our students and what we are doing as the programme is really ill, respectively they don't even know the discipline but are making these accusation (Participant, 11).

The interviewee's argument is not foreign in this study as many academics have alluded to the fact that industry is crowded with practitioners with little knowledge of PR as a discipline (Niemann and Meintjie 2008). Consequently failure to discuss the misunderstandings between the parties is detrimental to the quality of the relationship and possibly has negative implications for WIL and internship programmes. Failure to address the mismatch in theory and practical knowledge would lead to further frustration among partners, thereby affecting the sustenance of the relations they are building. This study reveals that lack of quality engagement strategies contributes to the dissatisfaction of partners and the eventually, the termination of links with the PR programme (Walch and Jackson, 2007). This further asserts that the PR programme, students and industry partners should accept the different mind sets of stakeholders and find common areas that can bring them together to avoid further disputes. For that reason, the motive behind communicating should always be that of openness and transparency (Le Roux, 2014:309). In addition Rensburg (2014:129) indicates that there is an increase in dialogue between the professional body and the academic discipline about means of improving the PR professional image in Southern Africa.

The issue of transparency, consistency, honesty, trust and communication should be the main factors that enable organisations to gain acceptance from stakeholders. However the findings of this study suggest that this is not the case between the PR programme and its industry partners. All interviewees admitted that there are challenges. However the PR programme has failed to devise an engagement strategy and strategic communication techniques that can be used to address these challenges. Participants from the PR programme claim that they were aware of two companies that terminated their relationship with the PR programme and ultimately stopped accepting PR interns. They however blame this case on the intolerance of employers. An academic staff states that:

I don't have problem with the students but with those employers who expect a lot from the students whilst forgetting that they also started at the same point where the students are. Students cannot be perfect, that is why we do cooperative

education. To my knowledge everything seemed to be fine because other employers continued to recruit our students every year (Participant (7).

Although this respondent blames this case on the intolerance of some industry partners, data from industry participants is contrary to this view. For industry participants they stopped recruiting PR students because of the poor quality of students graduating from the programme. These conflicting narratives further expose the quality of the relationship between the PR programme and its key industry partners. One participant from the PR industry states that:

> *CPUT never engages us on how the issue could have been dealt with, the discipline demonstrated the 'I don't care attitude (*Participant, 8).

The findings of this project show that both parties were not willing to go the extra mile; despite the employers' attempt to negotiate with the PR programme. According to Holtzhausen (2005:411) South Africans appreciate two way communication and value relationship building efforts. Access to valuable information can help an organisation to strategically communicate its message to its stakeholders whether in curriculum documents, WIL or internship programmes (Steyn, 2003).

In addition parties involved in the internship programme disagreed widely on what students should be learning in the programmes. From the findings, industry partners and students believe the PR curriculum should include time that is dedicated to practical aspects of the course (Sriramesh, K. 2009). However, PR academic staff argues that to have a strong PR profession in South Africa, PR teaching emphasis must be on conceptual knowledge as opposed to practical knowledge. Academics indicated that practical knowledge can never teach someone to think broadly. An academic at the PR programme captures this point succinctly in the following excerpt:

> *The public relations industry is crowded with people that never studied public relations, have no full understanding of public relations theories, and have no knowledge on how to implement public relations theories in their day to day activities. The majority of them are working as technicians and not in decision making position where thinking is needed. That is the reason why they don't want students to be taught conceptual knowledge. We are not here to teach practical skills like switching computer on and off, like design a brochure, or writing a press release, doing a media list. Those are skills that one can learn on the job in a very short period of time* (Participant, 11).

The academic staffs that holds this view has extensive knowledge in the field of PR and Communication and was concerned about industry perceptions of theoretical teaching. Also as a person who sits on various international accredited bodies, the participant argued that PR agencies operating in Cape Town have unrealistic expectations. However, according to industry partners, academics are disingenuous about the realities of the world of PR industry. One interviewee noted:

> *Academics should acknowledge that public relations is not about studying the BA in History, graduates need to be equipped with industry ready skills* (participant, 6).

This respondent reflects on her personal experiences as a UNISA graduate with an Honours Degree in communication. After completing her study she went to industry and she encountered several challenges that theoretical knowledge could not address. As a result, she also concurred that students need practical training to be competitive in the industry. Also, the fact that many industry practitioners' lack solid backgrounds in concepts of PR education is an area of concern. One of the participants raised this issue as follows:

> *The majority of practitioners come from sister fields such marketing, journalism, publicity, political sciences etc. Therefore any effort that seeks to bring really development and eliminate challenges between the practice and theory will require examining the roots of problem* (Participant, 11).

This participant's opinion is supported by Niemann and Meintjie (2008) who suggest that the PR industry in South Africa is clouded by failed journalists; and due to the lack of PR backgrounds, they have different perspectives about how PR should be practised. From the data analysed, universities are engaging, however industry is yet to approve their engagement strategies; and their ability to prepare students in line with employer's expectations (Hoyle and Goffnett 2013). Here, a lack of trust and commitment to communication are the key reasons for the failures. The South African Council of Higher Education and existing studies on this topic which are key sources of information, HEC (2011:57) recommend following elements to be included in the engagement strategy and relationship sustainability plans.

- Inform partners about academic development and opportunities;

- start a capacity building programme for partners to improve WIL;
- writing to partners officially to thank them for their involvement and support;
- And provide partners with current information when requested.

Findings from the analysis of documents indicated that the PR programme does not have a policy document that guides how it should engage with industry partners. However, an analysis of the CPUT WIL Policy document indicated that the programme should provide students with placement opportunities where work based learning allows them to apply theoretical knowledge in an authentic work-place setting. WIL is expected to promote learning outcomes that will contribute to skills development, in line with the principles of the South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) and the National Skills Development Strategy (Co-op education policy, 2006). The policy further stresses that the coordination of WIL must be done effectively in all components of applicable programmes. This includes having adequate infrastructure, effective communication, recording of progress made, monitoring and mentoring (Co-op education policy, 2006). Also, a learning contract that brings all parties together must be implemented to ensure that partners can negotiate, approve and assess the objectives and outcomes of the learning process. Furthermore, the policy indicates that regular and effective communication should take place between the institution, students, mentors and employers involved in WIL, with the purpose of establishing good working relations, and sustaining such relationships between the various parties involved (Co-op education policy, 2006).

On the issue of curricula, the findings from the CPUT WIL policy document further shows that the institution has clear admission requirements. Also, a prerequisite for work preparedness programme and placement procedures for the learning programme outcomes and records of learning, monitoring, visits, assessment and evaluation of the learners, structured feedback and performance review are included in the policy document (Co-op education policy, 2006). Similarly CPUT staff must monitor students as part of formative assessment to ensure that their learning experience meets the expectations of all parties. In the same way the PR programme is working on improving its curriculum. The department is currently working on the Post Graduate Diploma curriculum, which is due for submission. The curriculum is benchmarked with other universities offering PR around the world and it consists of five levels: level 1- Certificate,

level 2-Diploma, level 3 Advanced Diploma, level 4 Post-grad and level 5- Masters. The PR discipline hopes to implement the curriculum in 2017. Similarly data reveals that there is a great need for partners to work closely with students, as well to build awareness around the PR profession and allow opportunities for students that want to engage industry partners. This view is further support by the argument that students should be given the opportunity to interact with industry partners regularly (Rawell, 2003:27). Although the policy recommendations are clear, the programme seems to fail to comply with some recommendations.

In addition, findings from document analysis have revealed that industry partners plan to start a new PR School that creates journalists and public relations professionals in an effort to respond to students' incompetency in the work place. The purpose of creating a private college to train PR and Journalism students is to ensure that they are equipped with relevant writing skills that are required in the profession. Also, to respond to the issue of writing the public relations programme has made efforts to address previous concerns. To be enrolled in the PR programme at CPUT, applicants are expected to undergo a written test and an oral interview before a provisional acceptance is confirmed. Furthermore, the PRIAC chairperson argues with reference to the writing challenges of PR students that student readiness is a societal problem that cannot be solved by the department, but can be addressed by the department. This view supports the notion held by the PR academic staff that the issue of students' incompetence is beyond the programme's capacity to address, because it is a national crises and not a public relations crisis (Akoojee, 2012).

Finally the findings demonstrate that, lack of adequate engagement strategies has dire consequences for relationship building; and can negatively affect the public relations programme's reputation and the profession as well as students' ability to learn relevant skills and knowledge.
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4.2.5. Recommendations for improving strategies to meet industry expectations.

The interview process also focused on possible recommendations for improving the quality of relationship between the PR programme and its industry partners. Here, participants were asked to provide suggestions, given that they are aware of the

challenges. These recommendations hinge on the fact that in order to improve engagement, industry partners and the alumni of the PR programme need to be encouraged to play a more active role in the programme. Participants from the PR industry states that:

> *To improve engagement strategies and sustain the relations, I would say there are many things that need to be done. First of all, the whole department needs to be relooked at. Industry should be involved in the setting of curriculum and teaching materials; and organising workshop; meeting and newsletter* (Participant, 1).

> PR programme should consistently engage with its alumni: *I think it is important for the university to keep contact with the graduates that we currently have from CPUT in order to check their progress* (*Participant, 10).*

> *I think it is very important that we start with Alumni link even if we do it online or face to face for PR is very important. We need to strengthen our relations with our Alumni* (Participant, 6).

In these excerpts the participants privilege alumni linkages and regular interactions with graduates as a main strategy for strengthening the partnership (Barnard and Rensleigh, 2008:434). Participant 10 and 6 believe ongoing interaction between the parties involvement in PR is critical. This view indicates that ongoing interaction between PR programme and industry can contributes to the success of PR discipline (Waligo et al., 2014: 1343). As result, more attention should be paid to PR Alumni must to ensure the Alumni link remains firms. Yet participant 1 is of the opinion that the entire programme must be redefined, especially the issue of curriculum development. This view is further supported by (CHE, 2011), indicating that industry partners should form parts of university curriculum development and there should regular meetings Rensburg and Cant, 2011:134).

Furthermore, participants from the PR programme believe PRIAC's responsibility should be reviewed as follows.

> *The responsibility of industry members within PRIAC should be re-considered or perhaps even the whole format and/or composition and functions of PRIAC. The appointment of industry members for PRIAC must be well assessed. The PRIAC must consist of diverse industry members, comprising of small and big consultancy, corporate, NGO and government as PR is serving a variety of clients. Introduce public relations and industry partner's workshops according to*

a pre-agreed agenda strictly for industry partners that employ interns. The PRIAC responsibility should among other include organising conference for students through PRISA. The programme should start inviting industry members as guest lecturers. Reintroduced Friday Forums where industry members will address groups of students on trends and issues within the industry – as well as the expectations of industry. Friday Forums should be actively as well as consistent. In addition, PRIAC must create a favourable environment that prepares students leading to PRIAC meetings (Participant, 12 and Participant 7).

There must be a structured relationship between the institution and the public relations agencies. It could be maybe a quarterly session that we have to find out whether we are both on the same page, it could be training, workshops and face to face interactions that is active. Have more discussion and more of informal gathering to get to find out whether everybody understands what is supposed to be done. To check whether everybody is doing what is supposed to be done; and report quarterly, Check if anyone is struggling, is everybody understanding what they have to do, is change to curriculum bringing new challenges (Participant, 4).

The above quotes demonstrate that academics and industry partners have taken observations of the short fall in the public relations curriculum (CHE, 2011:61), engagement strategies; and partners inability to interact frequently (Ni, 2006:27). For that reason partners are of the views that a new structure that could facilitate interaction should be introduced. This structure will shape how PR programme engage with its key industry partners. Their view is further supported by (CHE, 2011) stressing the need to see all South African university, especially University of Technology to start involving industry partners in their daily activities for purposes of improving the quality of education, in order to meet industry needs.

In the same way; PR graduates and interns suggested that research for Public Relations practitioners should be introduced at an earlier phase of the course. Interviewees argued that without research, it is almost impossible to do PR work. Employers challenged them to conduct research and write reports regularly about the shifts in the industry as part of business skills (Venter 2010). Furthermore to deal with the issues of ineptitude, industry partners recommend that the programme should increase their acceptance criteria according to one interviewee:

I think the registration process needs to be looked at. They must be able to check who they accept to attend classes as there need to be a certain standard if UCT can put up a standard then I think CPUT can too (Participant, 5).

> *So the university entry requirement is very low at CPUT, they are taking students who can't write, students who failed, so entry requirement need to be improved* (Participant, 6*).*

Based on participant 5 and 6, the subject of student's incompetence and inability to perform their work effectively during their internship programme is also attributed to enrolment process. To improve the standard of PR education the programme could possibly work carefully on programme enrolment criteria. Also the programme should constantly update the curriculum. Finally the recommendation from one of public relations participants indicated that research of this nature should be repeated within three years.

> *Maybe your studies should be again reviewed in three year's time to check whether there was actual change; considering that we are currently trying to remade what is already existed based to the quality improvement plan and move on (Participant, 11).*

This respondent argues that this kind of research is critical and could shape how the PR discipline engages with industry partners. Therefore a study like this one should be conducted at later date again to assess whether parties involved in public relations at CPUT have worked out their engagement strategies. Again the interviewee demonstrates the need of an ongoing study in this area that would enable the public relations programme to constantly improve its curriculum, as it improves its relationship with industry partners (Daugherty, 2011; Van Rooijen, 2011:7; Swart, 2012:390).

4.3. Chapter conclusion

The chapter discussed strategies that parties involved in the PR internship programme identified as the PR programme's main approaches for engaging and sustaining its relationship with industry partners. Using the objectives of the study as the main entry points, the chapter examined strengths and weaknesses and brought these to bear on the central focus of the study. From the findings, three (3) strategies were identified; the internship programme, Public Relations Industry Adversary Council (PRIAC) and the Alumni programme. Furthermore the chapter analysed industry and students perceptions of strategies that the PR programme uses for engagement as well as the recommendations for improving the quality of the relationship. It highlighted the ambiguities and contradictions in the data and showed how these influenced participants understanding of the way the academia and industry partners are supposed to engage.

The ambiguities and contradiction point to the intricacies of building and sustaining relationship with a diverse and always changing PR industry (Bohloko, 2012; CHE, 2012). Ultimately, all interviewees expressed their dissatisfaction with the level of engagement and argue that poor engagement contributes to the poor quality of PR students in the programme. Shifting trends in the world of business make students and practitioners to believe that PR students are not well trained to cope in the rapidly changing PR industry (Vanter 2010). Chapter five provides the key conclusions from the data analysed and discussed, and brings them to bear on the topic of this study. It reflects on the challenges faced during the research and the lessons learned from the research journey. Finally it offers recommendations, the challenges identified in chapter four, areas for further research and a summary of the entire project.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

5.1. Introduction

The main aim of the study was to critically analyse strategies that the public relations programme uses to build and sustain stakeholder relations with its key stakeholders. Similarly the research problem that led to this inquiry was the issue of criticism that universities continue to receive with regards to university and industry partner relationships (Alpert al., 2009). In the case of CPUT's PR programme, there are two elements that could be the sources of this type of criticism. Firstly, there is no substantial research to validate whether engagement with key industry partners is mutually beneficial for both parties (Steyn and Puth 2000; Holtzhausen, 2005). Secondly, although, the PR programme leaders use different strategies to negotiate and sustain relationships with the industry partners, these strategies are not formalised and there is no memorandum of understanding between the programme and industry partners. These shortcomings are likely to affect the way staff of the PR programme build and sustain mutually beneficial relationships with industry partners. Furthermore, they have critical implications for the design of curricula that are responsive to industry requirements (Leeper and Leeper, 2001:462).

Chapter one outlined the background to this study. Chapter two discussed relevant literature and two theoretical frameworks that underpinned this study which are stakeholder theory and two-way symmetrical communication. Chapter three described the research method, methodology, data collection and analysis strategy. Also, the chapter explained case study design and qualitative approach as the main methodological frames for the study. The data was collected through personal interviews, focus group discussions and document analysis. The data was coded and analysed using a thematic content analysis approach. Chapter four provided a comprehensive analysis and discussion of key findings from the data, linking them to the main aim and objectives of the study, as well as literature and theories.

In this chapter, the researcher revisits the findings and provides key conclusions that can be derived from the findings. The chapter also reflects on some of the challenges

encountered during the journey, general relevant recommendations and identifies an area for further research.

5.2.   Challenges encountered during the research journey

The study focused mainly on the PR programme at CPUT and the two consultancies. The findings reflect the opinion of participants selected from these organisations including students. This thesis has attempted to make meanings from the views of these participants without make sweeping generalisation about the practice of PR in South Africa. Like any research project, several challenges were encountered during the process of data collection.

- A major challenge that was a limitation for this study was the lack of access to critical information on PRISA and IABC engagement strategies that guides how academic programmes teaching PR should engage with industry partners.

- Programme WIL policy document: also the researcher wanted to analyse policy documents that the PR programme uses for WIL contracting. However the findings revealed that this important document which is widely used in the PR programme only consists of one to two pages, without clearly stating partners' responsibilities and roles with reference to WIL. Therefore there was not critical information that could have contributed to the study. However, the study analysed CPUT WIL policy instead, which is still relevant to the case study.

- Due to time and access constraints, the study limited itself to a few number of participants from the PR agencies operating in Cape Town. The views of the participants from these agencies do not reflect the practice of PR in other South African provinces. Selecting a sample from other PR agencies from other provinces could have given several perspectives to this story. Nevertheless the agencies were suitable for the study because of their linkages with the PR programme at CPUT and only credible informants were selected for the study. Therefore, the research processes meet the requirements for any qualitative research project at Masters level.

- Another challenge encountered was the difficulty to access and to interview all managing directors in the two agencies and other senior PR practitioners. This quality of informant could have added rich insights to this project.

5.3.   Key conclusions from the findings

The study was motivated by Alpert al. (2009) who contends that in spite of noticeable engagement with industry partners' universities continue to receive criticism on the nature of the relationship with their industry partners. So the main question of the study was what are the strategies used by the Public Relations programme to sustain relationships with its key industry partners? After critically analysing the data, the researcher was able to identify key emergent issues that shape our understanding of the strategies used for building and sustaining relationships between an academic programme and the PR industry in Cape Town.

Firstly, with reference to engagement strategies, internship programmes stood out as the lead engagement strategy which was widely quoted by the participants. However, the findings demonstrate that this strategy is weak and the participants had several conflicting views on strengthening the internship programme. Furthermore existing literature indicates that internship programmes are a leading engagement strategy that is used by Public Relations programmes at various university of Technology to engage industry partners; however constant communication is needed to authenticate its relevance (Daugherty, 2011; Rusnburg and Cant, 2011; Swart, 2014).

Secondly, although the public relations programme is engaging, its communication efforts have not been noticeable because of the deficient human capital. Todd (2009) postulates that the issue of capacity within public relations academic programmes remains a challenge. In the same way Kuzu et al. (2013) noted that the success of universities and industry relations is determined by the extent to which academics, students and industry partners participate in organisational decision making. Therefore all parties should work together to alleviate the deficiency that is affecting engagement. Here, participants disagreed strongly about the role of academics in the PR industry.

Thirdly, on the subject of industry, partners' perceptions of strategies that are used by the public relations programme for engagement, data shows the current strategies fail to

sustain relationships between stakeholders. Findings demonstrate that key industry partners continue to employ public relations interns for different reasons, as opposed to being motivated by a good relationship. Hurst et al.; (2012) concurs that the only reason why the PR industry keeps employing public relations students is because they need cheap labour and are searching for future replacement or employees. For industry partners, the employment of PR graduates from CPUT was more to do with the company's corporate social responsibility, rather than a marker of the quality of their relationship with the programme. So partners continue to employee public relations students for the purposes of meeting their corporate social responsibility needs.

Fourthly, the role of the Public Relations Advisory Council (PRIAC) is to give input into academic programmes and to listen to feedback from staff and students. After receiving feedback from the staff and students, the council is expected to give useful input on how the programme's teaching, learning and experiential learning can improve. Nevertheless PRIAC which is considered to be the most important professional body in the sector has failed the discipline to a certain extent. Findings have shown that that PRIAC has failed to meet up a quorum on several occasions. Failure to meet a quorum has led to PRIAC to becoming an ineffective engagement strategy. Therefore participants believe PRIAC needs a total reform for the purposes of improving academic programmes and professional practice. In addition, several participants further pointed out that the PR programme's course outline has negative implications on maintaining a sustainable relationship with industry partners. The findings indicate that course outlines should be reviewed regularly to ensure that students are learning business related concepts and skills that will prepare them for the changing world of business (Venter, 2010). The PR discipline should inquire from industry about which skills are most important to strategically repositioning the discipline (Watson, 2008; Swart, 2014).

Fifthly, students' perceptions of the relationship between their employers and the PR programme, the findings demonstrate that there is no relationship that exists beyond the internship programme. Lack of a defined relationship between the public relations programme and industry partners affects students' performance because they do not meet the expectations of industry partners. Apart from the relationship, students hope that the programme would implement a curriculum that is focused on the realities in the

PR industry. Therefore, negative perceptions have negative implications on WIL, the internship programme and partnerships between stakeholders (Sawrt, 2014).

Sixthly, sustaining relations requires consistent effort and enduring commitment from both parties. As a result, the public relations programme is increasingly, working closely with industry partners for the purpose of responding to trends in the industry (Bohloko, 2012). Also, in order to mitigate negative perceptions, PR academics in the United States of America have introduced professional conferences, forums and seminars where both parties are invited to attend (Todd, 2009). However, drawing on this study in context of CPUT, public relations academics seem to be challenged with lack of knowledge on how to engage with industry partners. Furthermore one could argue that the public relations programme at CPUT is not practicing principles of stakeholder theory as they should because of factors that are possibly beyond the sphere of their influence. These include; decisions imposed by the Department of Higher Education and Training, poor work ethic and lack of motivation amongst students, as well inadequate facilities that would have facilitated the learning process.

In addition due to South Africa's historical background of apartheid, the implementation of engagement strategies for sustaining universities and industry relations require a different approach from that of developed countries. The dynamics of PR education in South Africa is different from that in the United States. The practice of PR education in the United States has matured in comparison to South Africa. However the dynamics are constantly changing, therefore South African academics should actively learn what is happening and how they can keep up with the trends (Todd, 2009).

Seventhly, a key finding of this study is the issue of lack of trust among partners. The findings revealed that partners do not trust each other's ability to meet their respective needs and ability to collaborate faithfully. Lack of trust is caused by the public relations programme's failure to meet industry perceptions and by poor participation from industry partners (Lledngham, 2003:182). In the same way the study found various conflicting views especially between theory and practice, as well as with the engagement strategies used. With regards to theory and practice industry partners' believe that the public relation programme's curriculum is too academically structured. However, the academics

in the public relations programme believe that students should be taught conceptually instead of a focus on practical learning (Hotzhausen, 2002; Van Rooinje, 2011).

Finally, change in the PR industry, new methods of knowledge output; new professional requirements in developing countries; relationships between industry partners and universities should be viewed from: the point of students' learning and development of expertise. Also, the arguments presented by academic departments and industry partners from the perspectives of the higher education system and the world of work respectively, should equally be taken into cognisance (Sarja et al.; 2003:147). To this end, communication should be purposeful, timely and the reasons for engaging with industry partners clearly spelled out. That will decrease the dissatisfaction from all partners that are involved in communication processes. Similarly, the public relations programme should introduce new forms of teaching that facilitates the transfer of theoretical knowledge to practical knowledge for diploma students (Sarja et al., 2003:149).

5.4.   Recommendations

The Public Relations programme need to design well thought engagement strategies that will guide the co-op lecturer and any other lecturer that aspires to engage industry partners. The scope of the communication strategy should cover internal and external communication aspects (Rensburg and Cant, 2011). The document will ease decision making processes that affect communication flow between the programme and key industry partners. Despite relying on literature, the findings from the study demonstrate that the "top to bottom" approach is irrelevant in terms of communicating with industry partners in crises situations (Steyn and Niemann, 2014). Through the adoption of a more flexible internal and external communication strategy, the PR programme will strengthen its relationship with key industry partners (Grunig and White, 1992). The co-opt lecturer and any lecturer aspiring to communicate with industry partners would not have to wait for directives from the top management of the University, thus making the interaction with industry partners timely and pertinent.

In the process of developing engagement strategies, the department must take consideration of stakeholder interests, needs and values. Therefore all aspect of stakeholder theory should be incorporated (Freeman, 1984). Furthermore key industry

partners must be consulted in order to make the process transparent, honest and trustworthy. Such steps will make the programme to take advantage of two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig and White 1992). A copy of the communication strategy should be available to PRIAC members. This process will improve the quality of relationship by ensuring that partners have access to key engagement documents that could refer to and apply whenever the need arises. Also the communication strategy and Memorandum of Understanding document will make possible for partners in relations to meet each other communication needs.

Consequently the PR programme should make use of ongoing face to face communication with all affected parties; and constant e-mails and phone calls as primary communication media for engaging with external stakeholders (Grunig et al. 2002). Finally a new module that will outline the course layout should be introduced, with an emphasis on understanding the role of PR practitioners within various organisations, as well as business communication skills (CHE 2011; Venter, 2010:284). Also the module should cover most of the things that all parties involved in PR internship programme consider to be more pertinent for advancing public relations as an academic discipline and a profession (Sarja et al., 2003:154).

The Public relations curriculum must receive enough attention and should be updated regularity to meet the growing demands of the PR industry, s well as business communication needs (Rensburg and Cant, 2011:134; Venter, 2010:282). In the same way Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and the internship programme must receive the same attention as theoretical learning, should the public relations programme want to improve the quality of students and meet the practical needs of industry partners (Sarja et al., 2003:154).

The roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders must be clearly outlined (CHE, 2011). The research indicates that all parties involved are not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities in the partnership. Therefore a MoU that clearly indicates each partner's duties would help to strengthen the relationship. To maintain positive relationships with industry, the University Of Technology which relies on internship opportunities for grooming its students for the world of work should clearly define their engagement strategy (Rensburg and Cant, 2011). Clear engagement strategies will

enable both industry partner and the PR programme to identify partner's concerns, formulate a strategic communication then engage reasonably (Steyn, 2000)

Additionally all interviewees felt that this research should not be the only step for partners to reach a formal agreement. All parties must work together to resolve their differences and then draft a memorandum of understanding (CHE, 2011:55). An alumni programme is a well thought engagement strategy if well administered, therefore the public relations programme must ensure the Alumni programme is well designed and administered. Effective engagement with former students of the PR programme who are working in the PR industry would create internship and or employment opportunities for current students of the PR programme.

Ultimately the public relations programme must recognise that as an organisation it has multiple stakeholders, with each stakeholder holding different perceptions, thus the issue of trust require more attention (Le Roux, 2014:310). By applying principles that underpin stakeholder theory and two-way symmetrical communication, further damage will be prevented (Freeman et al., 2004:364; Botha et al., 2007:69; Grunig, 2007:10). The process will enable the public relations programme to build and sustain new relationships, as long all stakeholders are equally treaded (Donaldson and Preston, 2013:71).

5.5. Areas for further research

This study attempted to critically analyse strategies that the public relations programme uses to build and sustain stakeholder relations with industry partners through the lens of stakeholder theory and two-way symmetrical communication.

- Future research could focus on the same area but on a broader population. The study could collect more empirical data, by using a mixed method approach, which would integrate the perceptions of a large number of organisations that are involved in public relations internship programme in Western Cape. By using a mixed method approach, the study will also include statistical data that can be generalised.

- Also, a study of this nature can be conducted at a national level. The study can select participants from various universities of technology and PR consultancies nationwide. This type of study can help professionals and academics to really understand the public relations education and practice landscape by understanding the perceptions of partners involved in PR internship programme.

- Finally, this kind of study can be conducted again after three years to verify whether the public relations discipline has managed to respond to industry partner's communication and academic delivery needs.

5.6. Conclusion to the entire study

This research started with a concise background to this study which highlighted some of the debates around this topic. It discussed the motivation for undertaking the project and the research problem, showing how current debates on the topic inform this problem. In addition, it clearly outlined the main aim and objectives and research questions. It also provided a significance of the study and the boundaries of the research project.

In chapter two the study discussed relevant literature, showing how existing studies have shaped our understanding of strategies for building sustainable relationships between academia and industry. Furthermore, this chapter discussed the origin of public relations as an academic discipline as well its professional development. Chapter two further interrogated views that purposeful communication that incorporates the views of industry partners is significant for any kind of relationship (Steyn, 2000). In the same way the designing of communication strategies should be explicit, consciously and purposefully developed, and made in advance (Mintzberg, 1978: 935). The chapter closed by examining two relevant theories-stakeholder and two-way symmetrical theory (Freeman 1984; Botha et al. 2007, Grunig and Hunt 1984).

Chapter three described in detail the research design and methodology, as well as the methods for data collection. It provided a motivation for selecting a particular design and approach.

Chapter four presented an analysis of the engagement strategies that were identified by interviewees that participated in this study. The investigation revealed the strategies that

are used by parties involved in the public relations internship programme as techniques for building and sustaining relationships. From the findings, three (3) strategies were identified: the internship programme, the Public Relations Industry Adversary Council (PRIAC) and the Alumni programme (CHE, 2012). With emphases on the topic and objectives of the study as the key points of focus, this chapter investigated the strengths and weaknesses of those strategies and provided recommendation based on participants' perceptions of these strategies and literature reviewed. The chapter reveals the disparity between partners' understanding of those strategies and participants disagreement on how industry partners and academia should engage. The ambiguities and contradiction point to the intricacies of building and sustaining relationships with internal and external stakeholders within a diverse and always changing PR industry (Bohloko, 2012). Similarly changes in the macro environment make students and practitioners to believe that PR students from CPUT are not well trained to cope in the rapidly changing PR industry (Vanter 2010).

Chapter five provides key conclusions from data analysis and discussion and brings them to bear on the topic of this study. The chapter pointed out factors that have led to partners involved in the PR internship programme to mistrust each other's' engagement ability. The chapter discussed the effects caused by these factors on the PR programme and precisely for the professional development of students. These include amongst others; the lack of an appropriate PR curriculum, incompetence with reference to practical skills amongst students and the absence of a Memorandum of Understanding between the PR programme and key partners. Although, the PR curricular was noted as not convincing enough by industry partners and students, the findings from academics indicated that the PR programme is currently working on its new curricular, which is expected to be implemented in 2017. Furthermore, the PR programme had addressed the issue of students' incompetency by changing its admission policy and it is expected that the 2015 intake will be competent by the time they graduate with their national diploma. Also, the chapter reflects on the challenges faced during the process of data collection and the lessons learned from the research journey. Finally, it offers recommendations for improving the engagement strategies between the PR programme and its key stakeholders, as well areas for further research.

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