



**Corporate communication strategy: aligning theory and practice amongst
selected public relations practitioners in South Africa**

by

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DECLARATION

I, **Michelle Burger**, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the 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.

Michelle Burger
Signed

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Date

ABSTRACT

This research reports on the findings from a study that explores how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice. Using the theoretical framework of strategic public relations within corporate communication strategies, this qualitative research seeks to understand what theoretical principles inform corporate communication strategies and how public relations practitioners develop and implement these strategies. The findings suggest that public relations practitioners have a more practical approach than a theoretical approach to public relations practice. This study identifies the importance of increasing the credibility of the discipline as public relations practitioners are able to constantly improve and adjust their strategies according to what works and what does not. Measurement and evaluation in application of corporate communication strategies increases research in public relations practice which will in due course influence public relations theory. Further study is recommended in increasing the knowledge of public relations practitioners regarding the theory of communication strategies which will assist in improving the status of public relations and the perceived value of the profession.

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my husband, Louis, and our children, Lisa, Emma and Lukas.

My love, I wish I had words to thank you for everything that you unselfishly sacrificed for me to complete my studies. You are such a beautiful example to me and our children.

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1 CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

'Nothing is as practical as a good theory' - Kurt Lewin (1945)

1.1 Introduction

This research explores how public relations theory aligns to public relations practice in the development and implementation of corporate communication strategies and answers the research question "How do the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice?"

This chapter presents the research context and background as well as the research problem and the objectives of the study. A summary of the research design and methodology is given together with the chapter outline for this thesis.

1.2 Research background

Public relations is an integral part of organisational strategic development and implementation. Although strategy is a broad concept, in general it serves as a guide to action (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Strategy is defined as *"the determination of basic long-term goals of an enterprise and the adoption of courses of action necessary for carrying out those goals"* (Chandler, 1962, p. 13). The vision, mission and strategic objectives of an organisation encompasses its basic long-term goals and guides its decisions as to how the vision, mission and strategic objectives are going to be achieved. Bryson (2011) defines strategic management as:

"the integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organisation, or other entity, in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfilment of mission, meeting of mandates, and sustained creation of public value" (Bryson, 2011, p. 55).

Grunig and Grunig (2000, p. 308) characterise strategic public relations as being *"planned, managed by objectives, evaluated and connected to organisational objectives."* Thus, the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives, which are all part of strategy and strategic thinking, should inform all public relations activities and responsibilities within an organisation. However, Du Plessis (2000, p. 21) contends that much of public relations practice is not based on the theoretical concepts that underpin the discipline and that it is public relations practice that informs public relations theory. Coombs and Holladay (2010, p. vi), argue that public relations theories and principles are designed with practice in mind although contrarily, strategies are developed through the application of theory and principles to action.

Furthermore, in the work place, public relations practitioners are absent from the organisational top management structure and thus have no input into the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives nor do they contribute to the organisational strategic thinking and planning (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Moore (1996) attributes this boardroom absence to public relations practitioners being unable to apply strategic thinking to their practice as they lack the business and management skills and knowledge to understand corporate strategy. A corporate communication strategy is an extension of the broader organisational strategy (Angelopulo, 2015) and provides *"the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with its stakeholders, i.e. it determines what should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals"* (Van Riel, 1995, p. 24).

Furthermore, Van Ruler and Vercic (2004, p. 6) acknowledge that public relations is a practical endeavour and *"the practice should define what the science is all about and science is only profitable if practice can work with it. Bridging theory and practice is, therefore, a fundamental asset of public relations science."* This study seeks to understand how the public relations practitioner uses public relations theory within strategic public relations.

1.3 Rationale

Having an academic background, and therefore a theoretical understanding of a discipline, assists to create credibility of the field. Public relations is no different. Grunig (2006, p. 51) asserts that *"the public relations profession is still far from being a research-based profession"* and despite advancements made regarding public relations research, public relations theory is still seldom used as the foundation for public relations practice (Waddington, 2014).

On the one hand, public relations theory suggests three strategic outcomes for the practice of public relations, namely; management of communication; building relationships; and dialogue. Both theory and strategy can be described as continuums, which *"change slowly over time"* (Vocabulary.com, 2013). While on the other hand, public relations practice is largely concerned with the management of projects, which have a practical orientation.

Corporate communication strategies are a powerful public relations tool (Coombs & Holladay, 2010) if they are deliberate and goal oriented, but public relations practitioners struggle to apply strategy to communication issues (Van Ruler, 1997). This research seeks to understand what theoretical principles inform corporate communication strategies and how public relations practitioners develop and implement these strategies.

1.4 Preliminary literature review

The context of the study is strategic public relations, with a particular focus on corporate communication strategies. A review of public relations literature shows that strategic public relations is optimised when public relations practitioners use a seven stage process approach (Fourie, 2014). This preliminary literature will review public relations theory relevant to these headings: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.

1.4.1 Public relations (context)

Based on public relations definitions, the discipline has three strategic goals namely, management of communication, i.e. controlling the message from the organisation; relationship building, i.e. developing trust with stakeholders, reputation; and dialogue i.e. collaboration, co-operation and co-creation with stakeholders to decide the future together. Public relations scholars Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 6) define public relations as *“the management of communication between an organization and its publics.”* From a relational viewpoint, Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985, p. 4) define public relations as *“a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends”*. However, established and mutually beneficial relationships are built on dialogic communication, which encompasses the elements of collaboration and co-creation. Roper, Zorn, and Weaver (2004, p. 11) state that dialogue involves purposeful attempts to *“increase understanding or shared meaning, raise awareness of taken for granted assumptions and beliefs, enhance learning, encourage collaboration and enhance the quality of decisions and actions”*. Van Ruler (2013, p. 129) supports Eisenberg’s (1984) definition of co-creation, which *“allows all parties to contribute to the shared view of organisational and social lives needed for coordinated enactment.”*

1.4.2 Strategy and objectives

Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005, p. 83) define strategic communication as *“communication aligned with the organisation’s overall strategy to enhance its strategic positioning”* and according to Botan (1997, p. 188) and Steyn and Puth (2000, p. 53) is *“a planned campaign.”* Planning translates the organisation’s mission into a strategy (Angelopulo, 2015) which subsequently becomes part of the organisation’s strategic communication.

Corporate communication, a management function within an organisation, is concerned with executing corporate communication strategies which support the organisation’s overall

strategy (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). Although corporate communication can be defined as *“the integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at relevant target groups, both internal and external to the organisation”* (Van Riel, 1995, p. 24), a corporate communication strategy provides the focus and direction for an organisation’s communication with its stakeholders, i.e. it determines *what* should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals (Steyn & Puth, 2000).

1.4.3 Environmental scanning

Environmental scanning and issues management are two important functions of corporate communication (de Beer, 2001); (du Toit, 2016). Barker (2015, p. 94) defines the business environment as *“the environment or marketplace in which the organisation operates”* and consists of three sub-environments, namely the micro environment, market environment and macro environment (Strydom, 2013). Within corporate communication, internal communication addresses the micro environment of the organisation and external communication addresses the market and macro environments (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Environmental scanning is the gathering of strategic information about the external environment that offer opportunities to the organisation or threaten the organisation (Aronoff & Baskin, 1983).

Bhardwaj and Kumar (2014, p. 40) define environmental scanning as *“the collection and use of information about events, trends, and relationships in an organization’s external environment, the knowledge of which would assist management in planning the organization’s future course of action.”* Furthermore, Grunig (2006, p. 159) defines environmental scanning as the identification of “stakeholders who are affected by potential organisational decisions or who want organisations to solve problems that are important to them.” Issues management is defined as *“the proactive process of anticipating, identifying, evaluating and responding to public policy issues that affect the organisation’s relationships with their publics”* (Cutlip, et al., 2006, p. 19). Heath (2005, p. 460) describes the responsibility of public relations in environmental scanning and issues management as *“reducing friction and increasing harmony between organisations and publics.”*

1.4.4 Corporate reputation

Fombrun (1996, p. 376) defines reputation as being *“the sum of the images the various constituencies have of an organization.”* Corporate reputation encompasses stakeholders’ overall evaluation of an organisation over time and uses the concepts of corporate identity and corporate image as the basis for judgement (Fourie, 2014).

Managing an organisation's reputation forms part of the strategic public relations function of the organisation as public relations practitioners are best able to determine who is important to the organisation and what should be communicated with them in order to build or enhance favourable organisational reputation (Mehta & Xavier, 2009). Fombrun (1990) advises that communication is a primary vehicle for building a sound corporate reputation. Campaigns, encompassing one-way or two-way communication are the vehicles through which public relations practitioners communicate an organisation's reputation. However, these campaigns must underpin the overall organisational strategy.

1.4.5 Stakeholder theory and management

Much of the literature on stakeholders starts with Freeman who places stakeholders at the centre of strategic thinking as to how an organisation creates value for its stakeholders. A stakeholder, according to Freeman (1984, p. 46), is anyone who can "*affect or is affected by*" the achievement of the organisation's objectives. However there are hundreds of stakeholder definitions and very little consensus has been reached (Miles, 2012). Some of the earlier theoretical categories include primary and secondary stakeholders (Clarkson, 1995); legitimacy, urgency and power (Mitchell, et al., 1997).

However, practically, stakeholders can be broadly classified into two groups: internal stakeholders and external stakeholders. Internal stakeholders include those stakeholders that work for the organisation, of which employees would be an example (Rensburg & Cant, 2010, p. 28). External stakeholders include those stakeholders that are impacted by decisions that the organisation makes, but that do not form part of the internal environment of the organisation. Examples of external stakeholders are customers, the media and government.

To manage stakeholders effectively, stakeholder identification and the nature and size of their stakes are the two elements which drive stakeholder interactions (Fombrun, 1990); (Steyn & Puth, 2000). However, Skinner *et al's* (2013) definition of stakeholder management encompasses a more holistic view as it considers the organisation and the activities needed to meet the stakeholders' identified needs:

"Stakeholder management includes aspects of identifying stakeholders, determining their needs, deciding on appropriate ways of addressing their needs as well as the needs of the organisation, and implementing activities that will address these needs within an agreed budget" (Skinner, et al., 2013, p. 40)

Strategic public relations is concerned with stakeholder management as it "*anticipates and manages stakeholder responses to organisational strategies [so that] actions can be put in*

place that either capitalise on potential positive responses or reduce or eradicate negative responses” (Ackermann & Eden, 2011, p. 180).

1.4.6 Message

The common definition of a message is what is being communicated between parties. Skinner *et al*, (2013) highlights that, for any situation there might be several target audiences, and a separate message would be developed for each group. Public relations uses messages to influence the perception of stakeholders in favour of the organisation as “no matter how carefully an organisation’s messages might be formulated, stakeholders might perceive these messages very differently from the way in which the organisation intended them to be perceived” (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 51).

Strategic public relations has the responsibility to interpret the organisation’s vision, mission and objectives to its stakeholders by means of crafting messages that are strategically aligned to the overall organisational vision, mission and objectives.

1.4.7 Measurement

Measurement and evaluation are essential elements in the creation of successful corporate communication strategies (Michaelson & Macleod, 2007) to demonstrate the impact of a message, programme or campaign (Stacks, 2010). Measurement and evaluation programmes are used to improve the overall performance of programmes, rather than determine the success or failure of a programme. Whatever measurements and evaluation tools are used, public relations practitioners should link their public relations achievements to the vision, mission and organisational objectives of the business as a whole (Lindenmann, 2003). Furthermore, public relations practitioners should be able to demonstrate in a measureable way how the results of their efforts benefit the organisation (Weintraub Austin & Pinkleton, 2015). Strategic public relations should be able to prove what value they add to the organisation through measurement and evaluation that links strategic communication to organisational objectives (Lindenmann, 2005).

1.5 Research problem

In an ideal world, public relations practitioners would play a strategic role in corporate communication strategies. However, this is not the case and public relations practitioners seldom have input into organisational strategy development (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Consequently, the credibility of public relations is at stake; and there is a disconnect between

public relations theory and public relations practice. This research seeks to understand what theoretical principles inform corporate communication strategies and how public relations practitioners develop and implement these strategies.

1.6 Research question

“How do the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice?”

1.6.1 Research sub-questions

These four sub-questions underpin the research question:

- What are the core elements of a corporate communication strategy in public relations theory?
- How do public relations practitioners frame corporate communication strategies?
- What are the core elements of a corporate communication strategy in public relations practice?
- How do public relations practitioners implement corporate communication strategies?

1.6.2 Research objectives

This study aims:

- to determine the core elements, as identified in literature, that make up a corporate communication strategy (literature review)
- to discover how public relations practitioners frame corporate communication strategies (survey questionnaire and interview)
- to explore the core elements of corporate communication strategies in public relations practice (interview)
- to learn how public relations practitioners implement corporate communication strategies (survey questionnaire and interview)

1.7 Research design

Bryman and Bell (2014, p. 100) define the term ‘research design’ as being the *“framework that guides the use of a research method and the analysis of the subsequent data.”* Research design may be broadly categorised into two types namely, empirical studies and non-empirical studies (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 78). This is an empirical study as it uses primary data,

and an exploratory study as the researcher wishes to gain new insights into the research topic and does not necessarily wish to draw conclusions (Saunders, et al., 2012). Cresswell (2014, p. 4) believes that qualitative research design is appropriate for “*exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.*” The research design is qualitative, underpinned by a constructivist philosophy, which is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed and can be different for people (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012). Qualitative research is subjective as it seeks to understand rather than predict (Stacks, 2010) and to develop theory rather than test a hypothesis (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012).

1.7.1 Population

Research population according to Bryman and Bell (2014, p. 170) is defined as “*the universe of units, like people, nations, cities and firms from which the sample is to be selected.*” The population for this study are members of the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database. The decision to use the PRISA database as the population was based on the assumption that all members on the database are qualified to practice public relations; therefore, membership to the PRISA database was used as a pre-qualification method for this study. Also, the researcher felt that by virtue of respondents’ paid-for membership to the PRISA body that they had adequate interest in the public relations field to make a meaningful contribution to this research.

1.7.2 Sample and sampling frame

Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 184) define a sampling frame as “*a list of elements from which a probability sample is selected.*” They furthermore indicate that “*samples provide information appropriate for describing the population of elements composing the sampling frame*” (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 184). Only APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) were selected from the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database for the survey.

Purposive sampling is defined as “*a non-probability form of sampling so the researcher cannot generalise to a population*” (Bryman & Bell, 2014, p. 186). This sampling technique will be used as the researcher wants to sample respondents in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the research questions.

1.7.3 Research methodology and methods

Research methodology encompasses the tools and procedures that will be employed to answer the research question (Babbie & Mouton, 2012) and involves two types namely, quantitative and qualitative methodologies. A quantitative methodology is numeric in nature and uses descriptive statistical analysis to answer the research question (Cresswell, 2014, p. 17). It is objective as it seeks to understand the world based on value-free processes and infers answers from the data through its generalisability (Berndt & Petzer, 2011, p. 47). This research used a quantitative questionnaire to survey the population. This method is appropriate due to the cost effectiveness and the ease of automating the data entry.

A qualitative methodology is textual in nature and uses inductive reasoning to answer the research question (Cresswell, 2014, p. 17). It is subjective as it seeks to understand the world based on how individuals experience it and infers answers from the data through its context (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012). This research used qualitative, semi-structured telephonic interviews as a method to understand why public relations practitioners use strategic communication the way they do. The sample was self-selecting as the respondents were able to choose whether they wanted to answer the survey or not (Lund Research, 2012).

1.7.4 Data collection instruments

The quantitative survey, in the form of a questionnaire comprising open and closed questions, will be developed from the literature review. Piloting of the questionnaire took place to ensure reliability and amendments were made before implementation (Welman, et al., 2005). The questionnaire was created on Google Forms and was distributed electronically to the sample population via email. The respondents therefore were self-selecting and self-administered.

From the literature, in conjunction with the responses to the questionnaire, an interview schedule was developed to guide the telephonic interviews, as the researcher was looking for in-depth information and insights into how public relations practitioners were developing and implementing corporate communication strategies and the reasons behind their choices.

An interview guide, a brief list of memory prompts, was prepared and used by the researcher as a tool to guide the interview questioning toward the topics and issues that the researcher wanted to know more about (Bryman & Bell, 2014, p. 228). Semi-structured telephonic interviews were conducted with the participants. Interviews are useful in explorative

investigations as they “*explore the views, experiences, beliefs and motivations of individual participants*” (Gill, et al., 2008).

1.8 Data analysis and interpretation

The survey software programme Google Forms was used to collect and analyse the survey data as well as to provide the researcher with descriptive statistics. According to Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 641) descriptive statistics describe the characteristics of a sample and summarises a set of sample observations from respondents.

1.8.1 Thematic analysis – interviews

Bryman and Bell (2014, p. 350) describe thematic analysis as “*identifying, analysing and describing patterns, or themes, across the data set.*” A thematic analysis allows the researcher to gain insight into the topic under investigation.

1.9 Significance of the research

The significance of this study is that it will increase the credibility of the discipline as public relations practitioners are able to constantly improve and adjust their strategies according to what works and what does not. Measurement and evaluation in the application of corporate communication strategies increases research in public relations practice which will in due course influence public relations theory.

1.10 Limitations of the study

The population of this study is limited to APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) registered with the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA).

This research is limited because it was a self-selecting sample, which creates a non-probability sample and limits the representation of the results i.e. the results are not generalisable.

This study limited to communications theory, especially public relations and organisational communication. While the researcher does not deny the existence of management theory and its communication components in organisations, the perspective of this research is public relations.

1.11 Research ethics

It is important that data be collected in an ethical manner and Diener and Crandall (1978) classify four main areas of ethical principles that must be considered by researchers, namely harm to participants; lack of informed consent; invasion of privacy and deception. The research ethics governing this research included protection of an individual's right to privacy, freedom of expression and confidentiality; no participants were exposed to risk, and no deception was employed, with prior consent being obtained from the respondents to the questionnaire and then again from the interviewees. Respondents gave their consent online and the interview participants were informed of the nature and background of the interview before it began. The questionnaire and the interview questions were answered on a voluntary basis and no individual was forced to participate.

1.11.1 Permission to conduct the study

Written permission has been obtained from the executive director of the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) regarding the access to and use of registered chartered public relations practitioners (CPRP) and accredited public relations practitioners (APR) members' contact details to conduct the survey questionnaires.

1.12 Outline of chapters

Table 1-1 Outline of chapter content

Chapter 1: Introduction	This chapter presents the research context and background as well as the research problem and the objectives of the study. A summary of the research design and methodology is given together with the chapter outline for this thesis.
Chapter 2: Literature review	This chapter discusses the literature pertinent to corporate communication strategies under the following headings: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholder, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.
Chapter 3: Research design and methodology	This chapter shows the research framework and methodology employed in this study. It explains the research questions, the data collection instruments and methods used to gather data and the sample selection process.
Chapter 4: Findings and conclusions	This chapter combines the findings that emerged from the data that was collected by means of a survey and telephonic interviews and offers conclusions. The research objectives and the findings will be aligned to the research objectives in this chapter.
Chapter 5: Recommendations	Chapter 5 concludes the study regarding how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice. The research aim and objectives, along with recommendations of this study is

presented in this chapter and the limitations of the study will be discussed. Suggestions for further research will be offered.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the research context, research problem and research objectives to answer the research question “How do the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice?” The research design and methodology comprise a survey questionnaire and telephonic interviews. The population was limited to public relations practitioners registered with the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA).

Chapter two will review the relevant literature regarding corporate communication strategies under the following headings: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholder, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.

2 CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This research explores how public relations theory aligns to public relations practice in the development and implementation of corporate communication strategies. Its purpose is to answer the research question “How do the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice?”

The context of the study is public relations, with a particular focus on corporate communication strategies. A review of public relations literature shows that public relations is optimised when public relations practitioners use a seven stage process approach (Fourie, 2014). This literature will review public relations theory relevant to these headings, namely: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.

2.2 Public relations (context)

A definitive definition of public relations is elusive. According to its range of definitions, public relations has three strategic goals namely, management of communication, i.e. controlling the message from the organisation; relationship building, i.e. developing trust with stakeholders; and dialogue i.e. collaboration, co-operation and co-creation with stakeholders to decide the future together (Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ferguson, 1984; Cutlip *et al.*, 1985; Ledingham & Bruning, 1998; Kent & Taylor, 2002; Theunissen & Wan Noordin, 2012).

The differing perspectives that public relations practitioners and academics have of their discipline, as Chauke and du Plessis (2015), explain is due to

“... its dynamic nature, the many approaches to public relations that exist and the various changes that public relations has undergone in its attempts to adapt to the needs and contexts of the societies in which it is practiced” (Chauke & du Plessis, 2015, p. 55).

According to Van Ruler and Vercic (2004, p. 3) acceptable alternative terms for public relations include ‘*communication management*’ and ‘*corporate communication*’. Likewise, Theunissen and Wan Noordin (2012, p. 7) state that the term “*communication management*” is often used to replace “*public relations*”. Furthermore, in Grunig’s (Grunig, 1992, p. 4) view, ‘*public*

relations’, ‘*communication management*’ and ‘*organisational communication*’ are terms, which can be used interchangeably.

2.2.1 Public relations as management of communication

Public relations’ core responsibilities include communication as well as a management function, thus public relations practitioners manage communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 6) to establish understanding with “*a view to inform, persuade, and influence attitudes and to bring about action*” (Skinner, et al., 2013, p. 28) to build relationships (Cutlip, et al., 1985, p. 4) and to enhance reputations (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2015).

Public relations scholars Grunig and Hunt (1984, p. 6) marry the concepts of ‘management’ and ‘communication’ when they define public relations as “*the management of communication between an organization and its publics.*” Furthermore, Grunig (1992, p. 4) explains public relations as the “*overall planning, execution and evaluation of an organisation’s communication with both external and internal publics – groups that affect the ability of an organisation to meet its goals.*” The key words in Grunig’s definition, namely ‘planning’, ‘execution’ and ‘evaluation’ are terms commonly associated with a management function. By nominating public relations as a management function, the discipline can no longer be relegated to an array of communication methods and techniques (Steyn & Puth, 2000), but rather as a strategic player on the organisation’s strategy development field. Toth and Trujillo (1987) affirm that there is a strong connection between management and communication with stakeholders by stating that:

“contemporary corporate communications refers to a management function in the business organisation which is responsible for presenting the organisation’s goals and character to many diverse publics” (Toth & Trujillo, 1987, p. 42).

2.2.2 Public relations as building relationships

Ferguson (1984) introduced the public relations perspective that underpins communication as a means to build relationships. Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985, p. 4) posit that the goal of public relations is to develop and “*maintain mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders.*” Furthermore, communication integration must take place in every area of the organisation and includes the relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 44). Therefore, organisational messages’ reach and influence must extend beyond the message itself, and must be relevant and consistent relationally.

Effective relationships are a key ingredient in an organisation's overall success (Cutlip, et al., 1985). It is the responsibility of public relations practitioner to identify key stakeholder groups with a view to building relationships with them through communication (Rensburg & Cant, 2010, p. 53). Furthermore, Center and Jackson (1995, p. 2) advocate that *"the proper term for the desired outcomes of public relations practice is public relationships. An organization with effective public relations will attain positive public relationships."* Ledingham and Bruning (1998, p. 62) expand on the impact of public relationships by defining relationships in a public relations context as being *"the state which exists between an organisation and its key publics in which the actions of either entity impact the economic, social, political and/or cultural well-being of the other entity."* Furthermore, this perspective of public relations as relationship management would encourage a strategic public relations approach that includes analysis, planning, implementation and evaluation (Ledingham & Bruning, 1998, p. 56).

Lee and Jun (2013) suggest that the concept of relationship is what distinguishes public relations from the other forms of communication. Furthermore, Center and Jackson (1995, p. 2) agree by advocating that *"the proper term for the desired outcomes of public relations practice is public relationships. An organization with effective public relations will attain positive public relationships."* Pieczka (2011, p. 110) explains the relational focus of public relations as a public relations goal, which would be achieved through communication. In addition, Rensburg and Cant (2010, p. 52) support the relational view of public relations and indicate that the primary function of public relations is *"balancing the interests of organisations and their publics through the management of organisation-public relationships."* Furthermore, public relations is defined by the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) as *"the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders"* (Skinner, et al., 2013, p. 4). Steinberg (2000) asserts that, when communication is seen as a transaction between participants, it creates the foundation or opportunity for relationships to be built. It is noted by Broom and Dozier (1990) that as public relations is able to affect the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders, this impact should be measured.

In addition, public relations is concerned with building reputations through relationship management and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) (2015) defines public relations in a reputation management context:

"public relations is the discipline which looks after reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support and influencing opinion and behaviour. It is the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and mutual understanding

between an organisation and its publics” (Chartered Institute of Public Relations, 2015).

2.2.3 Public relations as dialogue

Dialogue is a fundamental shift from telling and persuading in public relations to a conversational approach which is based on trust and commitment (Capozzi & Berlin Zipfel, 2012) as dialogue has its roots in the discipline of relational communication (Kent & Taylor, 2002) and seeks to develop relationships (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). The literature, relating to dialogue in public relations, does not define the concept of dialogue in public relations clearly and actual examples of dialogue are difficult to find (Meisenbach & Feldner, 2009); and poorly understood (Pieczka, 2011).

Similar to Grunig’s definition of public relations, dialogue or dialogic communication is described as communication between an organisation and its stakeholders and is a well managed public relations function when the communication is a transaction and occurs between the organisation and its stakeholders (Chauke & du Plessis, 2015, p. 236). Thus, dialogue is in essence an interpersonal communication exchange. Trenholm and Jensen (2008, p. 29) describe interpersonal communication, the foundation of relationship formation, as *“dyadic communication in which two individuals, sharing the roles of sender and receiver”* with the purpose of creating meaning. In an interpersonal communication context, dialogue may be defined as being *“a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together”* (Isaacs, 1999, p. 93).

However, Theunissen and Wan Noordien (2012, p. 10) believe that dialogue is a process and not a strategic public relations goal; as does Lane (2010) who posits that the process of dialogic communication is a sender-receiver process (Shannon & Weaver, 1949) which can be active or passive, but would result in a response from the receiver, *“who may be receptive or resistant to the ideas received”* (Lane, 2010, p. 20). Kent and Taylor (2002, p. 24) disagree by stating that dialogue is a product rather than a process as it produces a relationship in which both parties consider each other, not just their own interests (Botan, 1997) nor simply as a means to achieve a goal. Kent and Taylor’s (2002, p. 32) dialogic theory of public relations is based on the premise that *‘dialogue means a particular outcome resulting from dialogic communication procedures.’*

Botan (1997, p. 196) aptly states that, by engaging in dialogue with stakeholders, they enjoy *“the status of communication equal with the organisation.”* Dervin (1989) believes communication is more than a simple transmission and that communication has taken place only when meaning has been created through dialogue. Furthermore, dialogue considers all

communication partners as equals, because negotiating takes place when there are purposeful attempts to increase understanding, share meaning, raise awareness, enhance learning and *encourage collaboration and enhance the quality of decisions and actions*” (Roper, et al., 2004, p. 11) because dialogue is a practical approach to identifying and meeting stakeholder needs (Angelopoulos, 2015; Kent & Taylor, 2002) as there is an interrelationship between collaboration and negotiation. Conrad (1985, p. 243) defines collaboration as existing when all parties *“actively and assertively seek a mutually acceptable solution”* regardless of how much time it takes to achieve an outcome. Negotiation is similar as it engages in a *“give-and-take interaction to reach a mutually accepted solution”* (Wilson & Putnam, 1990, p. 375)

In his definition of co-creation as a contribution to a *‘shared view’* as well as *‘co-ordinated’* action, Eisenberg (1984) alludes to the concept of dialogue. Furthermore, Van Ruler (2013, p. 129) states that *“in managing corporate communication, the key issue is to manage the interactions in such a way that compatible zones of meaning are created with and among stakeholders.”* In addition, Botan and Taylor (2004) describe co-creation as the organisation and its stakeholders working together to create meaning and communication which in turn will lead to shared meanings, interpretations and goals.; allowing organisations to participate, adjust policies and procedures and align themselves to their environment (Chauke & du Plessis, 2015).

Although scholars believe dialogue promotes effective, efficient and ethical communication based on mutual interests (Kent & Taylor, 2002; Botan, 1997), Stoker and Tusinski (2006, pp. 160-162) caution that dialogue could be manipulated to achieve predetermined results and therefore undermines the objectivity of the interpersonal communication exchange making it morally susceptible.

2.2.4 Public relations models of communication

There is a plethora of models of communication, some of which have their origin in public relations, while others have their origin in other disciplines such as interpersonal communication (Isaacs, 1999) transactional (Verderber & Verderber, 2002) and political communication (Lasswell, 1948). For the purpose of this thesis, the origin of the models of communication is not as important as their strategic public relations application. Amongst other scholars, Grunig and Hunt (1984), Van Ruler (2004), Dozier *et al.* (1995) and Kent and Taylor (2002) each proposed public relations models of communication as means to analyse and practice communication management in an organisation.

Table 2-1 Some of the public relations models of communication and their strategic purpose

Models of communication	Strategic purpose
Propaganda	Hypodermic Syringe – Schramm (1954)
Press agency	One way communication – Grunig and Hunt (1984)
Dissemination of Information	Public dissemination of Information - Grunig and Hunt (1984) Information – Van Ruler (2004)
Persuasion	Two way asymmetrical -- Grunig and Hunt (1984) Persuasion – Van Ruler (2004) Mixed motive – Dozier (1995)
Mutual Benefit	Two way symmetrical – Grunig and Hunt (1984) Consensus Building – Van Ruler (20014) Mixed motive – Dozier (1995)
Dialogue	Dialogue – Van Ruler (2004) Mutual interests - Dialogue - Kent & Taylor (2002) Process - Theunissen & Wan Noordin (2012) Product – Kent and Taylor (2002) Influence – Coombs and Holladay (2010) Manipulation - Stoker and Tusinski (2006) Conversational - Capozzi and Berlin Zipfel (2012) Equality - Dervin (1989) Expedient – Angelopulo (2015)
Co-creation	Shared meaning - Botan and Taylor (2004) Participation - Chauke and du Plessis, (2015)
Collaboration	Collaboration - Kent and Taylor (2002); Conrad (1985) Negotiation - Wilson and Putnan (1990)

Grunig and Hunt (1984, pp. 21-43) proposed four traditional public relations models, which subdivides strategic communication into press agency, public information, two-way asymmetry, and two-way symmetry. According to Grunig (1992), each model is appropriate to a specific situation for communicating with a specific stakeholder group. Van Ruler (2004) agrees that anyone wishing to manage the organisation's communications could use selected individual strategies to resolve specific communication problems and proposes a basic communication model namely, the communication grid. The model consists of four communication strategies constructed on the creation of meaning, to be used in public relations practice, namely information, persuasion, consensus-building and dialogue. However, Dozier *et al's*. (1995) mixed motive model views strategic communication through

the lens of “strategic symmetry” (Grunig, et al., 2002, p. 370) and is founded on the principle of reciprocal communication, i.e. organisations realise that they are likely to benefit if they concede to some of the demands of their stakeholders (Grunig & White, 1992).

2.2.5 Strategic perspective of public relations models of communication

Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) press agency and public information model are primarily concerned with the dissemination of information and do not engage in dialogue with stakeholders. The press agency model’s purpose is to persuade and it is one-way, monological communication, which no intent to create dialogue between an organisation and its stakeholders. Until recently organisational communication was predominantly one way and monological (Botan, 1997) as public relations practitioners were concerned with obtaining media attention in the form of publicity for their organisation without the expectation of feedback. The press agency model is propaganda when it is used to spread ‘*incomplete, distorted or half-true information*’ (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 21). According to Lubbe and Puth (1994) this, together with the public information model, is a function of the technician public relations practitioner.

Van Ruler’s (2004) information model, together with Grunig and Hunts’s (1984) public information model, is one-way communication which makes use of mainstream or local media to spread accurate and generally positive information about the organisation but, has no expectations of feedback . These models are used to provide relevant information to generate understanding and awareness (Grunig & Hunt, 1984).

Grunig and Hunt’s two-way models are attributed to be the function of management and technician public relations practitioners (Lubbe & Puth, 1994). The two-way asymmetric model aims to change attitude and behaviour in favour of the organisation and is criticised for being one-way and manipulative (Van Ruler, 2004) as this model is used to construct organisational messages and does not encourage dialogue, but uses monitoring and measurement to adjust the message to persuade the public (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Similarly, Van Ruler’s (2004) persuasion model is a strategy to present the organisation with a favourable bias to further develop relationships with stakeholders. Also, in Dozier *et al*’s. (1995) mixed motive model, the two-way asymmetric communication component seeks to promote organisational self-interest as the best possible position for the organisation. However, if a small element of persuasion is involved, it is done within the two-way symmetrical approach that suggests a beneficial outcome for all parties (Dozier et al, 1995).

The two-way symmetrical model aims to change behaviour, where each participant in the communication process is equally able to influence the other (Van Ruler, 2004) to create

mutually beneficial relationships (Cutlip, et al., 1985) through mutual understanding (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) and it is seen as being inherently ethical and positively able to affect markets, performance, conflict resolution and crisis management (Huang, 2004). Furthermore the two-way symmetrical model is used by public relations practitioners to highlight the organisation's social responsibility and investment activities. Likewise, Van Ruler's (2004) consensus building model is a strategy to build bridges between the organisation and its environment or employees (Dozier, 1992). Similarly, in Dozier *et al's.* (1995) mixed motive model, the two-way symmetrical communication component aims to change stakeholder behaviours and perceptions and negotiation is used to achieve a win-win outcome.

The dialogue strategy proposed by Van Ruler (2004) is a facilitation strategy and is effective in identifying problems and consulting to collect possible solutions from stakeholders (Senge, 1990) as well as to develop corporate policies interactively in a socially responsible manner (Coombs & Holladay, 2010). It is used to engage with stakeholder groups and collaborate in decision-making (Van Ruler, 2004).

2.2.6 Public relations practitioners and strategy

Public relations practitioners fulfill either technician or management roles in the workplace, of which the most common is the technician public relations practitioner role (Broom & Smith, 1979). Their roles are based on the public relations practitioner's skill set and strategic input to the organisation (Botan, 1997; Steyn & Puth, 2000) as well as according to their primary job functions (Van Ruler & Vercic, 2004) and roles (Broom & Smith, 1979; Broom, 1982; Cutlip, *et al.*, 1985) and are outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2-2 Public relations practitioners and their corporate roles

Role	Description
Strategist public relations practitioner	
Strategic or board room level	This role is played at organisational strategic level.
Environmental scanning	Consists of monitoring relevant environmental developments and anticipating their consequences for the organisation's policies and strategies with a specific focus on relationships with stakeholders.
Reflective	
Expert prescribe	Part of strategy formulation team and makes corporate communication inputs into the organisation's strategic decision making process.
Problem – solving facilitator	
	This role is concerned with the organisational standards, values and views and aimed at the development of mission and organisational strategies.
Manager public relations practitioner	

Implementation of strategy	This role is played at the functional, departmental or divisional level of the organisation.
Communication projects	
Managerial	Purpose is to develop corporate communication strategy and policy for the organisation.
Educational	
Communicatin facilitator	Focus is on message identification by deciding what should be communicated to stakeholders to solve problems that developed in the relationship or to capitalise on opportunities presented.
	This role is concerned with commercial and other (internal and external) public groups and with public opinion as a whole and is aimed at the execution of the organisational mission and strategies.

Technician public relations practitioner

Communication Output	This role is played on the implementation or programme level.
Event organisation.	Purpose is to implement communication plans or campaigns directed at the organisation's stakeholders
Operational	
Communication Technician.	Does not play a strategic role or input into organisational strategy
	Skills: writing, event management, editing and media relations.
	This role is concerned with services and is aimed at the execution of the communication plans developed by others.
	This role is concerned with the mentality and behaviour of the members of the organisation and aimed at internal public groups.
	Technician must have an understanding of the strategy and convert the strategy into tactical elements

Adapted from Botan (1997) Steyn & Puth (2000); Van Ruler & Vercic (2004)

However, according to Botan (1997) public relations practitioners do not play an active role in strategic decision making and are functioning at implementation level as they do not have the skills and training to execute corporate communicaiton strategies and focus on keeping the client satisfied rather than advising the client. Venter and Louw's (2012) findings indicate that public relations practitioners lack knowledge and experience to function at a strategic level.

2.2.7 Public relations as corporate communication

Corporate communication is essentially a management function that is used by companies in a strategic and instrumental manner (Cornelissen, 2004) and provides a strategic framework that helps to connect communication goals to the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives (Steyn, 2004). Overall, corporate communication aims to reflect the organisation's transparency and accountability in its communication and disclosure regarding how the organisation performs in its environmental, social and economic dimensions (Lewis, 2011) by means of triple bottom line reporting. Triple Bottom Line is a sustainable benchmark for organisations and includes the principles of people, planet and profit (Skinner, et al., 2013, p. 271). Thus, corporate communication contributes to the organisation's purpose by

incorporating the values of its most important stakeholders into its strategic objectives (Steyn & Butschi, 2004, p. 6).

Public relations is often equated to corporate communication (Grunig, 1992; Hutton, et al., 2001; Steyn & Butschi, 2004). Furthermore, Van Riel and Fombrun (2007) define corporate communication as:

“the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communication aimed at creating favourable starting points with stakeholders on whom the company depends “ (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007, p. 25).

Internal communication, a specialist field in public relations, (Vercic, et al., 2012, p. 223; Van Riel, 1995; Yeomans, 2006) is aimed at the organisation’s internal stakeholders. Welch and Jackson (2007, p. 186) define internal communication as *“communication between strategic managers and internal stakeholders”* and indicate that internal communication aims to develop commitment, acceptance in the organisation, awareness of the organisation’s external environment and an understanding of organisational goals. Moreover, Skinner *et al.* (2013, p. 97) assert that internal communication may also be known as internal public relations. From a strategic communication viewpoint, internal communication should underscore the overall strategic organisational objectives and should aid in making the organisation more effective (Cornelissen, 2011).

External communication is applicable to the organisation’s macro and market environment and is described as messages from an organisation to stakeholders in the organisation’s external environment (Reference.com, 2016) that generally aims to present a favourable corporate image with external stakeholders (Cornelissen, 2011).

The strategic goal of corporate communication is to build an organisation’s reputation and to ensure that all communication is orchestrated into a coherent whole that both internal and external stakeholders are able to understand (Angelopulo, 2015) and by aligning all its messages with relevant stakeholder groups (Christensen, et al., 2008). Furthermore, Duncan (2002) adds that, from a relational viewpoint, communication integration ensures

“that the messages to these groups are as appropriate and beneficial to the business relationship as possible, and engaging in purposeful dialogue with them” (Duncan, 2002, p. 143)

In addition, the content of messages as part of corporate communication should underpin the organisation’s vision, mission and strategic objectives (Angelopulo & Thomson, 2015).

Chauke and du Plessis (2015, p. 235) aptly state that the co-creation function of public relations implies that public relations practitioners

“translate the organisation’s policies, values, aims, image and actions to its stakeholders and, in turn, understand and communicate the stakeholders’ needs, expectations, motives and values to the organisation” (Chauke & du Plessis, 2015, p. 235)

Thus it is the task of the public relations practitioner to ‘wrap’ the strategic goals, vision and mission of the organisation in a storytelling narrative to its stakeholders to achieve mutual understanding. This literature study covers corporate communication strategy in section 2.3.8 after discussing strategy in section 2.3.

2.3 Strategy and objectives

Before delving into the strategic role or function that communication plays within an organisation, it is necessary to define and explain strategy, which is a management concept. This section will review the definitions of strategy, types of strategy and the concepts of strategic planning and strategic management as further extensions of strategy.

2.3.1 Clarification of terms

Table 2.3 clarifies the terms that relate to strategy within a management discipline. This literature review will discuss the management terms from a strategic communication perspective.

Table 2-3 Clarification of terms that relate to strategy

Term	Explanation
Strategy	Strategies exist at various levels of an organisation, and these three levels of strategy are widely accepted: Enterprise level Corporate level Business unit level Functional level Operational level Strategic plans may be long-term or short-term and address matters of great importance in an organisation
Plan	Simply put, a plan involves <i>what</i> must be achieved (ends) and <i>how</i> it must be achieved (means) and typically considers time and resources
Planning	Planning involves the activity of preparing a plan and may be formal or informal. Typically, planning considers time and resources
Strategic planning	Strategic planning involves defined and recognisable sets of activities and follow an array of methods (Nickols, 2011). Strategic planning is a useful tool to position an organisation's strategy
Strategic thinking	Strategic thinking incorporates strategic management, strategic formulation, strategic planning and strategic deployment
Strategic management	In essence, strategic management makes strategic thinking work. Strategic management puts strategic formulation, strategic planning and strategic deployment into action

Adapted from Nickols (2011) and Steyn and Puth (2000)

2.3.2 Defining strategy

Nickols (2011, p. 3) explains that the definition of 'strategy' depends on the way in which it is used. However, because researchers often do not clarify the context in which they refer to the term, great confusion about the meaning of 'strategy' is often the result. Steiner (1979, p. 6) concurs that there is "*very little agreement as to the meaning of strategy in the business world.*"

An organisational strategy incorporates its overall vision and mission and business objectives as, according to Wilson (1997) it is a method to reach an overall goal. Furthermore, Tregoe

and Zimmerman (1980) believe strategy is the framework which guides those choices that determine the nature and direction of an organisation. In addition Bryson (2011, p. 10) explains that strategy is *“a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions or resource allocations that define what an organisation is, what it does, and why it does it.”* Angelopulo (2015) asserts that the organisation’s mission is only able to contribute to the organisation if it is considered as an integral part of all organisational functions. Chandler (1962, p. 13) states that strategy is *“the determination of basic long-term goals of an enterprise and the adoption of courses of action necessary for carrying out those goals.”*

Steyn and Puth (2000) indicate that the purpose of an organisation’s corporate communication strategy is to reflect the organisation’s overall enterprise or corporate strategy and that the processes of strategic planning and strategic thinking are prerequisites to arriving at an overall corporate communication strategy. However, even from a management perspective, Mintzberg (1990) observes strategy is often associated with practice and the tactics used to implement strategy.

Therefore, the attributes of strategy may be summarised as:

- Strategy involves tactics to reach an overall goal
- Strategy is a planned process
- Strategy gives an organisation its reason for existing (vision and mission)
- Strategy encompasses the organisation’s strategic objectives
- Strategy requires both planning (development of strategy) and implementation (carrying out the strategy that was developed)

As strategy is imperative to the existence and success of any organisation, it is useful to review the types of organisational strategies and to determine how each strategy contributes to organisational success and organisational communication.

2.3.3 Defining strategic management

The transition from strategic planning (the process of converting the organisation’s mission and vision into strategy) to strategic management (the management of the strategy) takes place by means of implementing the planned strategy. The implementation of the strategy takes place at the managerial level: *“managers translate and implement the organisation’s strategy into specific objectives for the divisions of the organisation that create, maintain and support its products and services”* (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 46).

Bryson (2011, p. 55) defines strategic management as *"the integration of strategic planning and implementation across an organisation (or other entity) in an ongoing way to enhance the fulfillment of mission, meeting of mandates, and sustained creation of public value."* In the development and implementation phase of an organisation's strategy, management of activities, processes and people must take place.

2.3.3.1 Levels of strategy

An organisation's strategy is developed at different levels to meet the needs of the stakeholders at each level as an organisation's stakeholders operate at different levels of authority. Steyn and Puth (2000, pp. 41-45) describe five levels of strategy that relate to strategic management, namely enterprise strategy, corporate strategy, business unit strategy, functional strategy and operational strategy.

2.3.3.1.1 Enterprise strategy

Enterprise strategy is concerned with the organisation's mission, i.e. where the organisation is headed; the organisation purpose, i.e. how it contributes to a specific section of the economy; and the organisation's role in society, i.e. the type of organisation (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Enterprise strategy covers the organisation's corporate social responsibility initiatives and the impact of stakeholders' decisions on the organisation and thus strategies developed at the enterprise level are stakeholder oriented (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Angelopulo (2015) describes this principle as 'market orientation':

"a market orientation is a way of thinking and organising in which the needs of the organisation's key stakeholders are held as the starting point for all decisions and actions" (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 44)

From a strategic relationship perspective, Grunig (2006) confirms that good relationships with stakeholders are achievable if the organisation develops goals that are considered to be for the 'greater good' of both the organisation and stakeholders. Thus, enterprise strategy provides direction for organisation and ensures that the communication strategy remains aligned to the overall strategic objectives and values of the organisation.

2.3.3.1.2 Corporate strategy

According to Steyn and Puth (2000), corporate strategy focuses on the achievement of the organisation's financial objectives as it defines the markets and the businesses in which an organisation operates as well as the competitive strategy on which it will compete (Nickols, 2010). Andrews (1997) defines corporate strategy as

“the pattern of objectives, purposes or goals and major policy plans for achieving these goals stated in such a way as to define what business the company is or is to be in and the kind of company it is or is to be” (Andrews, 1997, p. 50)

Thus, corporate strategy is decided at the organisation's inception as it defines the organisation's vision and mission and informs the corporate competitive strategy. According to Steiner (1979) strategy was initially concerned with how organisations countered competitive moves against them or succeeded in spite of them. Porter (1980), the proverbial 'father' of competitive strategy, defines competitive strategy as

“a broad formula for how a business is going to compete, what its goals should be, and what policies will be needed to carry out those goals” (Porter, 1980, p. xvi)

Furthermore, Porter (1980) believes competitive strategy may take on one of three generic forms, namely: overall cost of leadership, market differentiation and focus.

2.3.3.1.3 Business unit strategy

Angelopulo and Thomson (2015, p. 33) describe a business unit strategy as *“efforts to obtain a competitive advantage in terms of a specific or single product or market segment”* and thus these strategies are market orientated and have a niche application. These business unit strategies are specific to them on a functional and operational level, but echo the organisational strategy on a broader level (Porter, 1980).

2.3.3.1.4 Functional strategy

The implementation of an organisation's strategy takes place at the functional level and thus the organisation is structured to implement organisational strategy at different levels (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Communication strategy is an example of functional strategy (Angelopulo & Thomson, 2015). Botan (1997) asserts that, if stakeholders are important to the organisation's future, then it follows that public relations should be more important on a functional level than merely being a support function.

2.3.3.1.5 Operational strategy

Finally, the final level of strategy is on the operational or the 'doing' or 'action' element of implementation (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Thus, it is at this level that implementation strategies are decided and thus public relations communication forms part of operational requirements as the purpose of public relations communication is to clarify the plan to all stakeholders.

2.3.4 Strategic planning

Bryson (2011) defines strategic planning as a

“deliberative, disciplined approach to producing fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organisation (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, 2011, p. 37)

Strategic planning then, takes place on purpose and consists of decisions that have been made that will shape the way in which the organisation does business and its motivation for existing. The purpose of strategic planning is translating the organisation’s mission into strategy. For this to take place effectively, Angelopulo (2015, p. 46) asserts that management must have a clear understanding of the organisation’s mission and vision, stakeholder identification and stakeholder needs, and the positioning of the organisation within its micro and macro environment.

2.3.4.1 Strategic planning tools

Strategic planning tools include the resources that aid management to arrive at a suitable strategy for their organisation. Bryson (2011, p. 39) used the acronym ‘ABC’ to illustrate his method of strategic planning, where A is the formulation, B is the clarification and C is the resolving or solution to achieve strategic issues. Table 2.4 shows that to get from A to B involves clarifying the vision, mission and goals of the organisation; thereafter the process of strategy formulation is illustrated from points A to C and the implementation of the strategy is shown from points B to C.

Table 2-4 ABC's of strategic planning

Acronym	Explanation	Relationship to strategy
A	Figuring out where you are via a deliberative process	Formulation of strategic issues
B	Where you want to go	Clarification of strategic issues
	Content of A and B: Organisation’s existing or new mission; Structure; Communications systems; Programs and services; People and skills; Relationships; Budgets and Other supports	
C	How to get there	Resolve strategic issues
	Content of C: Strategic plan; Plans for various functions; Ways to restructure, reengineer, reframe or repurpose; Budget allocations; Other strategies and vehicles for change	

Adapted from (Bryson, 2011, p. 40)

Therefore, from the strategic planning tool described above, strategic planning involves three steps, namely: analysing the organisation's current environment; determining where the organisation wants to be in terms of its vision; and devising a plan of action to get the organisation to where it wants to be.

2.3.5 Strategic thinking

As previously stated, the role that public relations practitioners most often fulfill in organisations is that of technician role (Broom & Smith, 1979) and public relations practitioners functioning in this role are mostly concerned with public relations tactics. This is problematic for strategic public relations because if public relations practitioners are concerned with tactics, they do not consider strategic consequences on the organisation's behalf. In light of this, it can be maintained that public relations practitioners are not applying strategic thinking to strategic decisions as, according to Nickols (2015, p. 9) *"a decision represents a commitment to a particular course of action."* Furthermore, strategic decision making determines the course of an organisation (Eisenhardt & ZBaracki, 1992). When one understands how the strategic decision making process works, one is able to better represent one's own position in the decision outcome.

2.3.5.1 Categorising strategic decisions

Nickols (2015) characterises strategic decisions into four categories based on how they affect the organisation's internal and external environment, namely: direction; finance; people and risk.

Table 2-5 Linking strategic decisions with public relations strategies

Characteristic	Explanation	Public relations strategy
Direction	Strategic decisions could alter or confirm and organisation's direction	Corporate communication strategic/strategic plan
Finance	Strategic decisions have significant financial implications for the organisation	Internal communication strategy Reporting (triple bottom line reporting)
People	Strategic decisions hold implications for people, in terms of positively or negatively affecting their morale, commitment and motivation	Internal communication strategy
Risk	The outcomes of strategic decisions are never certain	Must talk to strategic plan. I would have considered the risk if I did environmental scanning

Adapted from Nickols (2015, pp. 10, 11)

2.3.6 Strategic public relations goals

Based on public relations definitions, the discipline has three strategic goals namely, management of communication, i.e. controlling the message from the organisation; relationship building, i.e. developing trust with stakeholders, reputation management; and dialogue i.e. collaboration, co-operation and co-creation with stakeholders to decide the future together. Ideally, the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives should underline all public relations communication and provide a strategic framework that helps to connect communication goals to the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives (Steyn, 2004). In addition, Grunig (2006) believes that public relations' value in strategic management is to

“identify strategic publics as part of the strategic management process and to build high quality long-term relationships with them through symmetrical communication”
(Grunig, 2006, p. 160)

As shown in figure 2.1, collaboration, according to Grunig (2006), is based on good relationships with its strategic publics and makes it easier for organisations to achieve their strategic goals.



Figure 2-1 Collaboration and strategic goals

Adapted from Grunig (2006)

However, a core function of public relations relates to reputation and therefore aligning the perception that an organisation's target audience has of the organisation with the image that the organisation has set for itself as a public relations goal i.e. how organisation wants to be perceived. Furthermore, Van der Walt (2015, p. 397) explains that the way in which to successfully achieve the alignment of all stakeholders' perceptions is by *“co-ordinating and aligning all internal and external messages”*. Thus, as all communication affects perceptions, public relations communication plays a fundamental role in how an organisation is strategically positioned for internal and external stakeholders.

2.3.7 Strategic communication

Argenti *et al.* (2005, p. 83) define strategic communication as communication that aligns with the organisational strategy to optimise resources and is a 'planned campaign' (Botan, 1997, p. 188). Strategic communication is purposive and aims to achieve specific outcomes (Angelopulo, 2015) such as inform, persuade or motivate behaviour change (Rogers & Storey, 1987, p. 817). Hallahan *et al.* (2007) describe strategic communication as communication that advances an organisation's mission and is:

"the analysis and explanation of intentional and purposeful communicative relationships between organisations and publics." (Hallahan, *et al.*, 2007, p. 4)

Steyn and Puth (2000) strongly advocate that public relations practitioners occupy seats at an organisation's boardroom table so that they are able to play a meaningful role in the development of the organisation's overall strategy. According to Botan (1997) strategic communication includes research to identify the problem, i.e. the role of research as goal identification; identification of relevant publics i.e. strategies address a problem with target audiences and measurable goals and objectives, i.e. employs measurable tactics to implement strategies. Therefore, according to Botan and Soto (1998) strategic communication takes on the form of a campaign when it is practically implemented:

'It is a planned and goal-directed strategic campaign and that such campaigns are characterised by their intended role in positioning an organisation or group to negotiate relationships with relevant environmental forces' and that 'most public relations practitioners and scholars see public relations as strategic communication' (Botan & Soto, 1998, p. 23)

Goodman (2000) and Argenti (2000) are of the opinion that the main objective for strategic communication is to communicate effectively and advocate a positive attitude. Strategic communication achieves this by shaping meaning, building trust, creating reputation, and managing symbolic relationships with internal and external stakeholders in order to support organisational growth and secure the freedom to operate (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Van der Walt (2015, p. 413) states that *"specific business objectives must drive the communication strategy, which in turn must serve to unite an organisation's approach to its internal and external audiences."* Thus, the organisation's corporate strategy drives the organisation's strategic public relations including the corporate communication strategy.

2.3.8 Corporate communication strategy

Van Riel (1995, p. 24) describes corporate communication strategy as *"providing the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with its stakeholders, i.e. it determines what*

should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals.” Steyn and Puth (2000) on the concept of corporate communication strategies by stating that

“it is a process of identifying the organisation’s key strategic issues, determining their impact on the organisation’s stakeholders, and deciding what should be communicated to solve the problem or capitalise on the opportunity” (Steyn & Puth, 2000, p. 52)

While communication strategies provide the framework for organisations to communicate with its various stakeholders (Steyn & Puth, 2000) so do they indicate what must be communicated to the stakeholder groups (Angelopulo & Thomson, 2015). Plowman (2005) surmises that ‘

“public relations is strategic when it aids in formulating the organization’s approach to accomplishing overall goals and then supports that effort in a coordinated and consistent manner” (Plowman, 2005, p. 132)

A communication strategy should include the whole organisation as well as support the organisational strategy to be relevant (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Therefore, public relations is concerned with the practicality of strategy, i.e. determining, articulating and communicating organisational strategies. When communicating the strategy, public relations practitioners should ensure that they understand the strategy as seen through the eyes of the targeted stakeholders and that the public relations practitioner is able to obtain a commitment to the strategy from these stakeholders.

2.3.8.1 Corporate communication strategy and public relations campaigns

An organisational strategy is based on pre-determined long term goals and the decision to carry out certain actions to achieve these goals (Chandler, 1962), and the corporate communication strategy determines how to communicate these long term goals to the organisation’s stakeholders (Angelopulo & Thomson, 2015). According to Doorley and Garcia (Doorley & Garcia, 2007, p. 287), a strategic communication plan’s purpose is to support the organisation’s business model.

A corporate communication campaign may be described as an effort to achieve public relations goals, through the application of public relations communication strategies and measurement of outcomes (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Furthermore, public relations campaigns are differentiated from marketing and branding campaigns as public relations objectives are to inform, create awareness, persuade publics on certain issues as well as organisational activities or motivate behaviour change (Chauke & du Plessis, 2015) over time, through the use of organised communication activities which include the mass media (Rogers & Storey, 1987).

Rensburg and Cant (2010, pp. 208-213) acknowledge three variations of public relations models for planning public relations campaigns, namely the communication by objectives (MBO) model (Fourie, 1982); the Cutlip, Center and Broom model (Cutlip, et al., 1985), the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) (Jefkins, 1982) and Steyn and Puth's (2000) communication plan model. Furthermore, strategic public relations is optimised when public relations practitioners use a seven stage process approach (Fourie, 2014). Table 2.6 compares the different models and divides the processes into the seven steps process approach acknowledged by Fourie (2014).

Table 2-6 Comparison of public relations models for planning public relations programmes

Model and steps	Communication by objectives (MBO) model (Fourie, 1982)	Cutlip, Center and Broom model (Cutlip, et al., 1985)	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) model (Jefkins, 1982)	Steyn and Puth's communication plan model (Steyn & Puth, 2000)
Stage 1 Context Environmental scanning	Planning The steps included in the planning stage involve 1) identifying the communication needs of both the communicator and stakeholders, 2) formulating the message, 3) formulating the objectives, 4) determining profitability, 5) gathering data, 6) stakeholder analysis, 7) analysis of the communicator, 8) determining the circumstances, 9) timing the communication, 10) determining the approach, 11) choosing the format, 12) determining the tempo, 13) structuring the communication, 14) selecting the codes and 15) selecting the media	Defining the problem Research is conducted to determine the reason for the need for a public relations campaign. A situational analysis, incorporating a SWOT analysis, is also done	Situation analysis Problem identification by means of a SWOT analysis takes place with the view to understand the organisational climate and how it is perceived by stakeholders	Research The problem or opportunity is identified and a situation analysis is conducted

Step 2/Stage 2 Strategy and objectives	Encoding The encoding stage involves step 16 and 17 of the model: 16) encoding the communication and 17) testing the communication	Planning and programming A strategy for the campaign is developed along with specific campaign objectives. Role players and their accompanying duties are identified. Key messages that must be communicated by the campaign are formulated with the intention of informing or persuading stakeholder groups. Communication or media channels are selected. Specific stakeholder groups are defined and identified in relation to their relevance to the campaign and its objectives. A budget for the campaign is outlined and agreed upon.	Formulating objectives The objectives are aligned to the situational analysis and comply to the SMART principle	Planning The overarching, long term communication goals and specific, short term communication objectives are determined
Step 3/Stage 3 Stakeholder	Delivery The delivery stage of the model looks at step 18, whereby the communication is delivered	Taking action and communicating Key messages are disseminated to the identified stakeholder groups and public relations activities are implemented.	Stakeholder identification Internal and external stakeholders relevant to the campaign are identified	Adaptation stage Stakeholder identification and constraints identified by the situation analysis and research are recognised
Step 4/Stage 4 Message	Feedback The feedback stage of the model incorporates the following steps: 19) arranging for feedback, 20) evaluating effectiveness and 21) stop or repeat	Evaluating the campaign The campaign is evaluated according to the objectives that were determined during step 2.	Message formulation The content that must be communicated through the campaign is devised and message(s) are formulated for each identified stakeholder group	Theme and messages An overall message in the form of a slogan is devised, and specific messages crafted for each identified stakeholder group

Step 5/Stage 5 Strategy and objectives			Implementation of actions Public relations strategies and techniques are employed to communicated messages and messages are aligned to campaign objectives	Implementation strategy and activities This step/stage involves the following aspects: implementation strategy, activities, central action and media for each activity
Step 6/Stage 6			Budget Administrative and campaign budgets are drawn up	Scheduling The timing and corresponding supporting communication is identified
Step 7/Stage 7			Evaluation Formal and informal research techniques are employed to determine the success of the campaign as it relates to the objectives in step2/stage 2	Budget The cost of each activity is listed
Step 8/Stage 8 Measurement				Evaluation research Consists of formative and summative evaluation research, in-process, internal and external evaluation

Adapted from Fourie (1982); Cutlip et al. (1985) Jefkins (1982); Steyn and Puth (2000)

It is clear from Table 2.6 that strategic public relations is concerned with the achievement of organisational objectives through communication; while implementation is concerned with public relations projects and tactics. Projects by definition have a limited time-line and have a beginning, a middle and an end stage; and the key to a successful project is how well the project is executed. According to Weintraub and Pinkleton (2015) successful public relations requires strategic research as well as strategic planning, but most public relations practitioners respond to organisational challenges in a tactical manner and make use of tactical decision making which is focussed on day-to-day actions as a part of a reactive response (Oliver, 2009).

2.3.8.2 Communication strategies to persuade, influence, change perceptions

Strategic public relations has three common goals which include the management of communication, i.e. controlling the message from the organisation; relationship building, i.e. developing trust with stakeholders, reputation management; and dialogue i.e. collaboration, co-operation and co-creation with stakeholders to decide the future together. Strategic communication is purposive and aims to achieve specific outcomes (Angelopulo, 2015) such as inform, persuade or motivate behaviour change. Furthermore one of the decisions made in strategic public relations is the choice of public relations communication models as a communication strategy (Oliver, 2009) as outlined in Table 2.6.

Persuasion is a possible strategic public relations choice based on the communication model. According to most dictionaries, persuasion is defined as *“the ability to influence people’s attitudes and/or behaviours.”* According to Morris and Goldsworthy (Morris & Goldsworthy, 2008, p. 100) public relations is about *“persuading people to act (or not act) in particular ways.”* Similarly, Halloran (2007, p. 6) defines strategic communication from a strong persuasive angle, when he states that strategic communication aims to persuade others *“to accept one’s ideas, policies or courses of action.”* Furthermore, Halloran (Halloran, 2007, p. 6) is of the opinion that *“strategic communication has its roots in the true and classic meaning of ‘propaganda.’* Although persuasion is an attempt to sway the opinions of others in a certain direction, as does influence, the difference lies in the methodology of getting others to agree. Strategic public relations aims to achieve mutual understanding and benefit, for both the organisation and its stakeholders (Halloran, 2007).

A public relations campaign that aims to influence stakeholders suggests a relationship or desires a relationship between the stakeholders. However, the greater the influence the more significant the ethical questions become (Botan, 1997; Botan & Hazleton, 2010). Porter’s (2010, p. 128) viewpoint regarding public relations and persuasion is that communicators, i.e. public relations practitioners, are appointed for the purpose of influencing behaviour and therefore persuasion is ‘necessary and inevitable.’ Messina (2007) and Fawkes (2007) agree with Porter (2010) by stating that all corporate communication is inherently persuasive. However, Porter (2010) surmises that the challenge lies in persuading ethically.

Another strategic public relations choice is to manage perceptions, which would be managing the manner in which a message is shaped or framed. Framing refers to highlighting bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in importance (Entman, 1993). The way a message is framed shapes how people define

problems, causes of problems, attributions of responsibility, and solutions to problems ultimately influencing public perception (Bullock, et al., 2001).

2.3.8.3 Communication strategies to build relationships

A third strategic public relations choice is to build relationships that will enable organisational objectives to be met. (Grunig, 2006). Grunig (2006, p. 166) advocates that public relations contributes to strategy when it helps organisations to develop communal relationships. Sriramesh and Vercic (2009, p. 4) echo that the relational role of public relations as well strategic communication, is to use communication *“for establishing and maintaining symbiotic relationships with relevant publics”* and to build mutually beneficial relationships between organisation and their publics (Elliot, 2011). Furthermore, organisations must determine how to communicate with their various stakeholders to preserve the relationship (Stephens & Malone, 2009). Thus, the goal of the public relations practitioner concerned with strategic communication should be to steer the interactions between the organisation and its stakeholders toward that which will advance the organisation’s mission, vision and strategic objectives.

2.3.8.4 Communication strategies to add value through dialogue

Described as a fundamental shift from telling to persuading, dialogue is, according to Roper, Zorn, and Weaver (2004, p. 11) a purpose driven attempt to develop understanding and shared meaning between people as well as to shine a light on what is taken for granted as assumptions and beliefs, promote learning and encourage people to work together. It is through dialogue that people are able to improve the quality of their decisions and actions. Thus, all communication strategies based on dialogue add value through sharing and thereafter building on what is shared.

From the discussion regarding ‘strategy’, it is clear that organisational strategies must remain competitive and that it inherently requires change. Thinking and managing strategically are important aspects of senior management’s responsibilities. However, they cannot do this without effective communication, thus proving that public relations practitioners must occupy senior management seats to be a part of strategic planning and execution in organisation. Therefore public relations practice is concerned with corporate communication strategies as the implementation of strategic communication is aimed at stakeholder groups to achieve organisational objectives. Coombs and Holladay (2012, p. vi) summarise that public relations theories and principles are designed with an eye toward how they can be used in practice and that strategy and application are inextricably linked.

2.4 Environmental scanning

Stacks (2010, p. 31) describes environmental scanning as an ongoing research process that seeks to create a body of knowledge about an issue or client or organisation that detects and explores potential concerns. Environmental scanning is the basis on which strategy is built and it underpins the content of corporate communication.

2.4.1 Environmental scanning, environmental variables and the business environment

Van der Walt (2015, p. 398) describes the term 'environmental scanning' as *"research to detect trends in opinions, whether these are opinions of the public, customers, sponsors or the organisation's employees."* Steyn and Puth (2000, p. 161) mention that social auditing is similar to environmental scanning as its purpose is to *"determine the effects of the organisation has had on its stakeholders and the extent to which those effects must be corrected."* An organisation's stakeholders who form opinions mainly operate in the micro environment context of the business. Thus, public relations practitioners must take the business context into consideration when doing the research to determine trends in opinions of the various stakeholder groups that are affected by decisions that the organisation makes.

Environmental scanning enables the organisation to identify stakeholders who are affected by potential organisational decisions or who want the organisation to solve problems that are important to them and enables public relations practitioners to bring an outside perspective to strategic decision making (Grunig, 2006).

Through the process of environmental scanning (of which research is the core component), public relations practitioners are able to have their finger on the pulse regarding the overall climate of stakeholders' feelings and opinions regarding the organisation and the decisions it takes. Likewise, because public relations practitioners that occupy strategic positions in the organisation have intimate knowledge of the motivation behind management's decisions and policies, they are well-positioned to facilitate co-creation between an organisation and its stakeholders (Chauke & du Plessis, 2015). Grunig and Hunt (1984) refer to this practice as 'boundary spanning'.

An environmental variable is a component of each sub environment and *"constantly changes the environment in which business organisations operate"* (Strydom, 2013, p. 102). The three sub environments of the business environment are known as: micro environment, market environment and macro environment. Environment variables may be determined by

considering the PEST (political, economic, social and technological) factors in which the organisation operates. Public relations becomes relevant to an organisation when public relations practitioners can effectively make sense, through communication, of the changes in the business environment to stakeholders.

The business environment may be defined as *“the internal as well as the external factors that impact on the business organisation, and that largely determine its success”* (Strydom, 2013, p. 106). Knowledge of the business environment will enable management to strategically align the organisation with its environment to be prepared to maximise the opportunities and minimise the threats that the organisation faces (Strydom, 2013). However, management cannot do this if they don’t understand the elements and nature of the business environment. The business environmental model depicts three sub environments in which a business operates:

2.4.1.1 Micro environment

This environment consists of all the variables that are under management’s direct control, such as the vision, mission, objectives, business functions and resources of the business (Nieuwenhuizen & Rossouw, 2012). The micro environment encompasses the internal environment of the organisation and is inherently different from one organisation to the next. An assessment of the internal environment will position management to identify the organisation’s strengths and weaknesses, of which form part of an environment analysis (Strydom, 2013, pg 110). The micro environment of an organisation may be analysed by means of conducting a SWOT analysis. This analysis enables management to identify the organisation’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The decisions that management make in the micro environment of the business organisation will directly impact the next sub-environment, namely the market environment.

2.4.1.2 Market environment (or task environment)

The key factors in the market environment of an organisation are those which determine the nature and strength of competition for the organisation and management’s role in the market environment is to identify, assess and take advantage of opportunities in the market and to develop and adapt its strategies to meet competition (Nieuwenhuizen & Rossouw, 2012). Competition, as a variable in the market environment, is defined as *“a situation in the market environment in which several businesses, offering more or less the same kind of product or service compete for the patronage of the same consumers”* (Strydom, 2013, p. 115). The consumer benefits from competition, but as a variable, it is definitely something that

management must take into account. Strydom (2013, p. 115) states that *“continuous monitoring of competition provides the basis for the development of a strategy”* and takes the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation; the positioning strategy that should be followed, and possible strategy adjustments into account.

2.4.1.3 Macro environment

For management, having knowledge and an understanding of the organisation's macro environment will enable management to adapt the business strategy to adapt and respond to change (Strydom, 2013). Nieuwenhuizen and Rossouw (Nieuwenhuizen & Rossouw, 2012, p. 155) describe the following environmental variables that comprise an organisation's macro environment: technology, economic, social, physical, institutional-government and international.

Technological advances bring about new processes, methods services and approaches to management. Management should stay abreast of technological advances and changes, as technology influences the entire organisation and every new facet of technology presents an organisation with opportunities and threats. Regular evaluation of an organisation's technological environment should result in a technology strategy for the organisation. Strydom (Strydom, 2013, p. 121) asserts that *“management must take note of structural changes in the incomes of different consumer groups and adjust its strategies accordingly.”* By doing so, management can adapt its strategy to react to economic situations effectively. The social environment of an organisation is impacted by the behaviour of its internal and external stakeholders. Social trends that have an impact on organisations include: demographic change, urbanisation, level of education, consumerism and social responsibility and business ethics (Nieuwenhuizen & Rossouw, 2012). According to Strydom (Strydom, 2013, p. 128), the physical environment refers to *“the physical resources that people and businesses need to support life and development”* and *“government, as a component of the macro environment, affects the business environment and business enterprises in a regulating capacity.”*

Therefore, if public relations counsels management based on environmental scanning and then facilitates the organisation's adaptation to the changes reported during the process of environmental scanning, then the discipline should occupy a seat at the strategic planning table. Furthermore, the process of environmental scanning should lead public relations practitioners to the communication objectives for their corporate communication strategies.

2.5 Corporate reputation

2.5.1 Defining corporate reputation

Stakeholder communication is important for building strong corporate reputation (de Bussy, 2008). Corporate reputation comprises corporate image and corporate identity (Fourie, 2014). From a strategic viewpoint, the presence of a favourable corporate reputation is an essential ingredient in the creation of a competitive advantage for the organisation (Gotsi & Wilson, 2001). Doorley and Garica (2007, p. ix) define corporate communication as being *“the centralised management of communication on behalf of the organization; the function is a critical contributor to an organisation’s reputation – and thereby its competitiveness, productivity and financial success.”* Thus, according to Doorley and Garcia’s viewpoint, the impact of an organisation’s communication reaches beyond just words and internal and external stakeholders – it truly affects the organisation’s bottom line. Gotsi and Wilson (2001, p. 99) cite the following benefits of a favourable reputation: enhancing an organisation’s financial value, influencing intention to buy, acting as a mechanism for assuring product/service quality, influencing customer and employee loyalty and offering distinctiveness to the organisation.

2.5.2 Defining corporate identity

An organisation’s corporate identity depicts its personality and the organisation controls the messages and images that the organisation shows about itself. Olins (1978), believes that the understanding of corporate identity has broadened to include the manner in which an organisation’s identity is revealed through behaviour and communication, as well as through symbolism to internal and external audiences. Van Riel and Balmer (1997, p. 341) state that *‘increasingly, academics acknowledge that a corporate identity refers to an organization’s unique characteristics which are rooted in the behaviour of members of the organization.’* Furthermore, Van der Walt (2015, p. 414) defines corporate identity as being *“the way in which an organisation presents itself through the use of symbols, communication and behaviour”*. The identity of an organisation are those aspects that differentiate it from other organisations, especially those in the same market. Fourie (2014, p. 152) explains that organisational identity is built by how the organisation uses its *“vision, mission, values, positioning, slogan and advertising messages”* and includes its logo, corporate typeface and colour and the architecture of its building. Furthermore, the organisation-stakeholder relationship *“determines the long-term value of a brand and its profitability”* (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 49) because as stakeholders interact with the organisation and its brand, each contact point that the stakeholder has with the brand should echo the organisation’s strategy.

2.5.3 Defining corporate image

Lubbe and Puth (1994) describe corporate image as how the organisation's stakeholders feel and believe about the organisation, thus while corporate image is not controlled by the organisation, it can be influenced by the actions that the organisation decides to take. Fombrun (1996, p. 376) defines reputation as *being "the sum of the images the various constituencies have of an organization."* Therefore, corporate image encompasses all of the ways in which an organisation chooses to show its personality to its stakeholders. In addition, Fourie (2014) explains organisational reputation includes not only the performance of the organisation, but also the behaviour of staff and management as well as its communication strategy as these influence stakeholder perceptions. Reputation is defined as *"an evaluation of an organisation driven by the perceptions of stakeholders"* (Fombrun & Van Riel, 2004, p. 3). Thus, internal stakeholders play an integral role in the formation of a favourable corporate reputation as they have a significant impact on the perception that external stakeholders have of an organisation (Kennedy, 1977; Dowling, 1986). It is thus public relations' purpose to apply the organisation's corporate identity across the entire organisational spectrum to ensure the enhancement and positive reception of the organisation in the eyes of its target audiences (Angelopulo, 2015). Corporate reputation is every internal stakeholder's responsibility as the actions taken by the employees in each business unit of the organisation affect it. Furthermore, Gotsi and Wilson (2001, p. 29) define corporate reputation as being *"a stakeholder's overall evaluation of a company over time"* as it is based on all aspects of the organisation from direct experience to communication as well as comparison of the organisation with its competitors. Van Riel and Balmer (1997) explain that the role of symbolism has shifted from increasing organisational visibility to a position of influence in communicating corporate strategy.

Strategic public relations aligns corporate identity and corporate image with the organisation's internal culture in a manner that will assist the organisation in building a good reputation. (Skinner, et al., 2013). Therefore, the concepts of corporate identity, corporate image and corporate reputation are closely interwoven and combine to help stakeholders to understand the character of the organisation.

2.6 Stakeholders

2.6.1 Stakeholder theory and management

Scholars view stakeholders differently and there is little consensus in their definition (Miles, 2010). Some scholars label stakeholders as primary versus secondary (Clarkson, 1995) or

divide them according to their attributes (Mitchell, et al., 1997). Chauke and du Plessis (2015, p. 227) assert that publics are considered as organisational stakeholders because the organisation has a relationship – “a two-way, *interdependent and reciprocal bond*” – with them. According to Freeman (1984, p. 46), a stakeholder is anyone who can “*affect or is affected by*” the achievement of the organisation’s objectives”. However, in later work Freeman *et al.* (2004, p. 58) use a different definition of stakeholders as “*those groups who are vital to the survival and success of the corporation*”. Under the banner of the strategic stakeholder, Clarkson (1995) categorised stakeholders as primary and secondary. There is a strong relationship between the organisation and the primary stakeholder group, which is defined as “*one without whose continuing participation the corporation cannot survive*” (Clarkson, 1995, p. 105) and includes shareholders, investors, employees, customers and suppliers. Furthermore, Clarkson (1995) defines secondary stakeholder groups as:

“those who influence or affect, or are influenced or affected by, the corporation, but they are not engaged in transactions with the corporation and are not essential for its survival” (Clarkson, 1995, p. 106)

and offer the media and special interest groups as examples. However not all stakeholders are equally important, therefore organisations prioritise them. Clarkson (1995) categorised stakeholders as being ‘primary’ and ‘secondary’, whereas Mitchell *et al.* (1997) prioritised stakeholders according to 1) the stakeholder’s power to influence the organisation., 2) the legitimacy of the stakeholder’s relationship with the organisation., and 3) the urgency of the stakeholder’s claim on the organisation. In an attempt to determine which stakeholders matter most to the organisation. Frooman (1999) observed that the ‘power’ attribute seems to have received the most attention from scholars. In Table 2.7, stakeholder attributes and classification have been plotted onto a stakeholder grid, which highlights that the two most common attributes of stakeholders are “can affect / affected by” and “power / interest”, indicating that most authors are in agreement with Freeman’s (1984, p. 46) definition that stakeholders are individuals who can affect or who are affected by the achievement of the organisation’s objectives. In essence, the authors all agree that the stakeholder is in a relationship with the organisation and because of that relationship, the stakeholder has some sort of effect on the business or is affected by the decisions that the business makes. According to Clarkson (1995), the relationship that exists between the two actors predict how the two interact with one another

Table 2-7 Stakeholder grid

	Can affect / affected by (therefore by definition in a relationship)	Purpose of organisation: profit or nonprofit	All stakeholders equal	Shareholders (investors) are king	Power / Interest	Significance	Disaggregation/uniqueness	Disposition	Impact on company	Influence	Legitimacy / Legitimate	Urgency	Benefit (mutual)
Freeman (1984)	x												
Campbell (1997)		x											
Argenti (1997)			x										
Clarkson (1995)	x												
Carroll and Buchholtz (2000)	x												
Mitchell, Agle and Wood (1997)					x						x	x	
Donaldson and Preston (1995)											x		
Ackermann and Eden						x	x	x	x				
Sillanpaa and Wheeler (1998)	x												
Thompson et al (1991)	x												
Benner (1993)	x					x					x		
Freeman (1994)	x												x
Wicks et al. (1994)	x	x											
Bowie (1998)	x												

2.6.2 Stakeholder theory

Stakeholder theory considers how an organisation is managed so that it creates value for stakeholders (Freeman, 1984). Mitchell *et al.* (1997, p. 855) state that stakeholders are prioritised according to which groups are deserving or requiring of management attention and which are not. Stakeholders must be managed because stakeholders and the organisation's

interests overlap and this, according to Frooman (1999) is the premise of the stakeholder theory. Friedman and Miles (2006) conclude that the purpose of the organisation should be to manage the interests, needs and viewpoints of stakeholders.

2.6.3 Stakeholder management

There are various interpretations of what stakeholder management is and much of stakeholder literature has been written from a management viewpoint (Donaldson & Preston, 1995). For Buccholz and Rosenthal (1997), stakeholder management is based on: the consideration of the interests and concerns of stakeholders when making management decisions so that the organisation is able to satisfy stakeholders; to benefit from positive responses and to avoid negative responses to management decisions (Ackermann & Eden, 2011); and through communication to improve stakeholder predictability (Harrison & St John, 1996) and to reduce conflict between the organisation and the stakeholder's interests (Frooman, 1999). However, Skinner *et al's* (2013) definition of stakeholder management considers the organisation and the activities needed to meet the stakeholder's identified needs as well as how to implement activities that will meet these needs. Furthermore, stakeholders are broadly categorised as internal stakeholders and external stakeholders as organisations cannot neglect building relationships with internal stakeholders (Skinner, et al., 2013) as ultimately they play a crucial role in the organisation's overall reputation. Building and maintaining relationships with external stakeholders – those groups that are not directly connected to the organisation, but who are affected by the decisions that the organisation makes (Freeman, 1984, p. 46) – are essential to organisational success.

Angelopulo and Thomson (2015) believe that different stakeholders are addressed according to the organisational strategy; and the starting point for strategic communication is the identification of stakeholders. According to Steyn and Puth (2000) two elements matter when broaching the topic of stakeholder management: stakeholder identification and the nature and size of their stakes. Frooman (1999) believes that identification and recognition of stakeholders is the first step towards managing them. Harrison and St John (1996, p. 58) connect identifying stakeholders and stakeholder management by stating that a positive relationship is necessary with strategically important stakeholders, and management techniques to manage stakeholders are determined by their strategic value; as are the communication strategies (Smudde & Courtright, 2011). The communication function of public relations is directed at specific audiences that the organisation deems as vital to its livelihood (Toth & Trujillo, 1987) as this is the fundamental purpose of public relations: *“to facilitate communication, acceptance, and cooperation between an organization and the publics that*

are critical to organizational survival" (Bruning & Ledingham, 1999, p. 159) and thereby "facilitate the relationship between an organization and its strategic publics" (Kirat, 2007, p. 167). According to Grunig and Repper (1992) an organisation has a relationship with stakeholders when the behaviour of the organisation or of the stakeholders has consequences for the other. Berman *et al* (1999) contends that, based on Freeman's definition of stakeholders, a reciprocal relationship exists between the organisation and its stakeholders. According to Harrison and St John (1996) the nature of the interdependence between an organisation and a particular stakeholder or stakeholder group is strongly influenced by the organisation's strategy.

2.6.4 Stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement is the term used to describe how organisations go about strategically influencing stakeholders to get a desired reaction. Stakeholder engagement may be defined as how organisations involve stakeholders in organisational activities to generate positive perceptions of the organisation (Greenwood, 2007, p. 351). Jansen van Rensburg (2013, pp. 153, 154) defines stakeholder engagement as a continuous and multi-faceted process that builds confidence in the organisation's decisions, develops goodwill and understanding of the organisation and establishes realistic expectations for stakeholders. These activities could include information dissemination, capacity building, community support and development as well as effectively engaging, listening and responding to stakeholder concerns. Stakeholder engagement is equally based on the organisational application of common and mutually consistent policies and practices as well as the recognition that the organisation and stakeholders have common and mutually overlapping interests (Post, et al., 2002).

The reason why organisations must have knowledge of stakeholder influence strategies is summarised by Frooman (1999) who states,

"knowing how stakeholders may try to influence an organisation is critical knowledge for any manager. After all, for managers to act strategically and plan the actions they intend their organisation to take presupposes that they have some idea of how others in their environment will act." (Frooman, 1999, p. 203)

According to Frooman (1999), knowing how stakeholders will react determines the strategic approach that the organisation should have towards them. Furthermore, Frooman (1999) suggests two strategies that stakeholders could use to influence organisations; the first is resource control which involves the manipulation of resources by the stakeholder in either a withholding strategy or a usage strategy. The second stakeholder influence strategy suggested by Frooman (1999) is pathway strategies, which can be direct or indirect as either

the stakeholder, in the direct path, manipulates the resource flow to the organisation; or a strategic alliance with someone who can do so indirectly. Frooman (1999) notes that the indirect pathway strategy includes the development of a communication strategy by the stakeholder which is directed at the ally with the intent of 1) informing the potential ally about the organisation's behaviour, 2) describing why the stakeholder sees the particular behaviour as undesirable and 3) identifying what the ally ought to do about it. The pathway strategy is based on the type of relationship that the stakeholder may have with the organisation.

Alternatively Jonker and Foster (2005) suggest two approaches to stakeholder engagement. The '*stakeholder information strategy*', is similar to Grunig & Hunt's (1984) public information model, as communication is always one-way, from the organisation to its stakeholders. This type of communication is viewed as 'telling, not listening' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984, p. 23), and its purpose is to disseminate information. It is criticised as being a form of manipulation as the organisation controls the message. However, organisations could adopt a two-way communication approach that considers the interests of both parties in decision making and balances conflicting interests and alternative views (Jonker & Foster, 2005, p. 51). Greenwood (2007, p. 315) states that an organisation that acts responsibly towards its stakeholders by considering their communication responsibility toward them demonstrates commitment and engagement. Thus, strategic public relations is involved in inviting individuals and groups to become stakeholders as much as in maintaining relationships with established stakeholders. (Smudde & Courtright, 2011).

2.7 Message

Generally speaking, the term 'message' refers to *what* is being communicated. In public relations, the message is the information regarding the campaign or strategy that the organisation wants its target audiences to know. To ensure the effectiveness of the messages communicated by the organisation, it should be communicated through various communication channels (Halloran, 2007). A challenge related to getting the message across to the intended target audience is cutting through the clutter and static of existing messages as well as competing messages vying for the attention of the target audience (Halloran, 2007). According to Conrad (1985), messages should support the image of the organisation and its members, be appropriately ambiguous, and be presented in an appropriate mode. Therefore, according to Harrison and St John (1996, p. 63) and Thayer (1963, p. 43) communication is the process by which information is exchanged between a sender and a receiver, and takes place when meaning or significance is assigned to stimuli. Angelopulo (2015, p. 450) asserts that "*the communicator cannot force perceptions onto an audience – it is the audience that*

interprets the campaign message, so communication campaigns must be planned from the audience's and not the communicator's perspective."

2.7.1 Corporate identity and corporate image

How an organisation's stakeholders perceive it, cannot be controlled by corporate communication, although messages are used to influence the perception of its stakeholders in favour of the organisation, but stakeholders may perceive these messages different to the way the organisation intended (Angelopulo, 2015). Furthermore, strategic communication and dialogue are different. Strategic communication aims to benefit the organisation and its interests, i.e. communicating with the intention of ultimately underscoring the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives. Strategic communication 'packages' the decision in the most attractive ways possible to its target audiences to get the desired result regardless of whether it is to persuade, inform, educate or manipulate. Dialogue implies that both the organisation and its stakeholders have a say in the decisions that are made as dialogue is based on a continuous conversation and is a means of understanding each other, not on trying to persuade each other (Kent & Taylor, 2002, p. 30). If an organisation has made the effort to sow communication and relationship over time, it will reap the associated benefits of dialogue which include increased support from stakeholders and an enhanced corporate image and corporate reputation (Bruning & Ledingham, 2000). The by-products of dialogue (Kent & Taylor, 2002) include trust and sympathy, but organisations must engage in communication and relationship building practices as part of its organisational culture, and not only as part of a communication strategy over time.

2.7.2 Communication mediums

O'Sullivan *et al* (1983, p. 134) defines a message in public relations context as "*an intermediate agency that enables communication to take place through the use of one or more channels*". The public relations practitioner must carefully consider the choices of communication channels when communicating messages to stakeholders; as each medium has different strengths and weaknesses and must be chosen appropriately (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 50). Chauke and du Plessis (2015, p. 241) declare that the media is a major tool for public relations practitioners as it is able to facilitate communication and a wide spectrum of media communication mediums are available for both internal and external stakeholders.

2.7.2.1 Selection of media

The process of selecting the most appropriate media takes place after the public relations practitioner has decided on the objectives, target audiences and relevant messages of the communication strategy. Table 2.8 summarises the most common internal and external corporate communication mediums.

Table 2-8 Internal and external communication mediums

Internal communication medium	External communication medium
Forums	Television
Induction programmes	Radio
Printed and graphic communication	Print
House journals or staff publications	Online platforms
Annual staff reports	
Management notes to employees	
Product exhibits	
Employee handbooks and manuals	
Payroll-envelope inserts	
Reading racks	
Suggestion schemes	
Audiovisuals	
Public address systems	
Document/computer referencing	
Audio conferencing	
Telephone, voicemail or 'out of office' settings	
Internet/Intranet	
Company radio and television stations	
Social media	

Adapted from Skinner et al (2013, pp. 101-106)

2.7.2.2 Online communication

The various definitions for public relations have been defined under the section heading 'public relations' and it can be concluded that public relations incorporates the management of communication and the building and maintaining of relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders. Marlow (1996, p. 116) explains that the premise of a definition for online public relations is similar to that of traditional public relations, but the online platform is able to reduce barriers between an organisation and its audience. Online tools

utilised by online public relations include websites, SMS's, blogging, social networks and the World Wide Web (WWW) (Barker, et al., 2015, p. 364). Barker *et al.* (2015) assert that online public relations consists of three key components, namely message consistency; interactivity, i.e. dialogue; and mission orientation, i.e. everything originates from the mission of the organisation. Thus, the tools utilised during online public relations must be in line with and support the overall organisational strategy and be in line with the corporate reputation, including corporate identity, corporate image and corporate brand.

Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 60) define social media as internet-based applications built on the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0. The advantage for a public relations practitioner using social media as a communication medium is that it is highly receptive to feedback and building relationships through two-way communication. Cornelissen (2011, p. 154) states that social media is a new way of reaching and engaging with stakeholders so as to *"tell and elaborate its story or key message to stakeholders or the general public in an interactive way."* Thus, dialogic communication is applied in the form of social media in the public relations context (Bortree & Seltzer, 2009).

The communication mediums selected by the public relations practitioner plays an integral role in measuring the success of the public relations effectiveness in communicating key messages with stakeholders (Lindenmann, 2003).

2.8 Measurement

According to Lindenmann (2005, p. 3) top management is exerting pressure on public relations practitioners to prove their value add and to account for the various campaigns and associated activities; as well as its impact the organisation's bottom line (Stacks, 2010, p. 5). However, although much progress has been made regarding measurement practices among public relations practitioners (Stacks, 2010) Grunig (2006, p. 51) asserts that *"the public relations profession is still far from being a research-based profession"* and that *"most practice still does not include research"*.

Public relations evaluation and measurement should be underpinned by research (Lindenmann, 2003). Stacks (2010, p. 6) provides the link between public relations research and measuring public relations: *"without research, the practitioners cannot assess where a public relations program begins, how it evolves or what the end product will be"*.

Strategic public relations practitioners must be concerned with research as part of their management role. Stacks (2010, p. 7) asserts that research is essential for public relations

practitioners to know how public relations messages and campaigns are received, whether they achieve the desired outcome and if not when to implement correction strategies. Skinner *et al.* (2013, p. 77) indicate that public relations research is relevant to public relations programmes and campaigns and should take place on three levels, namely: client or organisational research, opportunity or problem research and stakeholder or audience research.

According to Mersham *et al.* (1995), client or organisational research consists of five elements:

- The public relations practitioner must be familiar with the nature of the organisation's business, whether profit or non-profit
- Knowing the organisation's precise mission, its management's goals, priorities and problems
- Having a good working knowledge of the organisation's personnel
- Having insight into the financial status of the organisation
- Understanding the importance of corporate image and its impact on an organisation

Opportunity or problem research answers the need for the development of a public relations programme/campaign at a specific moment in time and could arise out of opportunities or crises that the organisation is presented with (Skinner, *et al.*, 2013). Stakeholder or audience research examines the stakeholders pertinent to the public relations programme/campaign (Skinner, *et al.*, 2013).

Public relations research may be described as the process of asking questions and finding answers in a systematic way in order to gather knowledge and understanding in a specific area (Le Guin, 2009). According to Stacks (2010) ultimately, public relations success is dependent on two aspects: where the public relations practitioner began the public relations campaign and what the practitioner's expectations were. Stacks (2010, p. 27) mentions that public relations practitioners diligently research where they began but neglect to measure whether their expectations were met or not.

2.8.1 Measurement and evaluation

Combined, the processes of measurement and evaluation determine the ultimate success or failure of a public relations effort. However, Steyn and Puth (2000, p. 151) assert that confusion exists between the meaning of 'measurement' and 'evaluation'. Measurement may be defined as *"the process of assigning numerical values to some or all attributes of the study object"*. Whereas evaluation *"determines the value or importance of a programme or effort,*

usually through appraisal or comparison with a predetermined set of goals and objectives, and it is more subjective in nature” (Rensburg & Cant, 2010, p. 99).

Lindenmann (2003) categorises public relations measurement and evaluation according to short-term and long-term public relations efforts: in the short term, public relations measurement and evaluation assesses the success or failure of strategic programmes, activities or tactics by measuring the outputs, outtakes and outcomes against predetermined objectives that have been set. In the long term, public relations measurement and evaluation assesses those public relations efforts that have set relationship creation or building as its primary objective.

2.8.2 Measurement

Organisations will never know the true value of their strategic communication efforts if they do not measure the impact thereof. Tixier (1995, p. 19) strongly supports this viewpoint: *“if the communication function is to be considered as a managerial one, it must refine its instruments of measure. To exist and survive, it is important to prove that it is both useful and beneficial.”* Steyn and Puth (2000) add to Tixier’s statement by indicating that measurement is concerned with the concepts of validity and reliability. Validity questions whether the measurement instrument used measures what is supposed to be measured and reliability relates to the consistency of the measure used (Steyn & Puth, 2000). Lindenmann (2003) explains that when public relations practitioners measure outputs, outtakes and outcomes a precise number is usually the end result, for example, 1000 newsletters or 10 000 website hits.

Steyn and Puth (2000, p. 158) differentiate between two evaluation research methods, namely formative and summative evaluation. Formative evaluation is strategic in nature and is usually conducted at the beginning of the public relations programme/campaign (MacNamara, 2008). Summative research evaluates the overall impact of the public relations programme/campaign and determines how the impact aligns with the overall goals and objectives and is conducted throughout the lifespan of the programme, namely before, during and after (Steyn & Puth, 2000)

2.8.3 Pillars of public relations measurement and evaluation

Skinner *et al.* (2013, p. 77) state that public relations research *“assists practitioners to identify and define stakeholder groups, develop messages to target these audiences, define objectives, design plans, implement tactics, measure effectiveness and ultimately assist management in realising the organisation’s business objectives”*. Their assertion confirms

Lindenmann's (2003) suggestion that the credibility of public relations measurement and evaluation should be built on five pillars, namely setting specific and measureable communication goals and objectives, measuring communication outputs, measuring communication outtakes, measuring communication outcomes and measuring organisational outcomes.

The Table 2.9 shows the five public relations measurement and evaluation components along with the tools and techniques available to public relations practitioners to measure them.

Table 2-9 Public relations measurement and evaluation

Public relations measurement component	Measurement instrument	Description
Measuring public relations outputs	Media content analysis	Purpose is to determine whether key messages disseminated to stakeholders via the media receives exposure. Includes print and broadcast media
	Internet media analysis	Purpose is to monitor published content and postings on websites and includes reviews and analyses of website postings and website traffic patterns
	Surveys/questionnaires	Purpose is to test stakeholders' response to a message
	Focus groups	Purpose is to pre-test attitudes toward key messages and assess their understanding of and reaction to these messages
	Pre-and post-tests	Pre-tests identify and measure possible effects and influencing factors in advance of planned activities. Post-tests are useful for gauging campaigns, their credibility and for organisational recognition and popularity
	In-depth interviews	Purpose is to understand the reasons behind beliefs, attitudes and behaviour
Measuring public relations outtakes	Awareness and comprehension measurements	Purpose is to determine, by means of quantitative and qualitative research, whether target audiences received, paid attention and understood messages directed at them
	Recall and retention measurement	Measures target audiences' ability to recall and retain public relations messages
Measuring public relations outcomes	Attitude and preference measurements	Purpose is to determine outcome of public relations programme/campaign by

		measuring opinions, attitudes and preferences. Includes quantitative and qualitative research methods before and after programme/campaign
	Behaviour measurements	Purpose is to measure whether the behaviour of the target audience has changed as a result of public relations programme/campaign.
Measuring organisational outcomes	Benchmarking	Organisation weighs its own practices in relation to best practices of other organisations in its field. Enables organisation to be more competitive.
	Communication audit	Purpose is to review the entire spectrum of internal and external communication pertinent to the organisation
	Balanced scorecard	Purpose is to determine the extent of alignment between corporate communication objectives and overarching organisation objectives
	Network analysis	Purpose is to determine the flow of communication within an organisation and to pinpoint any or potential blockages
	Environmental analysis	Purpose is to explore both internal and external trends that have an impact on the organisation

Adapted from Lindenmann (2003, pp. 5-8) and Steyn and Puth (2000, pp. 20-21)

2.8.4 Measurement instruments

The measurement instruments as indicated in table 2.10 depict how public relations success can be measured at the public relations output, outtake and outcome and organisational outcome level.

Table 2-10 Measurement instruments

Component of measuring process	Public relations role	Description	What of public relations is measured?	Measurement tools and techniques	Standard measurements used to determine public relations impact
Setting specific and measureable communication goals and objectives	n/a	What did the individual programme or activities as part of the greater public relations campaign set for itself as a public relations goal?	In order to achieve clear objectives, Angelopulo (2015, pp. 451-452) proposes that public relations practitioners operationalise objectives: show the intended performance of the set objectives and also stipulate the criteria that will be used to determine whether the aforementioned performance has been achieved.	Furthermore, Angelopulo suggests two ways in which this can be done, namely attainability and measurability. Attainability investigates the extent of the campaign's 'power' to achieve the expected outcomes of the overall strategy and measurability involves the comparison of the achieved objectives versus the intended campaign's objectives (Angelopulo, 2015, p. 452).	n/a
Measuring public relations outputs	Technician role	Typically short-term and tactical in nature and account for the amount of exposure the organisation receives	Media can be evaluated for their content; an event, as to whether the right people were there; a booklet or brochure for its visual appeal and substance	Print media analysis, Internet media analysis, weblogs media analysis, radio media analysis, survey or questionnaires, focus groups, pre- and post test, in-depth interviews	Media content analysis Cyberspace analysis Trade shows and event measurement Public opinion polls
Measuring public relations outtakes	Manager role	Perceptions of stakeholders that have been influenced that the output was designed to create, change or maintain	Favourability: determining whether stakeholders received the messages directed at them, paid attention to them Comprehension: determining whether stakeholders understood and/or comprehended the messages Retention: did stakeholders retain the messages and can they recall them in any shape or form Attention and response: did stakeholders share the information	Public relations products produced, products distributed, reach of target groups, amount of coverage that took place	Awareness and comprehension measurements Recall and retention measurements

			that they received or perhaps respond to it?		
Measuring public relations outcomes	Manager role	Generally more difficult and expensive to measure public relations outcomes and involves asking and carrying out extensive review and analysis of what was said and what was done	Did the communications materials and messages which were disseminated result in any opinion, attitude and/or behaviour changes on the part of those stakeholders to whom the messages were directed	Quantitative surveys, focus groups, qualitative depth attitude surveys, pre-test/post-test studies, ethnographic studies (relying on observation, participation, experimental and quasi-experimental research projects and multivariate studies that rely on advanced statistical applications such as correlation and regression analyses, Q-sorts, and factor and cluster analysis studies	Attitude and preference measurements Behaviour measurements
Measuring organisational outcomes	Strategist role	Success in public relations must be aligned to the overall vision, mission and strategic objectives of the organisation	Connecting public relations outcomes to the desired organisational outcomes such as: Trust Credibility Reputation Relationships	Benchmarking, conducting communication audit, balanced scorecard approach, network analysis and environmental analysis (Rensburg & Cant, 2010, p. 102)	Has the coverage achieved led to a greater share of voice over competitors? Did targeting new verticals open up business opportunities in new sectors?

Adapted from (Lindenmann, 2003, pp. 9-17) *and* (Rensburg & Cant, 2010, pp. 102-107)

Ideally, strategic public relations practitioners should measure the success or failure of their communication campaigns or communication strategies across the entire spectrum of stakeholder touchpoints. Also, thinking strategically requires that the public relations practitioner goes beyond the standard measurement tools and techniques, but that they analyse the results of their measurement in terms of public relations outcomes such as reputation of the organisation and trust.

2.9 Conclusion

The researcher's approach to the literature review as reflected in this chapter was that of public relations' contribution to organisational strategy. The literature was collapsed into the broad outlines of a communication strategy namely, context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.

Chapter three shows the research framework and methodology employed in this study. It explains the research questions, the data collection instruments and methods used to gather data and the sample selection process.

3 CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH DESIGN & METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter shows the research framework and methodology employed in this study. It explains the research questions, the data collection instruments and methods used to gather data and the sample selection process.

The problem statement and objectives of the study must be considered. The problem statement demarcates the object of the study (Mouton, 2009, p. 48) and the objectives stipulate the general goals or aims of the study. The problem statement refers to exploring how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice. More specifically, the study aimed:

- to determine the core elements, as identified in literature, that make up a corporate communication strategy
- to discover how public relations practitioners frame corporate communication strategies
- to explore the core elements of corporate communication strategies in public relations practice
- to learn how public relations practitioners implement corporate communication strategies

3.2 Conceptualisation

Conceptualisation clarifies the meaning of the concepts and variables to be studied (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 98). The concepts for this study include public relations, strategy and objectives, corporate communication strategy, message and measurement.

3.2.1 Public relations as strategy

In strategic public relations, as opposed to business strategy, communication is the vehicle that is used to achieve business objectives on the organisation's behalf (Seitel, 2011). Thus, strategic public relations may be described as how the organisation utilises its means, i.e. resources to move toward the expected end, i.e. outcome. Public relations is equated to organisational communication (Grunig, 1992, p. 4) and the literature defines it in a number of ways. Figure 3.1 illustrates the public relations goals commonly employed in strategic public relations for this study namely, management of communication, building relationships and dialogue.

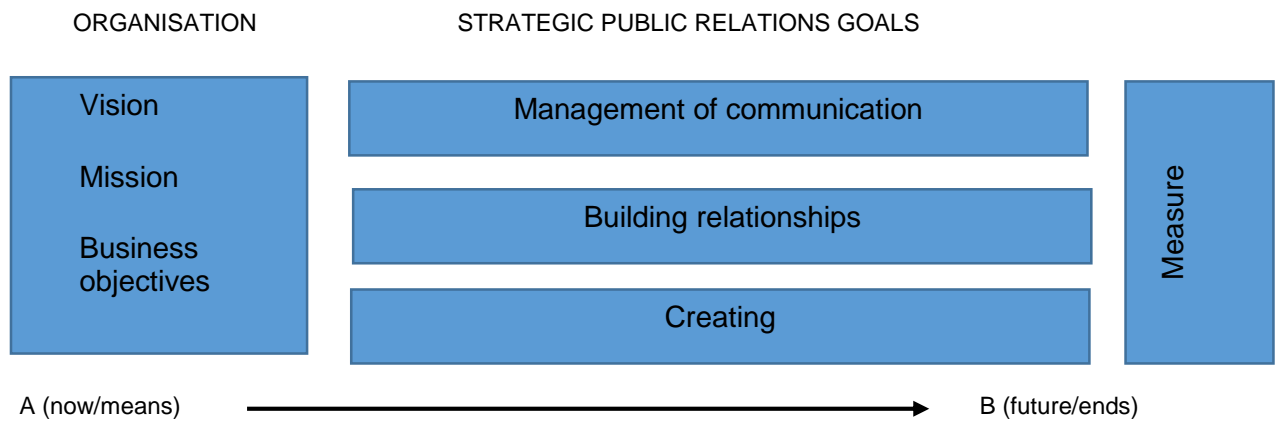


Figure 3-1: Strategic public relations goals

Management of communication as a goal of public relations encompasses relational and informational aspects. The relational aspect includes both internal and external stakeholders and the expectations that they have of the organisation while the informational aspect involves the content of the message and the channels used to disseminate it. Building mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and its internal and external stakeholders (Skinner, et al., 2013, p. 4) is based on the personality of the organisation, i.e. corporate identity, the perception that stakeholders have of the organisation, i.e. corporate image and the cumulative view that stakeholders have of the organisation based on its corporate image and corporate identity (Fourie, 2014, p. 154), i.e. corporate reputation. Organisations that collaborate and co-create with stakeholders are engaging in dialogue with them (Roper, et al., 2004, p. 11) with a view to create a favourable corporate reputation.

3.2.2 Corporate communication as strategy

Corporate communication strategy can only be described according to organisational strategic objectives because the corporate communication strategy is dependent on the vision, mission and organisational strategy (Van Riel & Fombrun, 2007). Thus, corporate communication communication strategies provide the framework for organisations to communicate with its various stakeholders (Steyn & Puth, 2000) so do they indicate what must be communicated to the stakeholder groups (Angelopulo & Thomson, 2015). When communicating the strategy, public relations practitioners should ensure that they understand the strategy as seen through the eyes of the targeted stakeholders and that the public relations practitioner is able to obtain a commitment to the strategy from these stakeholders.

3.2.3 Message as strategy

Message as strategy involves framing by means of the words used in the message (Entman, 1993), the target audience and the response hoped to be achieved by the message (Oliver, 2009). Therefore, the response represents the strategic goal that the organisation wants to achieve. Should the message not produce the desired response, the public relations practitioner needs to adapt the message (Hallahan, et al., 2007) and therefore measurement is necessary.

3.2.4 Measurement as strategy

The public relations goal of measuring milestones involves measuring how (and if) the communication goals that the organisation has set for itself have been met in terms of public relations outputs, outtakes and outcomes (Lindenmann, 2003) as, in essence, strategy is the process of movement from one point to another (Bryson, 2011).

3.3 Research Design

Mouton (2009, pp. 55, 56) describes research design as a plan or a blueprint of how one intends to conduct research and is centred on the logic of the research and considers the type of evidence that is required to address the research problem or question adequately. Research design is classified into two types, namely, empirical studies and non-empirical studies (Babbie & Mouton, 2012). Empirical studies use the collection of primary data such as surveys and the analysis of existing data such as text data (for example discourse analysis) and numeric data (for example secondary data analysis). Non-empirical studies involve the gathering of data through existing data such as literature reviews. This study's research design is empirical as survey questionnaires and telephonic interviews were used to collect primary data. This research is subjective, because reality is socially constructed and can be different for different people (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2012, p. 6)

3.3.1 Purposes of research design

Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 79) cite the purposes of research design as being descriptive research, explanatory research and exploratory research. Descriptive research is employed when the researcher presents evidence of interesting and significant patterns in existing or new data, or new trends in existing or new data (Mouton, 2009, p. 113). Explanatory research aims to show a connection between variables or events (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 81) and

exploratory research assists the researcher to gain new insights into a research topic and it is for this reason that exploratory research was used in this study.

3.3.2 Research methodology

Research methodology encompasses the tools and procedures that will be employed to answer the research question (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 75) and involve two types namely, quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Quantitative methodology is numeric in nature and uses descriptive statistical analysis to answer the research question. It is objective as it seeks to understand the world based on value-free processes and infers answers from the data through its generalisability (Berndt & Petzer, 2011, p. 47). Quantitative research, in the form of a survey questionnaire comprising open and closed questions, was used to gather information with a view to finding out how public relations practitioners frame corporate communication strategies.

Qualitative research seeks to describe and understand concepts rather than to explain and predict human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 53). Furthermore Merriam (1998) indicates that qualitative research builds on, rather than tests, existing theory and is used to understand situations in their context while also looking at the interactions involved. It is for this reason that qualitative telephonic interviews were used to gather data with a view to understanding why public relations frame corporate communication strategies the way they do.

3.3.3 Data collection

Mouton (2009, p. 100) describes data collection as the process involving *how* the researcher gathers data for a study. Data may be classified into two types, namely primary and secondary data (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 76). Primary data refers to data that the researcher collected by herself (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 76) and may be gathered by means of a quantitative or a qualitative approach. Quantitative information concerns the central role of variables in describing and analysing human behaviour (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 49), whereas qualitative information is collected by means of words and narratives. Secondary data constitutes documents and texts that were produced previously (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 76), in other words, data that existed already and was compiled or produced by someone other than the researcher. For this study, secondary data was gathered by means of analysing the literature regarding public relations and communication strategies to obtain the answer to sub-

research question 1 namely, “What are the core elements of a corporate communication strategy in public relations theory?”

More than one data collection method was used to gather primary data for this study. Firstly, the respondents were asked to complete a self-selecting, self-administered electronic survey questionnaire that was developed from the literature review. Thereafter, telephonic interviews were conducted with the respondents that indicated their willingness to be interviewed.

Babbie and Mouton (2012, pp. 249-261) describe three methods of surveying, namely face-to-face interviews, telephone surveys or interviews and self-administered questionnaires. Comparisons of the three methods of surveying are included in table 3.1.

Table 3-1 Comparison of survey methods

Face-to-face interviews	Telephone surveys or interviews	Self-administered questionnaires
Time consuming and costly	Survey conducted based on sample of telephone numbers rather than names	Population is literate and has permanent addresses
Reluctant to report controversial information	Saves time and money	Cheap and quick
High completion rates	Interviewers are safe when interviewing in high-crime areas	Respondents more willing to report controversial information because of anonymity
Effective for complicated issues	More likely to produce a biased sample in terms of class	Effective for sensitive issues
Survey conducted based on sample of addresses or telephone numbers rather than names		Usually addressed impersonally and generally low response rates are recorded

Adapted from Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 262)

Quantitatively, the questionnaire was used as a survey method to determine what public relations practitioners were doing in the field and qualitatively, the telephone interviews as a survey method were used to determine why they were doing it in the field.

3.3.4 Population (who will be observed)

David and Sutton (2011, p. 226) define population as “*every possible case that could be included in the study.*” The population for this study consists of APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) members of the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database. The decision to use the PRISA database as the population was based on the assumption that all the members on the database are qualified to practice public relations;

therefore membership to the PRISA database is used as a pre-qualification method for this research. Also, the researcher felt that by virtue of respondents' paid-for membership to the PRISA body that they had adequate interest in the public relations field to make a meaningful contribution to this research.

3.3.5 Sampling frame and sampling methods

A sampling frame comprises every element of the population from which a sample may be drawn (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 226). Examples of sampling frames include telephone directories, geographic maps and organisational membership lists (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, pp. 185-186). For this study, the level of membership on the the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database was used as a sampling frame and only the elite members, i.e. APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) were sampled.

Sampling methods refer to techniques that may be used to find information from a population and include probability sampling and non-probability sampling (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 227). The difference between probability sampling and non-probability sampling is that *“non-probability sampling techniques are samples that are selected based on the subjective judgement of the researcher, rather than random selection which is the cornerstone of probability sampling techniques”* (Lund Research, 2012). The motivation for the decision to use only the APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) members on the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database for this study was based on the researcher's assumption that these members have adequate knowledge to assist the researcher with the main research question for the study.

The sample was self-selecting for both the survey questionnaire and the telephonic interviews as the respondents were able to choose whether they wanted to answer the survey or not (Lund Research, 2012).

The interview participants were self-selecting as they volunteered to be interviewed by filling out the “permission to be interviewed” section of the self-administered electronic questionnaire. As a result, the researcher was able to gauge the participant's frame of reference and work background based on the answers that he/she provided in the survey.

3.3.6 Sample size

The Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database consists of 300 APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) members' contact information. Nine of the 300 members' email addresses did not exist when the researcher tried to send them the survey, thus, the total population had decreased from 300 to 291 members. It is possible that those members changed jobs from the time the database was received and the time it was used.

3.4 Questionnaire development and pilot testing

The data collection instruments for this study were a questionnaire and telephonic interviews. The questionnaire is attached in Appendix A and the interview guide is attached in Appendix C.

3.4.1 Questionnaire

Questionnaires are essential to and most directly associated with survey research and the questions asked should correlate with the research problem and objectives (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 238). The questions in the questionnaire used for this study were formulated clearly and unambiguously in order to eliminate any confusion for the respondent when answering the questionnaire as they completed it themselves. The questionnaire consisted of three sections: informed consent, communication strategies (organisation, stakeholder and communication) and biographical information.

3.5 Question content and phrasing

When compiling a questionnaire, Babbie and Mouton (2012, pp. 236,237) highlight three criteria, namely competence of respondents to answer the questionnaire; willingness of the respondents to answer the questionnaire and relevancy of the questions asked. While compiling the questionnaire, the researcher closely considered the above mentioned criteria and amended each draft accordingly to ensure that the end product was a well-planned and well-designed questionnaire that was relevant to the outcome of the research.

3.5.1 Ordering of questions

The order in which questionnaire items are presented can affect responses (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 242), therefore it is in the researcher's best interest to present the questions in the most effective way as to maximise the response rate. The sequence of the questions in the

questionnaire used in this study flowed logically and were relevant to the study. The first section contained an informed consent form that the respondent was asked to read and agree to. The second section consisted of questions relevant to communication strategies and included the concepts of organisation, stakeholder and communication. The questions relating to demographic were placed last to ensure that the most relevant information to the research study was answered first. Neither questions of a sensitive nature nor questions requiring classified information were asked in this questionnaire.

3.5.2 Types of questions

Welman, Kruger and Mitchell (2005, pp. 174-175) differentiate between open-ended and closed-ended (or multiple choice) questions. Open ended questions require that the respondents give their own answers without assistance from the researcher. A closed-ended question offers a range of answers that the respondent can choose from and are useful for providing the research with definite answers to a question. Within the broad categories of open-ended and closed-ended questions, Bryman and Bell (2014, pp. 202,203) explain that question types must also be considered. Each question type will be briefly mentioned and described in the table below along with the types of questions that were formulated in the questionnaire for this study. As seen in the table 3.2, some of the questions have a double classification. The full questionnaire is attached in Appendix A.

The answer categories were strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly agree. This is typical of an attitudinal scale, developed by Likert (Welman, et al., 2005, pp. 156-157). Attitudinal scales are based on different assumptions about the relationship was between individuals and their responses, in this instance, the relationship between the public relations practitioner and public relations theoretical knowledge was measured.

Table 3-2 Question types used in this study

Question type	Description	Corresponding question used for study
Personal factual questions	Predominantly include demographic and behavioural questions	Question 5 – biographical details
Factual questions about others	Relies on the perception of the respondent of themselves and the behaviour of others	Questions 2, 3, 4
Questions about beliefs	Respondents are asked about their beliefs	Not applicable for this study
Questions about knowledge	Questions are posed to 'test' respondents' knowledge or awareness in an area	Not applicable for this study, as the researcher's goal was to find out <i>what</i> the practitioner's were doing
Questions about attitudes	Questions measure attitudes are asked in a Likert scale format	Questions 2, 3, 4
Informant factual questions	Respondents are asked questions about an entity which they have knowledge of	Questions 2, 3, 4

Adapted from (Bryman & Bell, 2014, pp. 202,203)

3.5.3 Layout of the questionnaire

This research made use of Google Forms, survey software offered by Google within its Google Drive service, to distribute the questionnaire to the respondents. The survey, together with a covering letter, was e-mailed to all the APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) members on the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database. The decision to use Google Forms held the following advantages for the researcher:

Speed: The survey and covering letter were delivered to all the respondents simultaneously and within a few seconds depending on the speed of the respondent's internet connection.

Tracking: The Google Forms platform offers immediate notifications of responses that have been received via email.

Convenience: Both the researcher and the respondent benefitted from the ease of filling out the survey because of the compatibility of the Google Forms platform with a range of electronic devices such as desktop computers, laptop computers, tablets or cell phones to send, complete, reply and record the results of the survey.

3.5.4 Pre-testing

Pre-testing a questionnaire among respondents who do not form part of the population closes the gap for error (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 245). Also, pre-testing aids in determining any weaknesses of the questionnaire as a data collection instrument (White, 2005). The pre-testing of the questionnaire used for this study revealed that the questionnaire was too lengthy. The weakness was rectified and the questions were subsequently restructured as statements and corresponding checkpoint statements and grouped together according to the themes, “organisation”, “stakeholders” and “communication”. The questionnaires were completed within 15 – 20 minutes.

3.5.5 Telephonic interviews

For this study, basic individual interviews (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 289) were conducted through the use of a telephone. Basic individual interviews are characterised by the fact that it is *“an open interview which allows the object of study to speak for him/her/itself rather than to provide the respondent with a battery of the researcher’s own predetermined hypothesis-based questions”* (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 289). When conducting telephonic interviews, *“the interviewer asks questions from the interview schedule over the telephone and records the respondent’s responses”* (Welman, et al., 2005, p. 164).

For this study, the format of the interviews followed a semi-structured format, whereby a list of questions was prepared by the researcher, but allowance was made for the conversation to be steered by the participant so as to get depth of answers or information. Another reasoning behind this was to allow the participant to do most of the talking. Throughout each of the interviews, the researcher made use of probes to encourage the participant to answer a question, to gain clarity regarding a given answer or to encourage the participant to continue speaking. Active listening was also employed by the researcher during the interviews to assure the participant of the researcher’s interest in his/her answer.

As seen from the advantages column shown in table 2.3, the researcher opted to do telephonic interviews for those exact reasons. The fact that the researcher has a full-time job and that the sample of participants originated from cities across South Africa and internationally, prompted the decision for researcher to conduct telephonic interviews for both convenience and cost-effectiveness.

Table 3-3 Advantages and disadvantages of telephone interviews

Advantages	Disadvantages
Cheap and quick to administer, especially when the sample is geographically spread over a wide distance	Those participants that don't own or have access to a telephone are excluded from the study
Because the participant's replies are not affected by the personal characteristics of the researcher, a potential source of bias is removed	A potential for sampling bias could arise when dealing with low-income households that do not own a telephone
	It may prove to be more difficult to engage with a participant over the telephone for more than 20 – 25 minutes, as opposed to a personal interview that may carry on for much longer
	Telephone interviews, when compared to personal interviews, achieve lower response rates
	Personal interviews are a better tool to use when addressing sensitive issues
	The participant's non-verbal communication cannot be 'read' by the researcher
	Visual aids, with the purpose of prompting the participant to answer a question, are excluded

Adapted from (Bryman & Bell, 2014, pp. 217, 218)

3.5.6 Interview guide

According to Bryman and Bell (2014) an interview guide serves as a useful tool jog the researcher's memory regarding the particular topics and interest areas that the researcher wanted to know more about. This guide was prepared before the interviews were conducted and can be found in Appendix C.

3.5.7 Interview techniques

Bryman and Bell (2014) stipulate three interview techniques that researchers should pay attention to before starting the interview:

- Understanding the participant's frame of reference in relation to the study will assist the researcher in interpreting the answers offered by the participant
- A digital recording device obtained beforehand will assist the researcher to record and subsequently transcribe the interview after it has been conducted
- Due to the sensitive nature of recording devices, the interview should take place in a relatively quiet setting.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed for accuracy. The researcher conducted the telephonic interviews from an office with a landline telephone situated in a relatively quiet part of an office building. The researcher made use of a smartphone as a recording device and saved each voice recording as a separate interview. The voice recordings were then downloaded onto the researcher's personal computer for transcription. The landline telephone aided in better voice quality for both the researcher and the participant, which in turn made the transcription process easier. The duration of the telephonic interviews ranged from between 7 to 47 minutes, depending on how much time the participant had available for the interview. Eight participants were interviewed. An example of the interview questions are attached in Appendix D.

3.5.8 Transcription and coding of the interviews

In this study, the telephonic interviews were transcribed to ensure accuracy upon completion and analysed the typed transcriptions by means of coding. Keywords, phrases or themes that may or may not form part of the text under analysis are known as codes (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 339) and may serve to summarise or condense data (Saldana, 2010, p. 4). Coding may be defined as *"a process of applying codes to chunks of text so that those chunks can be interlinked to highlight similarities and differences within and between texts"* (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 339) and is *"an interpretive act"* (Saldana, 2010, p. 4).

3.6 Data analysis

Babbie and Mouton (2012) describe, among others, manifest codes, latent codes and axial codes. Manifest codes refer to recurring terms within the text and latent codes represent terms or themes that are inferred from the text (David & Sutton, 2011). *"Axial codes are codes that the researcher selects to represent and to highlight what they perceive to be the core issues of themes within the text they are analysing"* (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 345). In this study, the researcher began by coding words and phrases that recurred in the text. These words and phrases were then grouped into themes. The researcher then proceeded to do axial coding by sorting the codes into groups. David and Sutton (2011, p. 365) connect axial coding with thematic analysis as both *"work out what themes actually emerge from the data rather than can be imposed upon it from the researcher's own beliefs."* The context of the study is strategic public relations, with a particular focus on corporate communication strategies. With this in mind, codes and themes that relate to the following headings were developed: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.

3.6.1 Data capturing

The respondents' answers were automatically compiled into a spreadsheet format by means of the Google Forms survey software, thus displaying the data in a useful format. This platform also allowed the researcher instant access to the responses as the questionnaires were submitted. The software compiled the results into graphs for analysis. However, the software did not provide the mean, the mode and the median, therefore the data analysis cannot be called descriptive statistical analysis. The data provided was a frequency count, as the researcher counted the number of occurrences belonging to each of the categories in the likert scale. (Bryman & Bell, 2014). Although the researcher anticipated using descriptive statistical analysis to examine the quantitative data obtained from the survey questionnaire, Google Forms provided a frequency table. On reflection, the frequency table allowed the researcher to obtain the broad information required. Refer to Appendix B for the graphs.

3.7 Evaluation of research results

Research is measured according to its reliability and validity. Reliability is *"a matter of whether a particular technique, applied repeatedly to the same object, would yield the same result each time"* (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 119). In the survey questionnaire, statements were repeated in various sections to test the consistency of the respondent's answer.

Validity refers to *"the degree to which a measuring instrument actually measures and describes the concept it was designed to"* (David & Sutton, 2011, p. 268). Specifically, content validity as a subdivision of validity, is relevant to this study, as the interview questionnaire content effectively covers the range of meanings inferred by the overarching concepts of the study, namely management of communication, building relationships, creation and measurement.

3.7.1 Credibility and dependability

Credibility answers the question *"is there compatibility between the constructed realities that exist in the minds of the respondents and those that are attributed to them?"* (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 277) and for a study to be dependable, it must provide its audience with evidence that if it were to be repeated with the same or similar respondents in the same or a similar context, its findings would be similar (Babbie & Mouton, 2012, p. 277). According to Guba and Lincoln (1994, p. 114), if the researcher is able to demonstrate that his or her study is credible, then it is sufficient to prove the existence of dependability.

Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 277) indicate that credibility may be achieved through various means, each of which is explained in the table 3.4. Also, depicted in the table are the ways in which this study qualifies for each means described

Table 3-4 Achieving credibility

Means of achieving credibility	Brief description	How the means was achieved in this study
Prolonged engagement	Researcher remains in the field until data saturation occurs	The telephonic interviews were conducted until the researcher noticed a significant overlap in the majority of the answers given by the respondents
Persistent observation	Searching for information or interpretations that add value to the research and eliminating that which doesn't	The answers given by the interviewees were sifted according to their relevance to the study
Triangulation	Producing varying constructions of reality that exist within the context of a study by asking different questions, investigating different sources and using different methods	Triangulation was achieved in this study by asking 5 research questions (1 primary research question and 4 sub questions), three different sources were used namely survey questionnaire, telephonic interviews and an analysis of the literature

Adapted from: Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 277)

Berndt and Petzer (2011, p. 266) indicate that the credibility of one's research encompasses the following elements: accurate documentation of the methodology followed, supporting and justifying all claims, opinions, conclusions and recommendations made in the research and lastly accurately reporting results. This study is credible as the research process is methodically documented in this chapter and an accurate and objective representation of the results is reflected in the following chapter, namely chapter 4.

3.7.2 Transferability

Guba and Lincoln (1994) mention that providing a thick description of data in context and offering detailed reports on them allow the reader to judge the transferability of the study. This study meets the requirement for transferability as the data collected for both the survey

questionnaire and the telephonic interviews is relayed to the reader in great detail, allowing the reader to make his or her own conclusions regarding transferability.

3.7.3 Confirmability

Babbie and Mouton (2012, p. 278) and Nickols (2011) state that confirmability is the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the inquiry and not of the biases of the researcher. Guba and Lincoln (1994) mention six classes of data in determining whether the findings of a study are confirmable. Each of the classes is explained in table 3.5. Also depicted in the table are the ways in which this study qualifies for each of the classes described.

Table 3-5 Confirmability of findings

Class	Brief description	How the study meets the requirement
Raw data	Video and/or audio recordings, field notes, documents and survey results	All the interviews were digitally recorded so that they could be transcribed
Data reduction and analysis products	Written up field notes, summaries of condensed notes, theoretical notes	The transcriptions of the interviews serve as an example of written up field notes
Data reconstruction and synthesis products	Developed themes, findings, conclusions and final report	This encompasses chapter 2 (literature review - themes), chapter 4 (findings) and chapter 5 (final report)
Process notes	Methodological notes, trustworthiness notes, audit trail notes	These notes were made by the researcher throughout the process
Instrument development information	Pilots, forms and preliminary schedules, observation formats and surveys	The survey questionnaire was piloted before sending it to respondents

Adapted from Guba and Lincoln (1994)

3.8 Shortcomings and sources of error

The study was limited to APR (accredited public relations practitioners) and CPR (chartered public relations practitioners) members on the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA) database. Because the survey questionnaire respondents and the interview participants were a self-selecting sample, the opportunity for bias cannot be ignored as they selected themselves as research participants.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the use of both the quantitative and qualitative research methods to determine how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practices was explained. Firstly, the conceptual framework for the study was explained. Secondly, the research designed was explored. Furthermore, the data collection process and the analysis of the data was discussed. In the following chapter, the research findings will be shown.

4 CHAPTER FOUR - FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice. The first three chapters of the study offered an introduction to the strategic public relations and communication strategy landscape and the role that public relations theory and practice plays as well as the methodological approach that was used for this study. Chapter 4 combines the findings that emerged from the data that was collected by means of a survey and telephonic interviews. This chapter will conclude with a summary of the findings and relate them to answering the main/principle research question.

The findings of both the survey questionnaire (quantitative method) and telephonic interviews (qualitative method) will be grouped according to the sub-research questions of the study.

4.2 Literature review findings: sub-research question 1

The answer to sub-research question one, “What are the core elements of a corporate communication strategy in public relations theory?” is:

It may be concluded that the core elements of a corporate communication strategy in public relations theory are the three strategic public relations goals, namely management of communication, i.e. controlling the message from the organisation; relationship building, i.e. developing trust with stakeholders; and dialogue i.e. collaboration, co-operation and co-creation with stakeholders to decide the future together.

Also, public relations is implemented by means of five projects, namely corporate communication, reputation management, relationship management, stakeholder management, framing of messages and measurement.

Furthermore, the public relations models of communication had highly nuanced communication goals for each of the three strategic goals.

Additionally, corporate communication strategy may be divided into the following public relations concepts: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement.

4.3 Survey findings

The survey questionnaire includes 41 questions which are divided into four sections; namely biographical details and work background; organisation, stakeholders and communication. Refer to Appendix B for the complete questionnaire. The survey findings are grouped according to the sub-research questions. The percentages for the answer options 'strongly agree'/'agree' and 'strongly disagree'/'disagree' were combined to determine the overall agreement/disagreement percentage of the respondents. This was done so that the researcher could get an overall picture of the findings.

For each section, the survey statement question is indicated in bold and the checkpoint survey statement/s are indicated thereunder. Thereafter, the analysis and findings are discussed.

4.3.1 Question 1 (open question)

By way of counting, the finding for question 1 of the survey revealed that public relations practitioners consider these to be the top three core elements of corporate communication strategies:

- target audiences (12 responses)
- message (10 responses)
- objectives (9 responses)

It may be inferred from this finding that public relations practitioners function predominantly at a technician and managerial level in their organisations.

4.3.2 Findings: sub-research question 2

Table 4-1 Survey findings for sub-research question 2

Statements	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %
The organisation aligns concerns and problems to its corporate objectives	10.7	10.7	78.6
The organisation is always communicating with its audiences	17.9	7.1	75
The organisation takes responsibility for the consequences of its actions	14.3	3.6	82.2
The organisation talks to stakeholders	14.3	3.6	82.2
The organisation uses a face-to-face approach with the media	14.3	14.3	42.9
The organisation uses its resources to improve its competitive position	0	17.9	82.1
The organisation only communicates stories that benefit it	20.7	10.3	65.5
Stakeholders and the organisation consider its well-being	0	32.1	64.3
Stakeholders are aware of what is going on with the organisation	17.9	14.3	67.9
Stakeholders are important to the organisation	3.6	17.9	78.6
Stakeholders can find the organisation's messages easily	10.7	10.7	78.6
Stakeholders feel like they are part of the organisation	17.8	14.3	67.8
Stakeholders identify with the organisation	17.8	10.7	71.5
Stakeholders need to support the direction of the organisation	0	14.3	85.8
Stakeholders use knowledge to adapt their behaviour	14.3	21.4	64.3
Communication explains where the organisation is going	3.6	3.6	92.8
Communication is included in the annual corporate plan	10.7	17.9	71.4
Communication is seen as important by the organisation's management	3.6	7.1	89.3
Communication provides solutions to problems	6.9	10.3	82.8
Communication to stakeholders is important	0	7.1	92.9

Survey statement: The organisation only communicate stories that benefit it

Checkpoint statement: Stakeholders identify with the organisation

For the survey statement, 65.5% of the respondents agreed that the organisation/organisation's only communicate stories that benefit it and 71.5% of the respondents agree with the corresponding checkpoint survey statement, 'stakeholders identify with the organisation'. If stakeholders identify with organisation, it implies that they share the same goals and values as the organisation, which infers that dialogue is present in the organisation-stakeholder relationship. However, the respondents indicated that the organisation is only interested in disseminating information that benefits it.

Survey statement: Stakeholders are important to the organisation

Checkpoint statement: The organisation talks to stakeholders

The response rate for both the survey statement and the corresponding survey checkpoint statement align, as 78.6% of the respondents indicated that stakeholders are important to the organisation and 82.2% of the respondents agreed that the organisation talks to stakeholders. If stakeholders are important to the organisation, the assumption is that a process of stakeholder analysis has taken place. Therefore, stakeholder engagement and dialogue has probably formed part of the public relations practitioner's practice as the organisation talks to stakeholders.

Survey statement: Stakeholders need to support the direction of the organisation

Checkpoint statement: Communication explains where the organisation is going

The respondents' answers to both the statement and corresponding checkpoint statement agree, as 85.7% of the respondents indicated that stakeholders need to support the direction of the organisation and 92.8% of the respondents showed that communication explains where the organisation is going. This survey statement and checkpoint statement show that the general consensus among the respondents is that their public relations programmes/activities underpin the vision, mission and organisational objectives.

Survey statement: Communication to stakeholders is important

Checkpoint statement 1: Stakeholders can find the organisation's messages easily

Checkpoint statement 2: Stakeholders use knowledge to adapt their behaviour

The survey statement and the corresponding checkpoint statements reveal that the majority (92.9%) of the respondents are of the opinion that communication to stakeholders is important. The checkpoint survey statements show that 78.6% of the respondents agree that stakeholders can find the organisation's messages easily and 64.3% of the respondents agree that stakeholders use knowledge to adapt their behaviour. This finding demonstrates that the organisation communicates with stakeholders with the intention of influencing stakeholders to adapt their behaviour.

Survey statement: Stakeholders feel like they are part of the organisation

Checkpoint statement 1: Stakeholders use knowledge to adapt their behaviour

Checkpoint statement 2: Stakeholders identify with the organisation

The respondents agreed (67.8%) with the survey statement that stakeholders feel like they are part of the organisation. The findings for the corresponding checkpoint survey statements reveal that 64.3% of the respondents agree that stakeholders use knowledge to adapt their behaviour and 71.5% of the respondents agree that stakeholders identify with the organisation. The findings confirm that public relations practitioners incorporate dialogic goals in their public relations practice to allow stakeholders to feel a part of and identify with the organisation.

Survey statement: The organisation takes responsibility for the consequences of its actions

Checkpoint statement 1: Stakeholders and the organisation consider its well-being

Checkpoint statement 2: The organisation uses a face-to-face approach with the media

Both the checkpoint survey statements coincided with the survey statement question. The majority of the respondents (82.2%) agreed that the organisation takes responsibility for the consequences of its actions, 64.3% of the respondents agreed that stakeholders and the organisation consider its well-being and 42.9% of the respondents agreed that the organisation uses a face-to-face approach with the media. It may be inferred from the findings that public relations practitioners are ethical in their approach to communication programmes/activities and that mutual understanding is present between an organisation and its stakeholders, therefore public relations practitioners are responsible in their communication.

Survey statement: The organisation uses its resources to improve its competitive position

Checkpoint statement: The organisation aligns concerns and problems to its corporate objectives

The findings for the survey statement and the corresponding survey checkpoint statement reveal that 62% of the respondents agree that the organisation uses its resources to improve its competitive position and 78.6% of the respondents agree that the organisation aligns concerns and problems to its corporate objectives. The findings indicate that public relations

practitioners probably incorporate environmental scanning as part of their public relations practice.

Survey statement: Stakeholders can find the organisation's messages easily

Checkpoint statement: Communication provides solutions to problems

This result illustrates that 78.6% of the respondents agree that stakeholders can find the organisation's messages easily and 82.8% of the respondents agree that communication provides solutions to problems. The findings indicate that public relations practitioners use a variety of communication mediums to reach stakeholders. Also, the findings infer that public relations practitioners recognise the power of communication in solving problems.

Survey statement: The organisation is always communicating with its audiences

Checkpoint statement: Stakeholders are aware of what is going on with the organisation

The findings for the survey statement reveal that 75% of the respondents are in agreement that the organisation is always communicating with its audiences and 67.9% of the respondents agree that stakeholders are aware of what is going on with the organisation. The findings confirm that public relations practitioners are communicating regularly with stakeholders.

Survey statement: Communication is included in the annual corporate plan

Checkpoint statement 1: Stakeholders are aware of what is going on with the organisation

Checkpoint statement 2: Communication is seen as important by the organisation's management

Here, 71.4% of the respondents agreed that communication is included in the annual corporate plan. The respondents agreed (67.9%) that stakeholders are aware of what is going on with the organisation and 89.3% of the respondents indicated that communication is seen as important by the organisation's management. These findings infer that public relations practitioners probably have input at a strategic level in their organisation. The findings also show that communication is adequate as stakeholders are informed of organisational activities.

4.3.3 Findings: sub-research question 3

Table 4-2 Survey findings for sub-research question 3

Statements	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %
The organisation aligns concerns and problems to its corporate objectives	10.7	10.7	78.6
The organisation uses its resources to improve its competitive position	0	17.9	82.1
The organisation's audiences respond to messages as anticipated	14.3	28.6	52.7
The organisation has departmental silos	35.7	17.9	46.4
Stakeholders understand the world in which the organisation operates	21.4	25	53.6
Stakeholders need to support the direction of the organisation	0	14.3	85.7
Stakeholders understand the role they play in the organisation's success	17.8	21.5	60.7
Stakeholders' views are valued by the organisation	14.3	7.1	78.6
Stakeholders feel like they are part of the organisation	17.8	14.3	67.8
Communication explains where the organisation is going	3.6	3.6	92.8
Communication feedback from the organisation is overrated	64.3	14.3	21.5

Survey statement: The organisation aligns concerns and problems to its corporate objectives

Checkpoint statement 1: Stakeholders understand the world in which the organisation operates

Checkpoint statement 2: Communication explains where the organisation is going

Checkpoint statement 3: The organisation uses its resources to improve its competitive position

The survey statement and the corresponding checkpoint survey statements correspond with each other, as 78.6% of the respondents agree that the organisation aligns concerns and problems to its corporate objectives and 53.6% agree of the respondents are of the opinion that the organisation/organisation's stakeholders understand the world in which the organisation operates. Furthermore, 92.8% of the respondents agree that communication explains where the organisation is going and 82.1% of the respondents agree that the organisation uses its resources to improve its competitive position. It can be inferred from this finding that public relations practitioners probably consider the organisation's vision, mission and organisational objectives when communicating to stakeholders.

Survey statement 1: Communication explains where the company is going

Checkpoint statement: Stakeholders need to support the direction of the organisation

The respondents agreed (92.8%) that communication is used as a tool to explain where the company is going and the findings for the corresponding checkpoint statement are in line with the survey statement as 53.6% of the respondents agreed that stakeholders need to support the direction of the organisation. This finding shows that the organisation, through public relations practitioners, communicates its vision and mission to its stakeholders and that public relations practitioners probably incorporate stakeholder engagement in their practice of public relations.

Survey statement: The organisation's audiences respond to messages as anticipated

Checkpoint statement: Communication feedback from the organisation is overrated

Just over half (52.7%) of the respondents agreed with the survey statement by indicating that the organisation's audiences respond to messages as anticipated and 64.3% of the respondents disagreed that communication feedback from the organisation is overrated. This finding illustrates that messages are received and that stakeholders are responding as anticipated. Furthermore, organisational feedback is necessary.

Survey statement: Stakeholders understand the role they play in the organisation's success

Checkpoint statement: The organisation has departmental silos

The respondents agreed (60.7%) that stakeholders understand the role they play in the organisation's success and overall, 46.4% of the respondents agreed that the organisation has departmental silos while 35.7% of the respondents disagreed to the same checkpoint survey statement. Communication to external stakeholders is successful, but communication to internal stakeholders is inadequate.

Survey statement: Stakeholders' views are valued by the organisation

Checkpoint statement: Stakeholders feel like they are part of the organisation

Here, 78.6% of the respondents agreed that stakeholders' views are valued by the organisation and 67.8% of the respondents agreed with the corresponding checkpoint survey statement. This result shows that public relations practitioners consider stakeholder engagement and dialogue important.

4.3.4 Findings: sub-research question 4

Table 4-3 Survey findings for sub-research question 4

Statements	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %
The organisation's messages are consistent	14.3	10.7	75
The organisation is trustworthy	0	10.7	89.3
The organisation keeps staff informed as a priority	14.3	10.7	75
The organisation has a press release and publication focus	28.6	17.9	53.6
The organisation prefers social media to communicate	28.6	21.4	50
The organisation uses a face-to-face approach to the media	17.9	14.3	42.9
Stakeholders are best reached by a shotgun approach	71.5	14.3	14.3
Communication is seen as important by the organisation's management	3.6	7.1	89.3
Communication is included in the annual corporate plan	10.7	17.9	71.4
Communication strategies are published internally	14.2	10.7	57.1

Survey statement: The organisation's messages are consistent

Checkpoint statement 1: The organisation is trustworthy

Checkpoint statement 2: Stakeholders are best reached by a shotgun approach

The survey statement asked whether the organisation's messages are consistent and 75% of the respondents agreed. The respondents agreed (89.3%) with checkpoint the statement that the organisation is trustworthy and 71.5% of the respondents disagreed with the statement that stakeholders are best reached by a shotgun approach. The findings for the combination of the survey statement question as well as the checkpoint survey statements reveal that consistent messages relate to the organisation's reputation. If messages are consistent, the organisation is conscious of its reputation – no mixed messages. Due to targeted messages which are consistent, the organisation is seen as trustworthy.

Survey statement: Communication is seen as important by the organisation's management

Checkpoint statement: Communication is included in the annual corporate plan

Here, 89.3% of the respondents agree that communication is seen as important by the organisation's top management and 71.4% of the respondents agree that communication is included in the annual corporate plan. The findings infer that public relations practitioners

potentially play a role in strategy development within the organisation as communication forms part of management's frame of reference and is situated within the annual corporate plan.

Survey statement: Communication strategies are published internally

Checkpoint statement: The organisation keeps staff informed as a priority

The respondents agreed (57.1%) with the survey statement that communication strategies are published internally and 75% of the respondents agreed that the organisation keeps staff informed as a priority. The findings indicate that internal stakeholders are kept informed as management considers them important.

Survey statement: The organisation has a press release and publication focus

Checkpoint statement 1: The organisation prefers social media to communicate

Checkpoint statement 2: The organisation uses a face-to-face approach to the media

Just over half (53.6%) of the respondents agree with the survey statement that the organisation has a press release and publication focus, while 50% of the respondents agree with the first of the two checkpoint survey statements that the organisation prefers social media to communicate. The second checkpoint survey statement saw 42.9% of the respondents agree that organisation uses a face-to-face approach to the media. The inferences made from these findings are: if the organisation has a press release/publication focus, it implies that public relations outputs are being measured and not public relations outcomes or impact on business strategy. This result also indicates that at least half of public relations practitioners still prefer traditional media channels when communicating messages. This notion is supported by the second checkpoint statement, as a face-to-face approach with the media enhances trust. Furthermore, these responses collectively raise the questions about management's commitment to communicate.

4.3.5 Biographical details and work background

This section of the questionnaire gave the researcher an indication of *who* the respondents of the survey were by gleaned the information below from their responses to namely, their gender; age; public relations experience in the workplace; whether they are currently working within corporate public relations or consultancy public relations or in another work environment; their current job title within their organisation and all their qualifications.

4.3.5.1 Percentage of male and female respondents

The research revealed that 62.1% of the respondents were female and 37.9% of the respondents were male. Therefore, it may be concluded that of the sample, public relations is practiced mostly by women.

4.3.5.2 Age categories of respondents

None of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 25 years. One respondent (3.4%) indicated that he/she is between the ages of 26 and 35 years of age. Nine respondents (31%) indicated that they are currently between the ages of 36 and 45 years. The majority of the respondents (65.5%) indicated that they are over 45 years of age. Thus, the majority of public relations practitioners in the sample are over the age of 45 years.

4.3.5.3 Public relations experience in the workplace

The majority of the respondents (93.1%) have practiced public relations for over 10 years. Two respondents (6.9%) indicated that they have between 8 and 10 years' public relations experience in the workplace. It may be inferred that the public relations practitioners in the sample have more than a decade's worth of experience.

4.3.5.4 Public relations practice

An equal amount of respondents (37.9%) indicated that they are currently working for either a public relations consultancy that advises external clients or a public relations department within an organisation. Seven of the respondents (24.1%) indicated 'other' as their place of practice.

4.3.5.5 Current job title within the organisation

The majority of respondents (58.6%) hold the job title 'other' in their organisation. Five (17.5%) respondents indicated that their job title is 'public relations manager' and another five (17.5%) respondents indicated that their job title is 'public relations director'. The job title 'public relations consultant' is held by two respondents (6.9%). It can be inferred that the majority of public relations practitioners in the sample do not have a job title that relates to the discipline.

4.3.5.6 Qualifications

Table 4-4 Respondent qualifications

Job title	Communications degree	Strategy degree	Public relations diploma/degree	No qualification	Other
Public relations consultant	1				1
Public relations assistant					
Public relations technician					
Public relations account executive					
Public relations manager	3		1		1
Public relations director	1		1		3
Other	4	2	2	1	6

The researcher approached the findings for this question by prioritising the qualifications that are most pertinent to the strategic public relations discipline. As displayed in table 4.4, nine (31.03%) respondents have a degree in communication, two (6.89%) of the respondents have a degree in strategy, four (13.79%) respondents have either a public relations diploma or degree, one (3.44%) respondent indicated that he/she had no qualification that relates to either communication, strategy or public relations and ten (34.84%) respondents indicated the answer option 'other' as their qualification. From this finding, it can be concluded that the majority of public relations practitioners in the sample do not have a qualification that relates directly to the discipline.

4.4 Summary of survey findings

The main findings of the summary are included in table 4.5. The findings are summarised according to the relevant research question, except for the findings derived from the 'biographical details and work background' section.

Table 4-5 Summary of survey findings

Section	Finding
Biographical details and work background	Public relations is practiced in the sample mostly by women.
	The majority of public relations practitioner in the sample are over the age of 45 years.
	Public relations practitioners in the sample have more than a decade's worth of experience.
	The majority of public relations practitioners in the sample do not have a job title that relates to the discipline.
	The majority of public relations practitioners in the sample do not have a qualification that relates directly to the discipline.
Sub-research question 1	<p>Public relations is implemented by means of five projects, namely corporate communication, reputation management, relationship management, stakeholder management, framing of messages and measurement.</p> <p>Public relations models of communication had highly nuanced communication goals for each of the three strategic goals.</p> <p>Corporate communication strategy may be divided into the following public relations concepts: context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement</p>
Sub-research question 2	<p>If stakeholders identify with organisation, it implies that they share the same goals and values as the organisation, which infers that dialogue is present in the organisation-stakeholder relationship. However, the respondents indicated that the organisation is only interested in disseminating information that benefits it.</p> <p>If stakeholders are important to the organisation, the assumption is that a process of stakeholder analysis has taken place. Therefore, stakeholder engagement and dialogue has probably formed part of the public relations practitioner's practice as the organisation talks to stakeholders.</p> <p>Generally, public relations programmes/activities underpin the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives</p> <p>The organisation communicates with stakeholders with the intention of influencing stakeholders to adapt their behaviour.</p> <p>Public relations practitioners incorporate dialogic goals in their public relations practice to allow stakeholders to feel a part of and identify with the organisation.</p> <p>Public relations practitioners are ethical in their approach to communication programmes/activities and that mutual understanding is present between an organisation and its stakeholders, therefore public relations practitioners are responsible in their communication.</p> <p>Public relations practitioners probably incorporate environmental scanning as part of their public relations practice.</p> <p>Public relations practitioners use a variety of communication mediums to reach stakeholders. Also, the findings infer that public relations practitioners recognise the power of communication in solving problems.</p>

	Public relations practitioners are communicating regularly with stakeholders
	Public relations practitioners probably have input at a strategic level in their organisation. The findings also show that communication is adequate as stakeholders are informed of organisational activities.
Sub-research question 3	Public relations practitioners probably consider the organisation's vision, mission and organisational objectives when communicating to stakeholders
	The organisation, through public relations practitioners, communicates its vision and mission to its stakeholders and that public relations practitioners probably incorporate stakeholder engagement in their practice of public relations.
	Messages are received and that stakeholders are responding as anticipated. Furthermore, organisational feedback is necessary
	Communication to external stakeholders is successful, but communication to internal stakeholders is inadequate.
	Public relations practitioners consider stakeholder engagement and dialogue important.
Sub-research question 4	Consistent messages relate to the organisation's reputation. If messages are consistent, the organisation is conscious of its reputation – no mixed messages. Due to targeted messages which are consistent, the organisation is seen as trustworthy
	Public relations practitioners potentially play a role in strategy development within the organisation as communication forms part of management's frame of reference and is situated within the annual corporate plan.
	Internal stakeholders are kept informed as management considers them important.
	If the organisation has a press release/publication focus, it implies that public relations outputs are being measured and not public relations outcomes or impact on business strategy. Many strategic public relations practitioners still prefer traditional media channels when communicating messages

4.5 Interview findings

The findings of the telephonic interviews (qualitative method) will firstly be grouped according to the sub-research questions of the study and then by theme.

4.5.1 Findings: sub-research question 2

4.5.1.1 Question 1: In the survey you mention that you consider x y z to be the most important elements in a communication strategy, can you explain why you think that please?

There were variances in the responses of the questionnaire respondents and their responses during the interviews. Table 4.6 summaries these responses. The questionnaire asked respondents to prioritise their top three elements in developing communication strategies. During the interview, participants were asked to motivate the answer that they gave in the questionnaire.

Table 4-6 Top 3 elements of a communication strategy

No	Quantitative research (questionnaire) Top 3 elements of a communication strategy	Qualitative research (interview) Motivation of answer in the questionnaire.
1	Input into business strategy	<p>"I believe this is key to our role and responsibility as PR practitioners"</p> <p>"We need to know what are the likely outcomes of decisions taken at executive management level and possible consequences from a business and communication perspective"</p> <p>"we need to be at executive level to know what is going on and be able to make both constructive and strategic suggestions as communication professionals"</p>
	Forecasting communication resources and expertise required	<p>"We need to call on specialists to handle the portfolio.... designers, researchers, media experts and writers to handle the variety of assignments which fall within our brief"</p>
	Integrating communication disciplines	<p>"Both internal and external to speak with one voice. We need to work with HR for improved internal communications and we also need to call on consultants to assist in our external strategy"</p>
2	Competitor assessment	<p>"Without these elements you can't plan"</p>
	Strategic intent	
	Alignment to business strategy	
3	Background with objectives	<p>Respondent's answer did not offer support for each element mentioned</p>
	Target audience and action plan with time frames	
	Budget	
4	Research	<p>"Communication strategies cannot be planned without doing research"</p>
	Planning	<p>"One must be able to develop messages so that you can implement"</p>
	Ethical implementation	<p>"The perception with regards to ethical implementation is that the organisation is transparent, but the reality is that oftentimes the motivation is profit"</p>
	Evaluation/measuring	<p>Respondent's answer did not offer support for this element mentioned</p>

5	Understanding customer requirements	Respondent's answer did not offer support for each element mentioned
	Budget	
	Measuring	
6	Understanding the customer's requirements	Respondent's answer did not offer support for each element mentioned
	Finding a strategy that will work for them within their budget constraints	
	Keeping a very close watch on the results as it is implemented in order to tweak where necessary	
7	Understanding business priorities	"If the public relations practitioner does not understand the organisation's vision and mission, then the practitioner has no reason for doing a communication strategy".
	Understanding how communication can play a role	
	Constructing a plan that can affect change	

From the interviews that were conducted, the findings show that the respondents prioritised the following top three elements that are a priority in a communication strategy:

- 1) situation analysis,
- 2) aligning the communication strategy with the overall business strategy and
- 3) budget.

4.5.1.2 Question 2: Many companies use communication strategies to achieve different objectives, what has been the most common objective in your experience? And why?

Reputation is considered an important corporate communication strategic objective, however other objectives that were included were: sales, licence to operate and employee engagement.

"Sales. Bottom line. Sales. That's the only thing that makes a company tick. Are we getting the sales? Are we staying competitive? And that's it".

(Participant 6)

“The objective of a communication strategy would be to either build or protect an organisation’s image. So, either you are protecting them from something at a moment in time, or you are building their reputation over a long term basis”.

(Participant 7)

Therefore, reputation and employee engagement are the primary strategic public relations objectives.

4.5.1.3 Question 6: Have you ever had to sell the need for a communication strategy to management and how did you pitch it, if not how would you pitch it?

According to the interview participants, the challenges associated with selling or pitching a communication strategy to management are due to public relations practitioners’ absence from the boardroom and lack of knowledge or understanding on management’s part regarding communication strategies. Pitching the communication strategy with the aim of getting buy-in from stakeholders and the practical aspects when doing a pitch formed part of the answers for this question.

“It’s been an uphill battle for years for many public relations people, and it’s reflected in the lack of inclusion in the top senior management board. You know, the executive board consists of heads of different departments and business units. Unfortunately, public relations is not always invited, but seen from the management point of view it is that important to include in the senior body.”

(Participant 1)

“Always. It’s always a challenge. The financial year of [organisation] ends in June and actually this is the last year of the current term of office, which means that we’ll have to develop a new strategy for the next 5 years. It’s such a huge challenge, especially in terms of the budget allocation. People perceive communication as...like we are journalists. They still don’t understand the strategic nature of public relations and communication in their situation. So, it’s still a challenge, specifically when you get new managers who do not have that much background of the [organisation] or who maybe just joined the [organisation]. When you talk communication it’s like it’s not an important aspect of the municipality. It’s always a challenge.”

(Participant 3)

“To sell a communication strategy, and certainly with the purpose to change, they need to understand why you need to go through various phases. You don’t just say ‘we’re implementing this and that’s it.’ You know you have to go through phases to get people to buy-in using your particular model as a starting point. You need to create awareness and understanding, then you get to commitment and buy-in. For them to understand that, it just took long but in the end it was bought into and it was quite costly because it was also something that you had to do visuals for. In the end it paid off because they did put money towards it and we ended up rolling out the

project globally. In the beginning it was challenging to get it going, but when the buy-in was there and the rollout was happening, it made things easier.”

(Participant 5)

“Every single time. It depends on the company and the management. It depends on the type of personalities that you are dealing with. You’ve got to watch that body language every second that you are in that room, and put yourself in a seat. I always make sure that I get them seated and then I find myself a seat where I want to sit or I sit at the head of the table so that I can see everyone. There’s quite a lot of strategic thinking in how you pitch things. I’ll give you another example of that: long time ago, when [organisation] was part of [organisation] and [organisation] wanted to sell them and they didn’t want to be sold by [organisation] at that particular time, and I went in and sat with them and we did the figures and we did the whole presentation to the London board. Which we had to do on a video link. And I sat and trained these guys on speaking and I would turn the screens off and I would throw questions at them and I gave them an incredibly hard time. I really did. I took them into [organisation’s] building, we sat down and did a pre-run prior to that meeting and I told everyone exactly where I wanted them to sit. “You get here early and you grab those seats, and that is where you are going to sit.” Halfway through the presentation, the guy didn’t release my slides, so I had no supporting slides for the guys to talk to. But I had drilled them to such an extent that they could just flow.”

(Participant 6)

It is therefore accepted that public relations practitioners are excluded from the boardroom and corporate communication strategies are not seen as part of organisational strategy and public relations practitioners confuse or sometimes fail to distinguish between operational practice and strategic practice.

4.5.1.4 Question 7: when you are positioning an organisation through its messages to its publics, what sort of things should you consider as an initial, mid-term and final strategy?

Overall, the interview participants answered this question from a broad perspective and not in terms of the structure of initial, mid-term and final strategy. Repositioning messages to new or different target audiences, the overall lifespan of your communication strategy and upholding a favourable corporate reputation were offered as positioning objectives.

“the message at whatever stage must be transparent, consistent and honest. Not always easy to achieve when the situation looks dire and you appear to be at fault. However, by adopting an ethical approach to whatever you decide to do, you will be seen in the best light. Here is where the MD must take a key role as spokesperson for the organisation”.

(Participant 1)

“Look, I’ve worked mostly in the rail industry. So, your short-term strategy is to try and initiate the fact that you can do the job and that it will last you the 30 years that it is meant to last you. Anything in the rail industry works on a 30 year plan. Your biggest issue right up front is, can you do the job, are you reliable, is there spares to support it, and will you still be around in thirty years to support it? Thirty years is the lifespan of a locomotive. And that is something that you have to think about when you are planning something for the rail industry”

(Participant 6)

Therefore, public relations practitioners are communicating to stakeholders on an operational rather than a strategic level.

4.5.1.5 Question 10: In terms of your corporate communication strategies, do you communicate a message to get a response or do you communicate to meet objectives? Which one works better for you and why?

The formulation of objectives as the starting point of a corporate communication strategy is considered as important, but other participants indicated that communicating a message to get a response and communicating to meet objectives are the same thing and it was acceptable to adapt the objectives to suit the message in case of the desired response not being achieved.

“Well, I would say that first you’ve got to have the objectives. If you’re looking at the 7 key stages, you’ve got your SWOT analysis, the theme setting, you’re formulating your objectives and you’re looking at your target markets and so on. Even if you look at the basic structure of what we do, we have to discuss, after analysing the situation that we’ve been drawn into, what the objectives are. If we don’t have any objectives, then there’s no way that we can measure our performance. Then we’re just simply doing activities if we’re called in to handle x y z. If there’s no evaluation in the context of what the overall objectives were while doing this particular campaign. Clearly, if you don’t have objectives there’s no way to measure how successful you’ve been”.

(Participant 1)

“They are the same thing.”

(Participant 2)

“It’s both. Usually, your objectives will employ some sort of a response. So for instance, you’ll say to meet the objective, ‘we want to be at the top of the search engine list when customers type in tyres’. That’s the objective. If you find that that people will be responding to you because you’ve done something about it, then the two go together. It depends on what it is”.

(Participant 4)

"I'd say to communicate a message. Initially you have an objective to communicating that message. And the structure of your message will be slotted in to meet the objective and how you communicate that to the audience. However, if you do that and you realise that you don't get what you intend and you just go along, I would adjust my message. No sorry, I wouldn't adjust the message as such because the message remains the same, however I would adjust the deliverables".

(Participant 5)

Therefore, public relations practitioners are largely confused about how messages contribute to the successful attainment of public relations strategic goals.

4.5.2 Findings: sub-research question 3

4.5.2.1 Question 4: In your experience, what are some of the pitfalls of developing and implementing communication strategies?

The pitfalls mentioned by the interview participants include guarding against reactive communication strategies as opposed to proactive communication strategies and not obtaining top management's commitment to the communication strategy before implementation.

You know, public relations practitioners, when they develop communication strategies, they should have clear messages that speak to organisational objectives or vision and mission statement. They should not take on a reactive approach. They should develop a strategy with messages that are there to communicate effectively. It should rather be a proactive communication strategy than a reactive one because you are reactive in nature, you tend to spend a lot of money unnecessarily because crisis management has a lot to do with unplanned budget that has to be spent.

(Participant 3)

"It's got a lot to do with what you have to do internally to get management...you know, what very often happens is communication gets done in isolation. Management says 'oh we need communication', but they aren't necessarily sitting around the table discussing and they're not taken too much notice of and in actual fact they should. So, to me the most important thing of any strategy is to sit them down, the senior management, the directors, and say 'guys, what do you want to achieve out of this', because once you know you can make it happen. You have to sit down with senior management and get their total commitment. If you don't have their total commitment and their total willingness to work with you to go through the project, don't bother. You are set up for failure."

(Participant 6)

The main challenges are implementing reactive communication strategies and obtaining management buy-in to communication strategies.

4.5.2.2 Question 5: In your opinion, what is the effect of trust on corporate communication in general?

The interview participants are of the opinion that the concepts of trust and reputation are inseparable when dealing with an organisation's corporate reputation. From an internal communication viewpoint, the interview participants indicated that building trust with employees is essential and that visible action taken by management aids in building organisational reputation and trust.

"There's got to be trust within the company that they can and that their people can actually fulfil whatever the communication is...you need to build that internal pride and belief in the company before you can go and convince other people".

(Participant 6)

"...having leadership that is visible and what leadership says is what they do also. So that they have that credibility. And when there is credibility, there is belief and people will also see that the things being said are the same as what is actually happening. So then you are enhancing the trust. You are either building trust if it is not there or enhancing it if it is there".

(Participant 5) "

"We talk about image and reputation as far as the company is concerned, but essentially what this is all about is building trust. You can build a reputation, but ultimately hopefully that reputation develops into trust for the individual and the organisation. And that's critical".

(Participant 1)

"Your trust is as strong as your reputation, so if you've got a really good values based trust relationship with your target audience, I think you have achieved incredibly well".

(Participant 7)

Therefore, trust is important for reputation building, internally and externally. Trust is built by management walking its talk.

4.5.2.3 Question 8: In your experience as a public relations practitioner, to what extent does public relations theory influence the way in which you practice public relations? Do you consider the theory at all or do you expand on what has worked for you before. Can you give me an example?

The interview participants indicate that they have either a theoretical or practical orientation, but not both.

"...you realise that some of the things are not according to the theory as they are in the workplace. The practice is not implemented as stated in the theory...practice teaches you more".

(Participant 3)

"I never did theory. I never went for training. I did this without any of it."

(Participant 6)

"Ja, for me, it's been my bible. There are things that I learnt in 1992 that are still applicable. I always say, especially to the younger people that I mentor or coach now and again, that the principles are the same. What changes is how you implement them and how you adjust those principles to whatever environment, but they remain the same. So, it is something that doesn't change."

(Participant 5)

"Hopefully public relations practitioners know that they should be aware of the developments in the profession, and the profession is guided by bodies like PRISA and the GA. And within those organisations there are people that come...for example, take Anne Gregory. She has been for the last two years, the chairman of the Global Alliance, is a top academic. So, I think that we're fortunate in that the people at the head of, well certainly the Global Alliance, I can't speak for the other bodies, are really deeply committed and involved in the sphere and development and practice of the profession. So, the people at the top are aware of what's actually happening, what are the developments from a theory point of view and they expand them as well. They're making speeches and writing articles. Anne Gregory travels the world on behalf of the Global Alliance and what she thinks and who she represents is well documented. I think we should all be aware of what the trends are in the profession. But many of us, I'm afraid, are simply not involved with a professional body, whether it be PRISA or whoever, so we are not reading and we are not developing and we seem to be reacting rather than being proactive. We respond to what the client wants. And that means that theory and practice would have to be very careful...it's been lots of spinning, particularly on the political front, where we've seen Tony Blair and his spin doctor are pretty good examples of that. I think we have to ask the question: 'are public relations practitioners aware of the theory of our discipline, are they up to date on where it's going and what the changes are.' In our particular environment, of a developing world in Southern Africa, I would say we are very much behind."

(Participant 1)

Public relations practitioners tend to have a more practical approach than a theoretical approach to public relations practice.

4.5.2.4 Question 9: Have you learnt more from making mistakes as a result of daily public relations practice or from what you have read in public relations theory? Please will you explain why you say so?

The interview respondents are of the opinion that they have learnt more about public relations practice from experience as opposed to what they've learnt from public relations theory.

"No, it's the former. I am now in practice rather than academia, so I have found that I have learned so much by making small mistakes".

(Participant 4)

"It's a combination of the two. But I would say leaning more on the practical way you have made the mistakes and to know what the mistakes are. But for me, it's been more on the doing side."

(Participant 5)

"You learn more from doing."

(Participant 7)

Therefore, public relations practice should inform public relations practice.

4.5.2.5 Question 11: To what extent does perception (which can play many roles) influence communication strategies? Can you give me an example?

The interview participants view one of the responsibilities of public relations as aligning the stakeholders' and organisation's perceptions as closely as possible.

"...what we've got to do is narrow the gap between people's perceptions and the real situation"

(Participant 1)

"...you have to understand what a target audience's perception is of a situation, understand from the business what they want that perception to be, and you've got to close the gap. Essentially you've got to take an audience from what they currently believe i.e, their perception to what you want them to believe i.e, your targeted communication goals."

(Participant 7)

Therefore, public relations practice is concerned with creating perceptions which link to reality.

4.5.3 Findings: sub-research question 4

4.5.3.1 Question 3: What was your most challenging and/or exciting and/or satisfying communication strategy and why?

The participants found online public relations, crisis communication, having top management buy-in and involvement in the communication strategy and achieving a change in attitude and behaviour by stakeholders as the most satisfying.

“Well, literally in the last couple of weeks having been to Namibia and looking at some of the crises that companies have faced or will be facing in terms of a very different environment from five years ago. Social media has broken through or slipped around the firewall and companies are really having to think about what they communicate and what reactions could be to their statements. So for me, what I’ve been doing currently is very exciting and then, we’ve done some media workshops in Namibia as well where we brought together both the consultants, the corporates and the journalists to work on stories. It was very interesting, the comments that were made, from the journalists of the clients that they come into contact with”

(Participant 1)

“To date, I can’t point out a specific strategy that we worked on and all that, but there was a time when the [organisation], I think it was in 2014, was experiencing a lot of water interruptions. We had the organisational communication strategy that was adopted, but obviously we did not have proper messages wherein we had to form partnerships or collaborate with our stakeholders and our suppliers. We had to sit down and sort of crisis manage. The communication strategy specifically centred around the issue of water and how do we get to communicate that. It was one of those strategies that we developed that was more like crisis management communication.”

(Participant 3)

“And we had quite a few projects and events. I came up with the strategy and then we had meetings upon meetings with the MD and there was constant feedback all the time. That to me was the highlight and the most satisfying. And, believe it or not, I got paid very little, but the experience was satisfying.”

(Participant 4)

“I must say, it had to have been where we had to mobilise employees towards one thing that the organisation wanted to achieve. And, you know, communication strategies are then tailored around that one thing. And so, getting them to address change. There was one instance where we needed to get employees to understand

the value of excellent customer service, and being part of that was very exciting for me.”

(Participant 5)

“I think the craziest was [organisation] telling me that they want to put on an inter-trans exhibition and they only gave me 7 days to do it in. And get all the communication out, get all the material ready for it, get all the brochures, get all the stats printed, build the exhibition, make sure everybody was there, get all the invitations out.”

(Participant 6)

Therefore, management support to public relations programmes/activities is as important as is achieving measureable indicators of success.

4.5.3.2 Question 12: What are the most common steps in communication strategy implementation, and which do you consider to be the most important.

The interview participants highlighted situation analysis (which incorporates a SWOT and PEST analysis), objectives, stakeholder analysis, stakeholder engagement, message (which incorporates media engagement and communication channels) and measurement as the most common steps in communication strategy implementation. Only one participant listed measurement as one of the most common steps in his/her point of view.

“...once you’ve done the situation analysis like the SWOT analysis...”

(Participant 1)

“...but I always do a SWOT and PEST analysis, because it takes them from where they are. Before we can develop a strategy, let’s look at what your strengths are. The PEST analysis, I go through that as well. No organisation can go bundling along thinking that the world is not important. And sparks their thinking perhaps. When they start looking at the society they live in. They look at the economic situation and how they can use technology not only as communication skill but how they can share information.”

(Participant 4)

“...I need to sit down and agree on objectives and from that flows everything else.”

(Participant 1)

“When you implement the strategy, for me, the most important aspect is what are the objectives...”

(Participant 3)

“Who are your most important stakeholders? Who are the people that you really want to communicate with and why?”

(Participant 4)

“It can range, from media engagement, to stakeholder engagement...”

(Participant 2)

“The quality of the different communication channels that you then use to channel your message would be key. Because you’ve done your planning, you’ve done your strategy, now what is important is that you follow through with the different channels because then the channels would then be relevant for both the message and the audience. So, how you use your channels and the preparation of those channels is very key.”

(Participant 5)

“...you’ve got to understand how to communicate with a specific audience. For example, a 20 year old audience is probably not going to be communicated with through the Business Day. You’ve got to identify the appropriate communication channels, formulate a plan to speak to the specific audience and execute on that plan. It might be social media, it might be mainstream media, it might be a set of radio audiences for instance. Essentially it’s about understanding where your audience is at and communicating with them in a language that they understand.”

(Participant 7)

“It can range, from media engagement, to stakeholder engagement to measurement and not one of them is more important than the other. They all work together.”

(Participant 2)

The findings infer that none of these terms are commonly understood and measurement is not common in public relations practice.

4.5.3.3 Question 13: How do you know if your communication strategy works? Can you give me an example of how you are able to measure it?

The terms ‘evaluation’ and ‘measurement’ were used interchangeably by the participants. It was indicated that performance management and public relations programme/activity objectives should be used as a benchmark for measurement. The responses showed that the outcomes measured during a short-term and medium to long-term communication strategy are different. An array of measurement tools were mentioned by the interview participants.

The participants' viewpoints regarding *when* measurement takes place indicate that measuring for movement during a campaign is important. Also, that measurement at the conclusion of the campaign, and not at strategic points during the strategy takes place.

Table 4.7 depicts the participants' answers with regards to measurement tools that they use to measure the success of their public relations programmes/activities.

Table 4-7 Measurement tools mentioned by participants

Participant no	Measurement tool cited
1	<p>"How are we going to change that attitude?"</p> <p>"It's going to take a combo of circumstances to educate them, provide the services to get the community involved and so on...it's all about communication"</p>
2	<p>"It can range, from media engagement, to stakeholder engagement to measurement"</p> <p>"A lot of my work involves quite detailed research. So you know perfectly well there's a perception change on how successful you've been. On the assumption that the company hasn't done something very stupid in the interim. So you can measure it that way"</p> <p>"There are any amount of metrics you can use, from column centimetres, to media engagement to social media. You can use all of them if you like"</p>
3	<p>"We have some measurement tools that we normally use, like your perception survey or your post event or campaign calls where we try to get feedback from the participants or the target audience and find out whether we have met their expectations"</p>
4	<p>"The measuring of the Community Chest project was very measurable and easy to measure because responses were measured, we managed to do the analytics thing on social media"</p> <p>"I do think that measurement is important, I do that make sure that it is part of the strategy, even if we don't do the evaluation with the publics, I always do the evaluation with my client. I always go in there with a short questionnaire and just ask where you happy with the result, what was the result, did you feel that it improved your relations with your clients, and that sort of thing"</p>
5	<p>"If your strategy is short-term, then you would almost immediately start seeing results, because if it calls for action, then their behaviour would tell you whether they understand or not. If your campaign is medium to long-term, then you would have to test, you could use a dipstick or you get feedback by following up and also by evaluating the strategy by getting client feedback"</p>
6	<p>"The longevity of the sales and how long you can keep a client for"</p>
7	<p>"You can do audience testing up front, understanding what people believe at a moment in time, i.e. once again their perceptions, and you can do audience testing thereafter, to see if their perception has changed or if it's been altered. You can</p>

	also do stakeholder testing within a specific market. You can certainly test before, during and after to see if you are gaining any message traction”
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As a result, measurement is not commonly understood, nor is measurement practiced as a habitual part of communication strategies.

4.6 Summary of interview findings

Table 4-8 Summary of interview findings

Section	Finding
Sub-research question 2	Reputation and employee engagement are the primary strategic public relations objectives.
	Public relations practitioners are excluded from the boardroom and corporate communication strategies are not seen as part of organisational strategy and public relations practitioners confuse or sometimes fail to distinguish between operational practice and strategic practice.
	Public relations practitioners are communicating to stakeholders on an operational rather than a strategic level.
	Public relations practitioners are largely confused about how messages contribute to the successful attainment of public relations strategic goals.
Sub-research question 3	The main challenges for public relations practitioners when developing and implementing communication strategies are implementing reactive communication strategies and obtaining management buy-in to communication strategies.
	Trust is important for reputation building, internally and externally and is built by management walking its talk.
	Public relations practitioners tend to have a more practical approach than a theoretical approach to public relations practice
	Public relations practice should inform public relations practice.
	Public relations practice is concerned with creating perceptions which link to reality.
Sub-research question 4	Management support to public relations programmes/activities is as important as is achieving measureable indicators of success.
	The terms ‘measurement’ and ‘evaluation’ are not commonly understood and measurement is not common in public relations practice.
	Measurement is not commonly understood, nor is measurement practiced as a habitual part of communication strategies.

4.7 Finding: main research question

The answer to the research question is public relations practitioners have a more practical approach, i.e. operational than a theoretical approach, i.e. strategic to public relations practice.

This answer is supported by the following key findings:

- Public relations practitioners disseminate information through multiple communication mediums

- Public relations practitioners are responsible in their communication
- Public relations practitioners are involved in stakeholder engagement, i.e. dialogue, to influence and change their behaviour
- Public relations practitioners consider internal communication to stakeholders inadequate
- Public relations practitioners recognise the power of communication in solving problems, i.e. implementation
- Public relations programmes/activities are underpinned by organisational vision, mission and objectives.
- Public relations practitioners possibly play a role in strategy development in the organisation as communication forms part of management's frame of reference and is situated within the annual corporate plan.
- Public relations practitioners do not provide strategic input, i.e. decision making
- Public relations practitioners consider reputation and employee engagement to be primary strategic public relations objectives.
- Public relations practitioners acknowledge that they are excluded from the boardroom
- Public relations practitioners do not consider corporate communication strategies to be part of organisational strategy
- Public relations practitioners communicate to stakeholders on an operational but not strategic level.
- Public relations practitioners include environmental scanning as part of their public relations practice.
- Public relations practitioners believe that trust is important for reputation building, internally and externally.
- Public relations practitioners are concerned with creating perceptions which link to reality.
- Public relations practitioners are confused about how messages contribute to the successful attainment of public relations strategic goals.
- Public relations practitioners do not measure routinely.

Other findings include:

- Public relations practitioners would like management acknowledgement and support of their role in the organisation.
- Public relations practitioners have no common understanding of measurement.
- Public relations practitioners are challenged by reactive communication strategies and obtaining management buy-in to communication strategies.

- Public relations practitioners trust is built by management walking its talk.
- Public relations practitioners believe consistent and targeted messages created a trustworthy perception.

4.8 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of the research regarding the alignment of the principles of corporate communication strategies as outlined in public relations theory and public relations practice were presented. The most significant results were interpreted and discussed. The research will be concluded in the following chapter.

5 CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter concludes the study which explored how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice. An overview of the research goal and objectives along with conclusions and recommendations that can be drawn from chapter 4 will be included. The research objectives and findings will be aligned and the limitations of this study will also be addressed. Suggestions for further research regarding public relations and communication strategies will be offered.

5.2 Summary of research questions

The overall goal of this study was to explore how the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice; and to understand how and why public relations practitioners use public relations theory when practicing public relations.

To accomplish the overall objective of this study, the theoretical concepts of public relations and strategy were investigated. The research objectives are stipulated below:

- to determine the core elements, as identified in literature, that make up a corporate communication strategy
- to discover how public relations practitioners frame corporate communication strategies
- to explore the core elements of corporate communication strategies in public relations practice
- to learn how public relations practitioners implement corporate communication strategies

5.3 Key findings

The key findings are summarised in table 5.1 were collapsed into the broad outlines of a communication strategy namely, context, environmental scanning, corporate reputation, stakeholders, message, strategy and objectives, and measurement. These concepts were fully discussed in chapter two.

Table 5-1 Summary of interview findings

Outline	Key findings, i.e. principles of corporate communication strategies
Context	<p>Public relations practitioners disseminate information through multiple communication mediums</p> <p>Public relations practitioners are involved in stakeholder engagement (dialogue) to influence and change their behaviour</p> <p>Public relations practitioners are responsible in their communication</p> <p>Public relations practitioners consider internal communication to stakeholders inadequate</p> <p>Public relations practitioners recognise the power of communication in solving problems (implementation)</p>
Strategy and objectives	<p>Public relations programmes/activities are underpinned by organisational vision, mission and objectives</p> <p>Public relations practitioners possibly play a role in strategy development in the organisation as communication forms part of management's frame of reference and is situated within the annual corporate plan.</p> <p>Public relations practitioners do not provide strategic input (decision making)</p> <p>Public relations practitioners acknowledge that they are excluded from the boardroom</p> <p>Public relations practitioners do not consider corporate communication strategies to be part of organisational strategy</p> <p>Public relations practitioners communicate to stakeholders on an operational but not strategic level</p> <p>Public relations practitioners consider reputation and employee engagement to be primary strategic public relations objectives.</p>
Environmental scanning	<p>Public relations practitioners include environmental scanning as part of their public relations practice.</p>
Corporate reputation	<p>Public relations practitioners believe that trust is important for reputation building, internally and externally.</p> <p>Public relations practitioners are concerned with creating perceptions which link to reality.</p>
Stakeholders	<p>Stakeholders, an important sub discipline of public relations which informs public relations strategy through stakeholder analysis, messages through target audiences and stakeholder engagement through management</p>

	of communication relationship building, reputation management. There was no key finding specifically related to stakeholders. However, it is accepted that stakeholders are normally the target audience of any communication strategy.
Message	Public relations practitioners are confused about how messages contribute to the successful attainment of public relations strategic goals.
Measurement	Public relations practitioners do not measure routinely.

5.3.1 Context

Key finding: public relations practitioners disseminate information through multiple communication mediums

This key finding supports Grunig and Hunt's (1984) public information model and Van Ruler's (2004) dissemination of information model where dissemination of information is the main focus. However, this finding is not supportive of more recent public relations goals of dialogue, collaboration, co-ordination and co-creation including Kent and Taylor's (2002) models. Halloran (2007) indicates that messages communicated by the organisation are effective when they are communicated through a variety of communication mediums

Key finding: public relations practitioners are involved in stakeholder engagement (dialogue) to influence and change their behaviour

This finding contradicts the previous finding in that it supports stakeholder engagement which is underpinned the dialogue public relations model of communication which encourages collaboration, co-ordination and co-creation. Grunig and Grunig (2000) believe that organisational objectives are easier to reach when the organisation has good relationships with their stakeholders. Strategic communication achieves this by shaping meaning, building trust, creating reputation and managing relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Zerfass & Huck, 2007). Van der Walt (2015, p. 397) explains that the way in which to successfully achieve the alignment of all stakeholders' perceptions is by "co-ordinating and aligning all internal and external messages".

Key finding: public relations practitioners are responsible in their communication

This finding is in agreement with Greenwood (2007) as well as Jonker and Foster (2005) who consider responsible organisations to be those that, among other criteria, consider their communication responsibility towards their stakeholders.

Key finding: public relations practitioners consider reputation and employee engagement to be primary strategic public relations objectives

Key finding: public relations practitioners consider internal communication to stakeholders inadequate

Key finding: public relations practitioners consider reputation and employee engagement to be primary strategic public relations objectives

Internal communication should be a priority to management as it aids in developing commitment and an understanding of organisational goals (Welch & Jackson, 2007). Bruning and Ledingham (2000) assert that the associated benefits of dialogue (stakeholder engagement) with stakeholders include enhanced corporate image and corporate reputation. Furthermore, Steyn and Puth (2000) show that organisations cannot neglect building relationships with internal stakeholders, i.e. employees as they impact the organisation's overall reputation.

Key finding: public relations practitioners recognise the power of communication in solving problems (implementation)

Public relations practitioners are able to strategically select those public relations communication models (Grunig & Hunt, 1984); (Van Ruler, 2004); (Dozier, et al., 1995); (Kent & Taylor, 2002) which serve the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives best.

5.3.2 Strategy and objectives

Key finding: public relations programmes/activities are underpinned by organisational vision, mission and objectives

This finding supports Doorley and Garcia (2007) and Van der Walt's (2015) viewpoint that communication objectives must support the overall business objectives.

Key finding: public relations practitioners possibly play a role in strategy development in the organisation as communication forms part of management's frame of reference and is situated within the annual corporate plan

According to Steyn and Puth (2000) this finding represents the ideal practice in organisations as in their view, public relations practitioners should occupy seats at an organisation's boardroom table so that they are able to play a meaningful role in the development of the organisation's overall strategy.

Key finding: public relations practitioners do not provide strategic input (decision making)

Key finding: public relations practitioners acknowledge that they are excluded from the boardroom

Key finding: public relations practitioners do not consider corporate communication strategies to be part of organisational strategy

Key finding: public relations practitioners communicate to stakeholders on an operational but not strategic level

These findings are underpinned by literature. Steyn and Puth (2000) emphasise that public relations practitioners are absent from the organisational top management structure and thus have no input into the organisation's vision, mission and strategic objectives. A reason why public relations practitioners are excluded from the boardroom may be attributed to public relations practitioners being unable to apply strategic thinking to their practice as they lack the business and management skills as well as the knowledge to understand corporate strategy (Moore, 1996). This assertion may be supported by the key finding that indicates that public relations practitioners do not consider corporate communication strategies to be part of organisational strategy. According to the literature, corporate communication strategy is an extension of the broader organisational strategy (Angelopulo, 2015) and provides "*the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with its stakeholders, i.e. it determines what should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals*" (Van Riel, 1995, p. 24). Finally, Grunig (2006, p. 51) asserts that "*the public relations profession is still far from being a research-based profession*" and despite advancements made regarding public relations research, public relations theory is still seldom used as the foundation for public relations practice (Waddington, 2014).

5.3.3 Environmental scanning

Key finding: public relations practitioners include environmental scanning as part of their public relations practice

According to (Grunig, 2006), environmental scanning enables public relations practitioners to bring an outside perspective to strategic decision making. Environmental scanning is the basis on which strategy is built and it underpins the content of corporate communication.

5.3.4 Corporate reputation

Key finding: public relations practitioners believe that trust is important for reputation building, internally and externally

This finding is in agreement with the notion that strategic communication shapes meaning, builds trust, creates reputation, and manages symbolic relationships with internal and external

stakeholders in order to support organisational growth and secure the freedom to operate (Zerfass & Huck, 2007, p. 108). Van der Walt (2015, p. 413) states that *“specific business objectives must drive the communication strategy, which in turn must serve to unite an organisation’s approach to its internal and external audiences”*.

Key finding: public relations practitioners are concerned with creating perceptions which link to reality

This finding supports the literature viewpoint that the core function of public relations relates to reputation and therefore aligns to the perception that an organisation’s stakeholders has of the organisation with the image that the organisation has set for itself as a public relations goal i.e. how organisation wants to be perceived. Furthermore, Van der Walt (2015, p. 397) explains that the way in which to successfully achieve the alignment of all stakeholders’ perceptions is by *“co-ordinating and aligning all internal and external messages”*. Thus as all communication affects perceptions, public relations communication plays a fundamental role in how an organisation is strategically positioned for internal and external stakeholders.

5.3.5 Stakeholders

There was no key finding specifically related to stakeholders. However, it is accepted that stakeholders are normally the target audience of any communication strategy.

5.3.6 Message

Key finding: public relations practitioners are confused about how messages contribute to the successful attainment of public relations strategic goals

According to Hallahan *et al.* (2007, p. 4) strategic communication purposefully advances an organisation’s mission and is *“the analysis and explanation of intentional and purposeful communicative relationships between organisations and publics.”* Connrad (1985) believes that messages should support the image of the organisation. Angelopulo and Thompson (2015, p. 36) assert that *“messages to external stakeholders have to be aligned with the strategic intent (vision and mission) of the organisation”*.

5.3.7 Measurement

Key finding: public relations practitioners do not measure routinely

This key finding is echoed by the literature. When measuring their public relations success, public relations practitioners diligently research where they began but neglect to measure whether their expectations were met (Stacks, 2010, p. 27). Ideally, measurement should take

place at each strategic points during the public relations programme/activity where achievement is expected. Ultimately, top management is exerting much pressure on public relations practitioners to prove their worth and accountability for their public relations programmes/activities (Lindenmann, 2005, p. 3) and measurement will assist to create credibility of the field.

5.4 Discussion

The research objectives were investigated by means of a survey questionnaire and telephonic interviews. The methodology used to gather information for this study is explained in chapter 3, section 3.1.2. The quantitative data was analysed by means of the survey software programme Google Forms and the qualitative data was analysed by applying thematic analysis. Refer to chapter 3, section 3.3 for a discussion in this regard.

The sample profile of the questionnaire respondents and interview participants consisted of individuals registered with the Institute for Public Relations and Communication Management of Southern Africa (PRISA).and the questionnaires and interviews were geared to investigate the public relations practitioner. Although the stakeholder is an important consideration in public relations, the stakeholders' perception of the public relations practitioner's efforts was not investigated. However, it should be noted that corporate communication strategy is aimed at building the organisation-stakeholder relationship in some form or other.

The recommendations offered in this chapter may be useful for the public relations profession and academics as it will increase the credibility of the profession and research in public relations practice which will in due course influence public relations theory.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations are highlighted:

The need to educate public relations practitioners regarding the theory of how to develop and implement communication strategies is important, however, the crux of the matter is that public relations practitioners need to undertake more research so that public relations academics can use this practical knowledge to create and test theory that is relevant to the field's practical applications.

Increasing the knowledge of public relations practitioners regarding the theory of communication strategies will assist in improving the status of public relations and the perceived value of the profession.

More research needs to be done on measurement and the evaluation of corporate communication strategies to establish the public relations practitioner as a strategist.

5.6 Final conclusion

In answering the research question “How the principles of corporate communication strategies outlined in public relations theory align to public relations practice” the research found that public relations practitioners have a more practical approach, i.e. operational than a theoretical approach, i.e. strategic to public relations practice.

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7 APPENDIX A

8 APPENDIX B

11 APPENDIX E