Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

An evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology

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Mini-Thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree

Magister Technologiae: Public Relations Management

in the Faculty of Informatics and Design at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology

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District Six Campus

November 2020

DECLARATION

I, **Grant Abraham Barends**, declare that the contents of this dissertation/thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the dissertation/thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Grant Barends   December 2020

Signed   Date

ABSTRACT

This research explored the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology. The researcher used Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory as a theoretical framework to explore corporate communication as a strategic management function. The researcher adopted a qualitative research approach for the study. With the application of a qualitative research approach, the researcher was able to obtain an understanding of the role that communication practitioners provide within the institution, and it also allowed the researcher to get a valuable insight of executive management's perspective of the role of corporate communication practitioners.

The findings aligned with the research objectives of evaluating the role of corporate communication that allowed the researcher to develop sub-themes, followed by the themes of strategic management function highlighted in the literature review. Some of the findings demonstrates that although most of the participants believe that corporate communication should operate at an executive management level; majority of participants perform functional roles within communication that consists of drafting, writing, editing communication to mostly internal staff via internal platforms and organisational website that portrays CPUT in a positive light on behalf of management. Many of the participants indicated that corporate communication is better suited under the Marketing and Communication Department (MCD), because the functions are interrelated, dependent on each other and staff within the unit support each other. However, one participant expressed the need for independence because practitioners will be more effective.

The study allowed the researcher to make conclusions and recommendation that will contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function within higher education. Grunig and Grunig's (2008:342) states that future research should help corporate communication evolve as a strategic management function and continually re-institutionalise itself to adjust to changes in organisations, communication technologies and societal expectations."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

I dedicate this mini-thesis to my wonderful wife, Jolene and my amazing, beautiful girls, Gilah and Jadah.

Jolene, you are soulmate, my love, my rock, support, my confidant and my prayer warrior a woman after God's own heart. The sacrifices and the encouragements you have made for me to complete my studies. I can only say that when God made you, He must have been thinking about me. Thank you, my Love.

Gilah and Jadah, you mean the world to Mumma and Dadda. The unconditional love and understanding you have portrayed to allow Dadda to complete the studies just shows your beautiful hearts and kindness you have towards Mumma and Dadda and for the Lord. I love you forever, my girls.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Title

An evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology.

1.2 Introduction

"I see future CEOs coming from Public Relations" - Jean Michel Dumont (2016)

This research seeks to explore the fundamentals that demonstrate corporate communication as a strategic management function. Corporate communication is currently not operating at the executive level, but rather acting at an operational level as a service unit to executive management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT). This research intends to answer the question "how do corporate communication practitioners provide a strategic role at an executive management level?" Furthermore, the study aims to investigate the current role of corporate communication and the public relations department (that is currently operating as separate entities within the Marketing and Communication Department). The goal is to ascertain whether they are contributing to the organisational goals and objectives set by executive management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT).

This section provides conceptual definitions to understand the overlapping roles of corporate communication and public relations, especially as it relates to the present study,

The overall theme of corporate communication (CC) has strategic management objectives that include management of communication between organisations and various publics and also relationship building through stakeholder engagement. Van Riel (1995:24) defines corporate communication as the "integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at relevant target groups." The terms corporate communication and public relations are used interchangeably by various experts in the field of corporate communication. For the study, this researcher seeks to establish corporate communication as a strategic management function. Steyn (1999:24) states that corporate communication is preferred when referring to corporate communication strategy since public relations is more commonly known as external communication to many organisations. Still, corporate communication incorporates both internal and external communication.

Cutlip, Center and Broom (1985:4) define public relations (PR) as "a management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and

the publics on whom its success or failure depends". Although the role of practitioners is to communicate; maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship is also relevant and essential to the organisation and all stakeholders (internal and external).

According to Grunig and Hunt (1984:6), public relations practitioners manage and execute communication for the organisation as a whole. It is for this reason that at CPUT, both are used interchangeably by the Marketing and Communication Department (MCD). For the present study, corporate communication is the umbrella term also used to include public relations. It is vital for the study because it evaluates the strategic management role that corporate communication and public relations practitioners provide at a university of technology - in this instance, at the CPUT. The study draws from Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence theory* which complements the study's objective to explore aspects of corporate communication as a strategic management function. The researcher integrated the approach into the rest of the research, especially the literature review section.

1.3   Background to the study

For many years, the function of corporate communication and the role of corporate communication practitioners has been a contentious subject at CPUT. The advancement of marketing, media and events' departments into the public relations domain has caused executive management to misunderstand the actual profession. The perceived role of corporate communication practitioners at a strategic management level amongst executive management, can either be attributed to misunderstanding or lack of knowledge.

In addition to the encroachment of marketing into the corporate communication domain, the location of corporate communication within the hierarchy of the institutional organogram serves as a non-excellent corporate communication function. According to Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337), corporate communication practitioners should not report to managers who are not familiar with the discipline, and who do not ascribe to corporate communication mandate. At CPUT, the corporate communication practitioners, public relations practitioner and the media liaison practitioner operate as separate entities within the MCD, which services and supports executive management. In other words, practitioners with different designations and job functions of MCD receive instruction directly from executive management and thus report directly to the institution's Vice-Chancellor (VC). The VC and executive management are, therefore, unable to as ascertain the true nature of the corporate communication function within the strategic management contingent.

Since the #FeesMustFall protests (a student-led protest movement aimed at stopping the increase in student fees, as well as advocating for increased funding for tertiary institutions), CPUT has gone through many challenges and changes. The changes have resulted in severe

reputational damage and a high turnover of executive managers (4 Vice Chancellors in the last five years). As a result, employees felt insecure and uncertain about their future. Job security stemming from changes with permanent and contract positions (in and out-sourcing), budget cuts and salary negotiations hampered the institution's efforts to progress strategically. Many stakeholders were disillusioned and unsatisfied during this challenging period due to the institution's communication style. Communication between executive management and their stakeholders were minimal and to an extent, non-existent. According to Abrahams and Toyer (2018:20), stakeholders believe that CPUT could improve in their communication and be more effective by incorporating new ways of communication with traditional methods of communication. By blending conventional forms of communication with contemporary techniques, CPUT can bridge the communication gap and communicate with all stakeholders on all communication platforms.

The absence of corporate communication at a strategic level and the inability to have direct influence at executive management level could be detrimental to the organisation's image, reputation and ultimately organisational effectiveness as was demonstrated in the past such as #FeesMustFall protests. Corporate communication practitioners excel because they possess the expertise and knowledge to engage with stakeholders that can ensure effective communication, through communication strategies that could be beneficial to the organisation and all its stakeholders. According to Grunig and Grunig (2008:335), there are four categories of excellent corporate communication function:

- Empowerment of the corporate communication function
    - Empowering corporate communication as a critical management function
- Communicator roles
    - Corporate communication practitioners must have a managerial role
- The organisation of the communication function
    - Corporate communication should be an integrated communication function and not subsidiary to marketing or other management functions
- Corporate communication models
    - Building corporate communication and on two-way symmetrical model

The categories highlighted by Grunig and Grunig provides the foundation for an *excellent* corporate communication function. Grunig and Grunig (2008:339) states that the *excellence* theory is "the most important component to the contribution of corporate communication as a strategic management function". Practitioners must apply excellent corporate communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness. In a less ideal environment, most practitioners

operate in a functional role by writing stories for newsletters and company websites, creating an impression of misrepresentation and misunderstanding amongst management.

Steyn (1999:22) explains that Chief Executive Officers (CEO's) admit that their lack of knowledge and understanding of the function of corporate communications contributes toward the misrepresentation of communication practitioners and managers. They (communication managers) should not isolate themselves within their departments, but should rather familiarise themselves with the organisation, be proactive and professional" (Steyn, 1999:22). Without the expertise of conceptualising, formulating and implementation of communication strategies, CPUT's image and reputation could tarnish even further and could ultimately impede on organisational goals. According to Steyn (2009:3), executive management does not have the knowledge to provide strategic direction on issues that relate to strategic communication management.

The independence of the public relations profession has many times come under scrutiny in terms of ownership because the public relations department has been considered a subsidiary component of media and marketing departments. According to Grunig and Grunig (2013:19), public relations departments will optimally function if they operate independently; and below par when they are a subsidiary of the marketing department.

The function of executive management is to operate at a strategic level, and a significant objective for them is to achieve organisational effectiveness. Profit margins, stakeholder relations and setting up goals, such as the organisation's vision and mission statement, are all traditional functions set at a strategic level by executive management. Grunig and Grunig (2000:308) state that strategic public relations include "strategic planning, managing objectives and evaluation connected to organisational objectives." Therefore, the setting of strategic objectives, vision and mission of organisations are strategic functions that should be inclusive of public relations practitioners' role at a strategic level within an organisation.

Corporate communication practitioners are responsible for the drafting of corporate messages that speaks to stakeholders and ensuring that stakeholders' objectives align with organisational goals. Ultimately, the development and implementation of an effective communication strategy aimed at communicating effectively with primary stakeholders have many benefits, the overriding one being contributing towards the organisation's overall effectiveness (Steyn, 2002:23). A corporate communication strategy is an extension of the broader organisational strategy (Angelopulo, 2015).

Does executive management consider public relations to play a strategic role in strategic issues at the executive management level? Esler's (1996:9-12) study of Executive Management and PR practitioners showed that these two groups approached PR and its role

in the organisation from different perspectives.   When PR executives spoke about communication, they were usually referring to the products, programmes and activities that the PR team had created. When the Executive Management talked about PR and communication, they usually described it in terms of results, or solutions to critical problems (Esler, 1996:9-12).

Should the study be accepted, the strategic role that corporate communication practitioners could provide, could be pivotal to CPUT in the way they communicate with stakeholders and ultimately have a positive influence on the organisation's image, reputation and progression. Through in-depth interviews with executive management, corporate communication and public relations practitioners, the study will address concepts that relate to the strategic management function of corporate communication. This research study hopes to highlight concepts through the theory that relates to the strategic management of corporate communication such as the strategic management, social responsibility, reputation management, corporate governance, stakeholder management and boundary spanning. By highlighting the various concepts, the focus of the research will be to contribute to Grunig and Grunig's excellence theory, expanding the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function. Grunig and Grunig (2008:342) states that the future of the *excellence* theory is evolutionary and should evolve for corporate communication to operate as a strategic management function.

1.4 Rationale and motivation for the study

The rationale for the study is to contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function, reflecting on literature and experts within the discipline of corporate communication and focusing on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory. Corporate communication practitioners at CPUT will be able to use the research to contribute effectively to MCD and CPUT's overall objectives by evaluating their current roles to that of an excellent corporate communication function. The study will give executive management clarity that corporate communication can operate at a strategic management level.

With the expertise that practitioners can bring to the boardroom, they will be in an ideal position to create and spearhead suitable corporate communication strategies that will satisfy the needs of all stakeholders. CPUT provides a service to a vast group of heterogeneous stakeholders across a wide geographical area. Cornelissen (2008) highlights that corporate communication as a management function, especially in organisations with a wide range of services, and with a wide geographical range, must be coordinated as a strategic management function (Cornelissen, cited Mohamed and Abu Baker, 2018).

Given that traditional means of corporate communication could not avert the challenges CPUT faced post #Feesmustfall, it becomes imperative to incorporate corporate communication as a strategic management function. According to Mohamed and Abu Baker (2018:241), the communication abilities of management are limited and dated; managers welcome corporate communication practitioners to provide them with guidance on how to communicate strategically.

1.5 Statement of the research problem

The absence of corporate communication as a strategic management function at universities of technology has resulted in the urgent need to address the communication gaps between executive management and its stakeholders; by determining the role that corporate communication practitioners in marketing and communication departments provide at strategic levels in higher education. Whilst the location (MCD) of corporate communication within the institution is precise, Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory highlights the importance of corporate communication as a management function independent of marketing.

Whilst the absence of corporate communication practitioners persists at boardroom level, CPUT will continue to operate at a level that could be detrimental to their reputation and image. Steyn (1999:26) states that most organisations have corporate communication practitioners playing the role of technicians, providing communication and journalistic skills to implement decisions made by others. Although corporate communication practitioners provide an operational function at CPUT, the need to re-evaluate corporate communication as a strategic management function has become critical, because of CPUT's exponential growth in services and stakeholders over the last decade, resulting in various communication gaps.

1.6 Significance of the research

The significance of this research is:
- To provide corporate communication practitioners with the opportunity to evaluate their current role as practitioners.
- To contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function in higher education.
- To enhance the discipline's credibility within the communication landscape, by contributing to the academic literature.

1.7 Main Research Question

How does corporate communication contribute to the development of the strategic management function?

1.7.1 Research sub-questions

- What are the factors that validate corporate communication as a strategic management function?
- To what extent are CPUT communication practitioners positioned within the strategic management role?
- How does the current role of corporate communication practitioners align itself with Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory?

1.7.2 Research objectives

The study has the following research objectives:

1.7.2.1 To contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function.

1.7.2.2 To accentuate the strategic role that corporate communication practitioners can provide at the executive management level.

1.7.2.3 To establish the functional role CPUT communication practitioners are currently practising at CPUT.

1.7.2.4 To investigate the methods applied by corporate communication practitioners, to determine whether they are aligned with Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory.

1.7.3 Hypothesis

- The role that corporate communication practitioners provide at CPUT is operational and not strategic.

1.8 Review of literature

This research will explore the theoretical framework that emphasises corporate communication as a strategic management function. Based on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory, the theoretical framework will include literature to contextualise the role of corporate communication practitioners as a strategic management function. The *excellence* theory will, therefore provide the theoretical framework that will strengthen the various concepts, which will contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic

management function. Drawing on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory, the theoretical framework will also focus on the corporate communication models that will demonstrate the nature of communication that practitioners provide at CPUT.

According to Hayes (2008:14) "the challenges and opportunities for corporations thrust into the global spotlight are catalysts for corporate communication to rethink its role and purpose, given the need for corporations to build strategic and sustainable relationships." By incorporating corporate communication as a strategic management function, the opportunity to achieve effective communication and organisational effectiveness could hold more benefits to the institution.

Grunig and Grunig's (2008:342) excellence theory states "the need for future research should be developed to help corporate communication evolve as a strategic management function and continually re-institutionalise itself to adjust to changes in organisations, communication technologies and societal expectations." By conducting the study, this researcher will attempt to understand corporate communication as a strategic management function and adjust to an ever-changing world of corporate communication.

Strategic management, corporate governance, social responsibility, reputation management, stakeholder management and boundary spanning will be explored.

1.8.1 Strategic Management

The corporate communication function within an organisation is to engage with stakeholders internally and externally by gathering information and disseminating messages that will lead to organisational effectiveness. To achieve organisational effectiveness, companies manage stakeholders and corporate resources effectively and optimally to achieve their strategic objectives. Steyn (2007:3) emphasises that the role of public relations consist of more than just a functional role, instead "public relations should operate in a strategic role and assists an organisation in adapting to its environment by feeding it with intelligence concerning reputation, strategic stakeholders and societal issues." Grunig and Grunig (1992:65-90) argue that for public relations to achieve excellence, "practitioners should take part in managing the decision-making process." Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005:89) suggest that "effective communication practitioners are those who speak the same language as executive management and have a deep understanding of the organisation and its strategy." The chance of miscommunication or not being on the same page exist in any organisation. However, to close the communication gaps between the organisation and stakeholders, corporate communication practitioners provide an essential role between the parties involved. According

to Grunig and Grunig's (2008:335) *excellence* theory, corporate communication practitioners "must be part of the dominant coalition of the organisation". To close the communication gaps and to avoid misunderstanding within the organisation, corporate communication practitioners must operate at a strategic management level.

Corporate communication practitioners would provide management with strategic direction, through conceptualisation, application and implementation of communication strategies. Steyn (2002:21) highlights that "corporate communication practitioners should function as strategists at top management or macro level of the organisation to optimise services."

Practitioners communicate with various stakeholders on behalf of the organisation to achieve organisational goals set by executive management, ensuring that the conduct of all parties is responsible and in a mutually beneficial manner. Grunig and Grunig (2008:339) *excellence* theory suggests that to enhance strategic management, corporate communication must be an essential part of the management of every organisation and the function of corporate communication will assist the organisation to engage with stakeholders to achieve organisational goals that is mutually beneficial. Therefore, communication practitioners will effectively manage all (internal and external) communication between stakeholders that is strategic, to influence the progress of the organisation. Grunig and Hunt (1984:6) state that corporate communication is "the management of communication between organisations and its publics.

The creation, implementation and dissemination of corporate communication strategies are vital elements aligned with strategic management, and executive management must understand the importance of correct information and techniques when communication takes place with various stakeholders. Forman and Argenti (2005:251) state that corporate communication function was tightly connected to strategy implementation, formulation and development." The communication strategy is, therefore, a strategic management function and Argenti, Howell and Beck (2005:83) highlight strategic communication as "communication aligned with the organisation's overall strategy to enhance its strategic positioning."

The very basis of Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence theory* is to establish corporate communication as a strategic management function. Grunig and Grunig (2008:334) *excellence* theory states that corporate communication should function in such a way that it is possible to identify strategic stakeholders as part of the strategic management process to build mutually beneficial relationships.

1.8.2 Stakeholder management

The public relations function revolves around the study of organisations and people (stakeholders). Organisations that embark on strategic decisions utilises experts in their respective fields that ensure organisational effectiveness. They employ marketing specialists to focus on marketing and sales and engineers that will focus on technical aspects of the product. It would therefore make sense to include the professionals who best understand the company's publics in the decision making and strategic management process. PR professionals possess the expertise to advise and give strategic input to executive management when they make decisions that impact stakeholders.

Freeman (1984:46) states that a stakeholder is "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives." Freeman (2004) highlights that stakeholders are "those groups without whose support the organisation would cease to exist."

Public relations practitioners are in a unique position to identify and communicate with stakeholders. Brønn (2001) states that "those responsible for communicating with stakeholders, those who have their fingers on the pulse of what is happening in society, need to play a major role in strategy formulation". Failure to communicate with stakeholders due to limited access with all stakeholders can be detrimental to an organisation. Sherman states that "corporate communication practitioners have the most reliable knowledge of the organisation's stakeholders, are being *kept out of the loop* when decisions are being made, and this is a major a major strategic limitation for organisations," (Prahaled and Hamel, cited in Sherman,2014).

Should organisations consider the opinions of their stakeholders and make decisions accordingly, the organisations could become more successful in terms of output and communication. Steyn (2002:13), explains that stakeholder management incorporates people with the knowledge, characteristics and the expertise of working with all stakeholder concerns. Sirgy (2002:143-152) concurs by saying that stakeholder relations directly impact institutional performance. He explains that the organisation's growth and survival is determined by relationship quality with stakeholders. Argenti (1997:442) states that when organisations adopt the stakeholders' approach, they perform better, the more closely they engage everyone affected by their operations.

Grunig and Grunig (2008:339) highlights that when corporate communication practitioners' functions within a strategic management role they "manage communication between management and publics to build relationships with publics to contribute to the strategic decision process of the organisation". Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence theory* is based

on communication that will increase the level of stakeholder engagement with the organisation to build on long term relationships and develop trust between the organisation and its publics.

1.8.3 Reputation Management

Many organisations and executive management do not understand corporate communication discipline. Watt (2009:1) states that "corporate communication is misunderstood". Only when an issue becomes a crisis, only then, do organisations recognise the importance of the profession. This makes sense because corporate communication practitioners understand the organisation and its stakeholders and know what messages to communicate and to which audience.

All stakeholders can affect the reputation of the organisation positively and negatively. It is therefore vitally important for communication practitioners to engage with all stakeholders in a manner which is transparent and mutually beneficial. According to Rawlins (2006:12) "stakeholders that become active publics and that can influence the success of an organisation or can appeal to the other stakeholders with that influence, should become priority publics for communication strategies".

Corporate communication helps the organisation have an influence on stakeholders by building the organisation's image and reputation that is favourable to all parties. According to Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:36), reputation management is high on the list of the corporate communication function. The role of practitioners is, therefore, to manage the reputation of the organisation by engaging in crisis communication and drafting of contingency plans to safeguard the organisation from bad press and developing a bad reputation. Communication practitioners have many times remedied and rescued the organisation' reputation and coffers. Bechan (2008:7) states that "the aim of this would be to help the organisation maintain and create mutually beneficial relationships, trust and a positive reputation," According to Cornelissen (2004:5) "the purpose of corporate communication is to establish and maintain favourable reputation with stakeholder groups, upon which the organisation is dependent."

Doorley and Garica (2007) define corporate communication as being "the centralised management of communication on behalf of the organisation; the function is a critical contributor to an organisation's reputation – and thereby its competitiveness, productivity and financial success."

The excellence theory refers to the corporate communication models that signify excellence corporate communication be based on the two-way symmetrical model of corporate communication. In so doing, practitioners provide two-way communication that encourages

mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and stakeholders, which results in favourable reputation and reduces negative publicity.

1.8.4 Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Social Investment (CSI)

From an organisational perspective, corporate social responsibility is becoming more widespread amongst many organisations. A company that does not participate in corporate social responsibilities runs the risk of creating a bad image and bad reputation. Organisations have become part of the communities they operate in, and these communities usually judge them, should they fail to contribute to civic societies. According to Capriotti and Moreno (2007:85), corporate social responsibility is one of the essential functions in corporate communication and the relationship between the two in practice are very similar.

Grunig and Hunt (1984:6) describe public relations as the management of communication between an organisation and its publics". From a relationship perspective Capriotti and Moreno (2007:85) describe corporate social responsibility as the "stated commitments of an organisation and its relationship with its different kind of publics in the fulfilment of its economic, social and environmental duties". For an organisation to be able to relate with stakeholders and to be effective, they need to be interactive and communicate with all stakeholders and contribute to societies and communities. The achievement of organisational effectiveness and the contribution from management towards the triple bottom line forms part of corporate communication as a strategic management function. The triple bottom line embraces the economic, environmental and social responsibilities of the organisation. "The triple bottom line currently exists as a kind of balanced scorecard that captures in numbers and words the degree to which any organisation is or is not creating value for its shareholders and society" (Savitz and Weber, 2014:4-6).

In a global economy, consumers demand transparency from corporations and do not spend their hard-earned money until they like what they see. Organisations do not operate in isolation from the world, and CSR is no longer an option. According to Selcraig (2006:101), investors are screening the organisations they commit their money to. The PR department could gain influence by suggesting CSR initiatives that position the business as a good corporate citizen. Pellegrini (2012:26) defines corporate citizenship as the organisation's responsibility towards society. It also involves the social responsibility of businesses and the extent to which they meet legal, ethical and economic responsibilities.

The rise of social media has had an impact on the way communication practitioners' function (see Mbinjama-Gamatham 2014). Stakeholders may use social media to defame or complement the organisation. The same way investors have an eagle eye on the organisation where they have invested interest. Practitioners have, therefore, an obligation to management

communication well, because, without strategic communication, the organisation could be negatively impacted. According to Bechan (2011:139) "communication specialist implements a variety of strategic initiatives to develop and maintain good relations with stakeholders and investors". According to Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337) *excellence theory*, communication practitioners who operate on the symmetrical model generates effects that balance the interests of the organisation and its stakeholders. Investors are more inclined to commit to the organisation who are transparent and operate on the symmetrical model.

1.8.5 Corporate governance

An organisation's dedication toward stakeholders can activate corporate governance by being responsible citizens and by demonstrating the principles highlighted in the King III report. By showing corporate governance, organisations will adopt the following principles: discipline, transparency, independence, accountability, responsibility, fairness and social responsibility. These seven principles will enable organisations to measure and report on their corporate citizenship. Judin (2016:2) states that "complying with good corporate governance is not only important but rather critically important for the corporate communication industry".

The triple bottom line (people, planet, and profit), is the underlying theme that navigates corporate governance within the organisation. Organisations are becoming more socially responsible for members of society. In the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function, organisations cannot operate in isolation, but rather embrace and contribute to the triple bottom line for the organisation to be effective. De Beer and Steyn (2012:30) defines communication management "as the management of communication between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders and other societal interest groups". The common denominator between corporate communication and corporate governance is that both are responsible for communicating with stakeholders. The King III report (2009:100) identifies that "corporate governance recognises that organisations have many stakeholders who can affect the organisation in achieving their objectives".

"Corporate governance is concerned with holding the balance between economic and social goals and between individual and communal goals. The aim is to align as nearly as possible the interests of individuals, corporations and society" (Cadbury, 2000:7-15). An objective of corporate communication practitioners must be to communicate with stakeholders in a trustworthy manner that will build and foster good relations that is mutually beneficial to all parties involved. De Beer and Steyn (2012:32) states that strategic communication will assist the organisation with corporate governance to act socially responsible and thus obtain legitimacy, trust and build a good reputation.

Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence theory* highlights the importance of developing an ethical framework for corporate communication practitioners to use as they operate at a strategic management function.

1.8.6 Environmental Spanning or boundary spanning

The best way to manage a crisis is through forecasting and predicting possible outcomes. Grunig (2006:162) describes "that the most successful corporate communication departments participated fully in strategic management by activating environmental scanning of the organisation by bringing in outside perspectives and strategic decision making." Steyn (2007:5) affirms that "communication practitioners would be involved in activities such as environmental scanning, gathering information regarding stakeholder concerns and expectations and interpreting this information concerning consequences for the organisation."

According to De Beer and Steyn (2012:31), the "central concepts of strategic communication management are environmental scanning with the view to identify and managing stakeholders and issues". Corporate communication practitioners can add value to the organisation by identifying stakeholders and developing different strategies to engage with the groups that affect the organisation by adopting the function of boundary spanning and environmental scanners. In so doing, practitioners will collect valuable data that organisations can positively use that could have harmed the organisation in the future.

The strategic role of boundary spanning has its benefits by scanning the business environment for trends to give the organisation a competitive advantage. Dollinger (1984:366) states that "boundary spanning is a strategic management function, and it provides organisations an edge in the marketplace." The focus of Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence theory* is to establish corporate communication as a strategic management function. Grunig and Grunig (2008:342) states that "the *excellence* theory is evolutionary". Environmental scanning must be in place to enhance corporate communication to a strategic management function, as an essential concept and a communication role to enhance the strategic role of corporate communication.

1.9 Research design

The research will be categorised as an empirical study to acquire knowledge, through the experience of those in the field of corporate communication. The researcher wishes to explore the role of corporate communication practitioners and to get an understanding of executive managements' perspective about the corporate communication function at CPUT and compare these findings to the corporate communication literature that posits best practice in this regard. In other words, the research aims to benchmark CPUT's corporate communication practices with excellence in corporate communication, which will be

extrapolated in the literature review, with a distinct focus on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory.

Leedy (1997:195) defines the term 'research design' as "the plan for the study, providing the overall framework for collecting data."

Researcher's proposed framework:

Research paradigm   Research method   Data Collection   Sample population   Data analysis

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Explorative  →  Qualitative  →  Interviews  →  Corporate        →  Thematic
                                                Communication        analysis
                                                Practitioners &
                                                Executive
                                                Management
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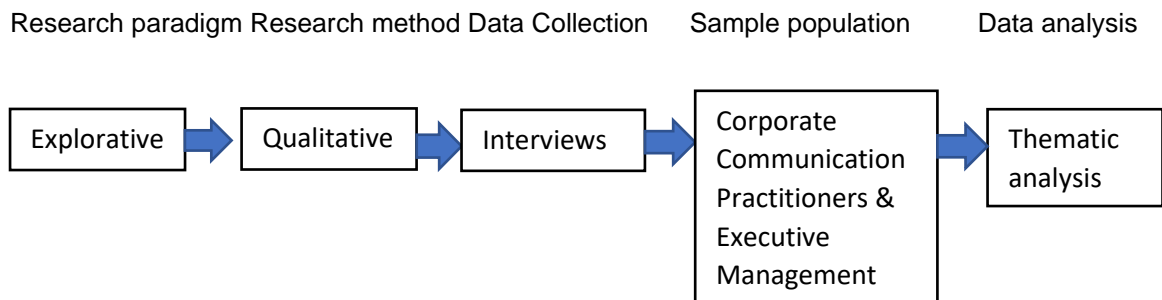
The research will adopt an exploratory design approach to answer the research questions for the study. Neuman (2014:38) states that exploratory research is moderately unfamiliar territory and that not much is known about the topic or the population. By utilising the explorative approach, the researcher's understanding is that little is known about the role of corporate communication practitioners at CPUT and their connection as a strategic management function. The researcher will adopt a qualitative research approach for the study. Cresswell (2014:32) suggests that "by adopting the qualitative research approach, the researcher will be able to explore and understand the meaning individuals and groups ascribe to certain issues". By conducting the study amongst communication practitioners and executive management, it will allow the researcher to understand the role that practitioners provide and also get a perspective of management's understanding of practitioners' role.

According to Cresswell (2014:37), a small number of participants characterises qualitative approach, and it consists of a subjective, ontological context; whereby individuals develop meanings and understanding toward certain things through experience and interpretation. The participants were purposefully selected; that is why the qualitative approach is suitable because the sample size is relatively small and the researcher are exploring the interpretation and experience of the role of corporate communication practitioners and executive management. Cresswell (2014:242) suggests that the best qualitative data collection process for the intended research will be to conduct semi-structured interviews, backed-up by audio recording the interviews and finally to transcribe the interviews. The qualitative design includes participants purposefully to take part in the research process (semi-structured interviews) during the data collection process to get an understanding of the role of corporate communication practitioners. According to Cresswell (2014), the final process of research

design will consist of analysing (thematic analysis) and interpretation of the data. Lastly, the research design process will be concluded by adopting a thematic analysis to examine the qualitative data, by reading the transcribed information, identifying common themes and concepts, coding the data and documenting the findings.

A further discussion about the research design will be detailed in chapter three.

1.9.1 Population and sample

Research population, according to Bryman and Bell (2014:170) is defined as "the universe of units, like people, nations and organisations from which the sample is to be selected."

The intended study will be conducted at a university of technology, specifically CPUT. The sample population for the engaged research are all currently working within the marketing and communication department. They are as follows; 1 public relations practitioner, 3 corporate communication practitioners and one media relations practitioner (5 representatives in total). Although the designation of the representatives is different, they are all involved in corporate communication to a certain degree by engaging with various stakeholders daily.

The decision to use the identified representatives as the population is based on the knowledge that all representatives have the first-hand experience in corporate communication. It is also based on the assumption that all have met the minimum requirements set by CPUT to function in the role of corporate communication practitioners. Also, the researcher considers the representatives to be vital to the study of corporate communication to establish their current function and align that to corporate communication theory and ultimately to assist corporate communication practitioners to evolve as a strategic management function.

The decision to use the population for this study are also based on the knowledge that they are employed by the organisation to execute certain communication functions, directed at various stakeholders. Combined, the participants have years of experience of working in the communication field, specifically within newsrooms and within CPUT. The average age group of participants ranges between 35 and 50 years of age and shows that practitioners have many years of experience within their respective roles. The minimum qualifications of all participants are B-Tech degrees, which give the participants an excellent theoretical background, coupled with the necessary work experience. Members of the executive (approximately 2 representatives) will also be interviewed, to acquire their understanding and expectations of the corporate communication discipline and the roles performed by those working as communication practitioners. See attached, Appendix 2.

The same questions structured for corporate communication practitioners will apply for public relations and media relations practitioners, respectively, because of the different designation.

Wherever corporate communication appears in a specific question will be replaced for the participant that will be interviewed. See attached, Appendix1.

1.9.2 Research methodology and methods

The research methodology incorporates the tools and processes that will be employed to answer the research question (Babbie and Mouton, 2012) and will include two types, namely, quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

The research methodology takes the form of a qualitative method, and structured interviews will be used as the data collection process. According to Cresswell (2014:239), qualitative interviews generally involves obtaining information through experience and the views of participants. By conducting structured interviews, the researcher will get information and the opinions of practitioners and executive management of the role of corporate communication practitioners within CPUT.

Neuman (2014:38) states that "exploratory research primary goal is to examine issues and develop preliminary thoughts about it." The research is exploratory and seeks to understand how corporate communication practitioners can provide a strategic management function by exploring strategic management literature that is based on corporate communication function.

According to Neuman (2014:70), the researcher that uses "the inductive approach confirms a theory that begins with empirical evidence and works towards more abstract concepts." The researcher will provide an inductive approach to answering the research question by reflecting on what is taking place within the workplace by conducting interviews with corporate communication practitioners.

1.10 Limitations of the study

Although the researcher acknowledges that many other organisational theories exist, the research is limited to the study of public relations and communications theories. The sample population for the intended research is limited and confined to one department (marketing and communication) at CPUT and some of its executive members.

1.11 Permission to conduct the study

The director of Marketing and Communication has approved the commencement of the research study. After the agreement, written permission has already been obtained as confirmation to conduct the research. Ethical clearance needs to be obtained from the executive management committee to complete the research amongst executive management. The protocol to get the approval is as follows; the student's supervisor would address a letter to the Head of the Research Committee within the chosen faculty, this individual would then

forward a formal request to the executive committee on the students' behalf. The research committee meets monthly. They would subsequently share their feedback with the Head of the Research Committee, who would revert to the supervisor for approval or not approved.

1.12 Outline of chapters and proposed timelines

Chapter content	Mini Thesis	Date
Chapter 1: Introduction	Finalising research proposal	July 2020
Chapter 2: The literature review	Theoretical research	August 2020, September 2020
Chapter 3: Research design and methodology	Fieldwork: data collection, analysing of data	September 2020
Chapter 4: Findings and conclusions	Drafting of findings and concluding	October 2020
Chapter 5: Recommendation	Drafting of recommendations	October 2020, November 2020
Completion	Submission of the final document	1 December 2020

Table 1-1: Chapters outlined

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will explore the theoretical framework that emphasises corporate communication as a strategic management function within an academic institution. CPUT is the only university of technology operating in the Western Cape region of South Africa and provides services to an estimated 38 000 staff and students combined. Because of the exponential growth in terms of stakeholders and infrastructures of the institution over the last 20 years, it is essential to review the function of corporate communication practitioners within the institution. Premised on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) excellence theory, the theoretical framework will include literature to contextualise the role of corporate communication practitioners as a strategic management function.

The excellence theory will provide the theoretical framework that will strengthen the various concepts such as strategic management, corporate governance, social responsibility, reputation management, stakeholder management and boundary spanning. It will contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function.

The literature review will also focus on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory that will focus on the corporate communication models and four categories of an *excellent* corporate communication function that will highlight best practises within an organisation.

2.2 Strategic Management

To understand the concept of strategic management, one would need to understand the environment (the type of business, stakeholders, services and products) and the objectives of corporate communication practitioners. However, a lack of understanding of the environment that the organisation operates could be harmful and could potentially increase the risk of organisational losses and damages. According to Porter (1990:79), an understanding of the environment of operation creates a strategic advantage to organisations. Grunig (2011:15) associates institutional and social milieus directly to stakeholder publics that can determine the mission and objectives of an organisation that includes governments, communities' investors, employees and other stakeholders. It is therefore essential to understand the environment corporate communication practitioners are operating in at CPUT. In the context of the academic domain, the engagement with stakeholders and their function within the

institution will give them a strategic advantage if they have a clear understanding of their environment.

When corporate communication practitioners have gained a strategic advantage of their environment, the organisational objectives become less complicated, and communication with stakeholders is more effective. The achievement of organisational goals can potentially improve corporate communication contributions to the strategic management function. Grunig (2011:16) states that when corporate communication operates as a strategic management function, the organisational effectiveness becomes clear, through the building of relations with stakeholders. Corporate communication provides strategic direction to the organisation by engaging strategically with stakeholders through the development and implementation of communication strategy.

2.2.1   Historical role of corporate communication

Steyn (2002:2) defines corporate communication as the management function to identify and manage issues and stakeholders, building mutually beneficial relationships through strategic communication to achieve organisational objectives. According to Grunig and Hunt (1984:91), [in the past?] corporate communication technicians provided communication and journalistic skills that included writing, editing, audio and visual messages and content to carry out communication programmes. Corporate communication practitioners were not involved in decision making of the organisation, but only performed pre-described duties and followed instructions. However, corporate communication practitioners traditionally occupied the role of a communication manager, who systematically planned and managed organisational communication plans and communication policy (Grunig and Hunt, 1984:91).

According to Steyn (1999:40), the communication technician and the communication manager had similar, but distinct roles. While the communication technician operated at what would be regarded as a lower level, he/she nonetheless, performed corporate communication duties requiring communication and journalistic skills. Similarly, the communication manager performed duties such as planning, implementation and evaluation of communication messages, although the roles were considered good practice, it was not *excellent*. The study will focus on the role of corporate communication practitioners at CPUT by examining their everyday job function, to determine whether or not it fulfils operational duties such as the writing of press releases, reports and web content for the institutional website. The study will also examine if their functions enable them to contribute to strategic management situations at CPUT as it relates to Grunig and Grunig's (2008) publication on *excellence* theory in corporate communication.

2.2.2 Evolutionary role of corporate communication as a strategic management function

As the world around us evolved with innovation and new technologies, the demands from various publics have increased, and that had a direct influence on how organisations conduct communication with societies and stakeholders. New technologies have allowed stakeholders, such as students and staff, to engage directly with communication practitioners and executive management alike. It has amplified the role of corporate communication practitioners to the extent that experts such as Grunig and Grunig, Steyn, Mbinjama-Gamatham and many others in the field of corporate communication landscape, made considerable academic contributions to the body of knowledge to advance the role of corporate communication practitioners within the discipline. Contrary to historical roles of corporate communication technicians and managers, the role of corporate communication has evolved into a strategic management function.

According to Grunig and Grunig's (2008:339) excellence theory, for corporate communication to operate as a strategic management function, it must be a pivotal part of the management of every organisation. Corporate communication practitioners will help the organisation (CPUT) interact with stakeholders to accomplish their mission, manage communication with top management and contribute to the executive process. Grunig and Grunig (2008:335), categorised the foundation of an excellent communication function follows:

- Empowerment of the corporate communication function
  - Empowering corporate communication as a critical management function
  - Senior CC practitioners involved in strategic management processes and developing strategic programmes for strategic publics
  - Corporate communication practitioners being part of the dominant coalition of the organisation
  - Diversity in terms of race in all corporate communication roles
- Communicator roles
  - Corporate communication practitioners must have a managerial role to achieve *excellence*, who can conceptualise and direct communication strategies
  - Corporate communication managers must be knowledgeable of the communication function and its directives
  - Diversity in terms of gender in all communication roles
- The organisation of the communication function

- Corporate communication should be an integrated communication function and not subsidiary to marketing or other management functions
- Corporate communication models
  - Building corporate communication on the two-way symmetrical model
  - Communication strategies should be a two-way symmetrical strategy for building and maintaining mutual relationships
  - Practitioners must be knowledgeable of the two-way symmetrical model

As environments changes and the world evolves, the role of corporate communication technicians and managers comes with its limitations. Grunig and Hunt (1984:5) state that communication technicians will continue to provide essential functions by implementing corporate communication programmes. Still, they need to be supervised by corporate communication practitioners who are knowledgeable about the communication strategy and management function.

Other authors share Grunig and Grunig's views on the *excellence* theory that corporate communication should operate as a strategic management function. According to David (2017:1), strategic management applies to senior management and corporate communication equally. So, what applies to senior management applies to corporate communication, because they operate at the same level as the organisation where stakeholders accomplish organisational objectives. Similarly, Hallahan *et al.* (2007:12) posit that the term strategic is associated with power and decision making. When used in conjunction with communication, it implies that communication is a management function.

Historically, corporate communication managers operated at functional levels, and they provided a reinforcement role of implementation of communication strategies. According to Argenti *et al.* (2005:84), corporate communication practitioners need to have a seat at the decision-making table so that when the organisation take a strategic approach about communication, communication becomes an integral part of the formulation and implementation of the strategy. Over the years, the role of corporate communication practitioners has changed from providing technical support to managerial functions such as marketing or advertising. Cornelissen (2004:47) states that communication practitioners are now increasingly positioned strategically within the hierarchical organisational structure where they operate as members of the executive management.

The world of business is an ever-changing environment, and the more changes are taking place within that space, the more organisations need to adapt to the demands of industries and its stakeholders. The innovation of smartphones and new technologies has redefined the

way organisations engage with their constituencies (internally and externally). Although corporate communication technicians and managers have held the fort by executing communication plans that were initiated by executive management, the time has come for communication practitioners to be strategically positioned within strategic management to take strategic communication action through communication strategies that will assist the organisation in rapid responses and to minimise the risk of organisational damage.

According to Mohamed *et al.* (2014:116), corporate communication entails selectively communicating the strategic views and objectives of the organisation to all stakeholders. Corporate communication is s a key management strategy." As the environment changes, the complexity and the nature of business changes. In the same vein, the role of communication practitioners should change more strategically. Steyn (2009:7) states that the role communication practitioners have developed into that of corporate communication strategists who operate at top-management (macro) level, with strategic management functions that relate to organisational policies, environment, strategies and stakeholders.

Acknowledging the historical roles of corporate communication technicians and managers as good practise, Grunig and Grunig's (2008) provides the theoretical framework that elevates corporate communication as a strategic management function. According to Hallahan *et al.* (2007:10), traditional communication activities and their effects are rapidly disappearing. David (2017:2) states that crisis-driven corporate communication is often reactive, whereby corporate communication practitioners who consider strategy formulation and implementation operate at the strategic management level, are often proactive. To achieve organisational objectives, organisations must be proactive and integrate the role of communication practitioners into strategic management functions of the organisation. Once corporate communication practitioners operate at a strategic management level at CPUT, they will immediately take ownership of formulating and implementing corporate strategy.

According to Argenti *et al.* (2005:89), for top communication practitioners to be effective, they must operate at management level, because they speak the same language as executive management and have a deep understanding of the organisation and strategy. To have the knowledge and experience of the organisation, stakeholders and the environment, allows communication practitioners to strategically (develop, institute and manage) contribute to the overall communication strategy of the organisation.

2.3 Stakeholder Management

2.3.1 Overview of origins of stakeholder management

The very basis of corporate communication is to communicate, engage, create and initiate a dialogue on behalf of the organisation, to generate mutual understanding to the benefit of all the stakeholders connected to the organisation, and the world at large. Early scholars developed theories around the stakeholder concept, and the stakeholder approach to strategy emerged early in the mid-1980s. The motivation behind stakeholder management was to establish a framework for managers who were having trouble within their environment of operation and the changes they were experiencing (Freeman, 2001:3). Freeman (1984:46) defines stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives. After the broad description of stakeholders, Freeman *et al.* (2004:58) later provided a more concise definition which describes stakeholders as those groups who are vital to the survival and the success of the corporation.

2.3.2 Who are the stakeholders?

To strategically communicate with the stakeholders, corporate communication practitioners need to know who they are.

Friedman (2006) categorises stakeholders	Researcher categorises stakeholders of CPUT
•Customers	Staff: full-time, part-time and contract
•Employees	• Academics
•Local communities	• Administration
•Suppliers and distributors	• Council
•The media	• Executive management
•Public in general	• Support professional services (security, gardening, cleaning personnel)
•Business partners	• Union Reps
•Future generations	Students: full-time, part-time and short course
•Founders of the organisation (past generations)	• Undergraduates
•Academics	• Postgraduates
•Competitors	• International students
•Government, regulators and policymakers	• Prospective students
	Media, service providers, communities, other universities

Table 2-1. List of Stakeholders

The management of stakeholders has become an integral part of the corporate communication practitioners' function. Grunig and Grunig's (2008:339) state that in a strategic management role, corporate communication practitioners manage communication with top managers and with publics, to contribute to the strategic decision process of the organisation to manage and build a relationship between the organisation and stakeholders. By reviewing the list of stakeholders at CPUT, the role that corporate communication performs is central because of the multitude of stakeholders connected to the institution. The function requires strategic planning because all stakeholders are affected by decisions made at a strategic management level, and communication practitioners should ensure they foster and manage relations between CPUT and all stakeholders. The only way communication practitioners at CPUT can communicate with all their stakeholders is to be strategic and intentional about the communication process, and not leave stakeholders uninformed. Cornelissen (2008:9) states that corporate communication is a management function that organisations use to build and nurture relations with stakeholders strategically.

2.3.3 Various views that reinforce stakeholder management as a strategic management function

As the business landscape and the environment evolve the nature of organisations changes, the demands of stakeholders and the complexity of issues increases and changes. The role of corporate communication practitioners has grown from just a communication function with stakeholders, to the management of stakeholders. Cornelissen (2008:9) states that corporate communication is a management function that organisations strategically use to build and nurture relations with stakeholders and the overall strategic management of the communication process. According to Mohamed & Abu Baker (2018:241), organisations require more than simple internal and external communication; they also need to manage relationships. Corporate communication practitioners need to manage stakeholders, become proactive in their function and create opportunities, whilst change is inevitable.

The days of stakeholders not having a voice or platform to engage with organisations are long gone. Previously stakeholders just gave their voice away by only not having access to corporations to voice their opinions and allowing politicians and union representatives to be their mouthpiece. New technologies and constant innovation of improved ways of communication have allowed stakeholders to become active citizens of society and organisations with which they connect. According to Garam (2017:2), corporate communication practitioners are currently dealing with a more sophisticated group of intelligent stakeholders who are continuously expanding in terms of knowledge of the

organisations' products and services and how organisations should treat them. New technologies are very appealing to young people, and students are more sophisticated and knowledgeable about services that CPUT provides. So corporate communication practitioners should know and understand how and when to communicate with students to prevent issues from turning into crises.

Grunig and Hunt (1984:6), states that stakeholder management is a corporate communication function and is part of the management of communication between the organisation and its publics, by managing and executing communication plans on behalf of organisations through examining the behaviour of stakeholders and advising management strategically. It demonstrates that there is a need for effective management of stakeholders. The responsibility of corporate communication is to embrace the challenge, because the survival of any organisation depends on what stakeholders' voice about them that can either affect them negatively or positively, because of their approach.

Stakeholders and organisations impact each other in various ways. Effective communication ensures that the organisation has some semblance of control over the impact stakeholders have on their set goals, as well as the impact they have on stakeholders. Corporate communication practitioners manage the function and process thereof because they are the ones that are most knowledgeable of the organisation and the stakeholders. According to Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:200), the role of corporate communication practitioners is to effectively communicate with the stakeholders in ways that serve the organisation and the stakeholders. Freeman (2001:4), states that the purpose of stakeholder management is to develop approaches to manage numerous groups and relationships strategically. Instead of students dictating conversation and communication through social media, practitioners must manage their stakeholders strategically, by creating platforms and establishing suitable approaches to communicate with staff and students.

Scholars such as Freeman and Friedman have developed theories on stakeholder, stakeholder management and stakeholder approach. Although their views are relevant to organisations at large, none is more established as the contribution of Grunig and Grunig's *Excellence Theory* and Freeman's *Stakeholder Approach to Strategic Management* that emphasises that corporate communication practitioners should operate within a strategic management function.

Grunig and Grunig's (2008:339) *excellence* theory states that corporate communication is an integral part of the management of every organisation. It assists the organisation with needed skills and capacity to interact with stakeholders, as well as manage the communication with

top management and publics through the facilitation of dialogue between the organisation and stakeholders.

2.3.4 Stakeholder models and approaches

Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337) excellence theory approach to stakeholder management for *excellence* in corporate communication and aligning CPUT stakeholder expectations to the two-way symmetrical model of communication

Two-way symmetrical model	Aligning stakeholder expectations at CPUT
Collaboration and enhanced public participation	Stakeholders can expect regular partnership interventions and wish to be more involved and participate in projects.
Management of conflict with strategic publics	Stakeholders can expect transparency and interaction during sensitive situations to reduce conflict
Development of long-term relationships with stakeholders	Stakeholders can expect long term relationships between CPUT and themselves.
Ethical behaviour between organisation and stakeholders	Stakeholders can expect ethical behaviour and mutual respect between themselves and CPUT
Balanced interests between organisation and stakeholders	Stakeholders can expect amicable relations between themselves and CPUT when they share interests

Table 2-2. Aligning stakeholder expectations with the two-way symmetrical model

The two-way symmetrical model will enable the CPUT and communication practitioners to build and improve relations with stakeholders. The adoption and application of the two-way communication model will help in valuing and meeting stakeholders' expectation. Grunig and Hunt (1984:22) developed the four models of public relations for organisations to evaluate the communication approach to stakeholders:

Model name	Type of Communication	Characteristics
Press agent/ publicity	One- way communication	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires.
Public information model	One-way communication	Uses press releases and other one-way communication techniques to distribute organisational information. The public relations practitioner is often considered an in-house journalist.
Two-way asymmetrical model	Two-way communication (imbalanced)	Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence audiences to behave as the organisation desires. Does not use

		research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organisation.
Two-way symmetrical model	Two-way communication	Uses communication to negotiate with the public, resolve conflict and promote mutual understanding and respect between the organisation and its stakeholders.

Table 2.3: Grunig and Hunt's four models of public relations

According to Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337), the two-way model symmetrical model is the most effective approach to stakeholder management in the quest to achieve excellence in corporate communication.   The two-way symmetrical model will allow communication practitioners at CPUT to engage openly and freely with stakeholders in an ethical manner without fear of intimidation and manipulation. But it will instead build and foster relations that will be beneficial to both parties, CPUT and stakeholders alike. According to Freeman (2001:10), a stakeholder approach emphasizes active management of the business environment, relationships and the promotion of shared interests.

Freeman's (2001:11-15) approach to stakeholder management:

- Single strategic framework
  - Environmental shift →New strategic problem → Development of new strategic framework → Adoption of new strategic practices
- Strategic Management
  - Strategic management actively plots a new direction for the organisation and how the organisation and stakeholders can affect each other
- Survival
  - Achieving organisational objectives by surviving times
- Value-based management
  - Incorporation of critical values of the strategic management process between organisation and stakeholders
- Incorporation of both descriptive and prescriptive approach
  - Descriptive by building on concrete facts and analysis
  - Descriptive by creating and influencing stakeholders and the environment
- Concrete names and faces
  - Understanding stakeholders' needs
- Integrated approach
  - The strategy that satisfies multiple stakeholders simultaneously
  -

It is evident, from Freeman's approach, that corporate communication at CPUT will benefit from applying the management of stakeholders to their job function because they have an important strategic role to play in serving both their organisation and stakeholders. In many organisations, the contribution of the discipline have been questioned, amongst executive management. According to Mohamed *et al. (*2014:1), corporate communication practitioners are continuously faced with challenges in management meetings to justify their contribution and continue to face budget cuts from finance and downsizing in terms of staffing. In many situations' top management value, the input of other departments such as finance and human capital more, because the "evidence" that is more tangible to that of corporate communication. In most cases, the nature of the corporate communication function is intangible, because it involves the acquisition of knowledge about stakeholders' specific needs, vis-à-vis their milieu of operation. The acquired knowledge and understanding will help in building long-lasting relationships through long term strategic engagements.

Most organisations still view stakeholder management as an unnecessary venture; they often fail to realise the immense importance of strategic corporate communication to the overall organisational objectives. According to Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:202), corporate communication practitioners are increasingly more involved in managing strategic issues for the organisation. Mohamed *et al.* (2014:116) state that corporate communication function involves selectively communicating the strategic views and objectives of the organisations to stakeholders. They consider the function as critical to management strategy.

According to Argenti *et al.* (2005:84), the function of corporate communication practitioners is not only to reinforce and implement an organisational strategy but also to interpret stakeholders' responses in ways that can impact on future strategy. Practitioners are the ones who have their ears to the ground. They are also the ones who make sense of the information they receive, and the possible effect of such information to the institution. Therefore, corporate communication function (stakeholder management), is an integral function to position the organisation (CPUT) strategically amongst stakeholder groups and contribute to the development of strategic management.

In conclusion, organisations affect stakeholders, and similarly, stakeholders affect organisations. Still, corporate communication practitioners must manage the process, to the benefit of all sectors of society and the organisation. The application of Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337) excellence theory is critical to building relations and the management of all stakeholders connected to the CPUT. Cornelissen (2008:32-60) encapsulates corporate communication to be a strategic management function; stakeholder management to be central to corporate strategies of which communication practitioners being the experts thereof, to

facilitate, build and manage mutual understanding and relationships between the organisation and stakeholders.

Friedman (2006:3) advocates the positioning of organisations as part of the larger group of stakeholders. Thus, the purpose of the organisation should be to manage their interests, needs and viewpoints. Although the process of stakeholder management forms part of the corporate communication function, the organisation itself should consider the role as a collective to foster relations.

2.4   Reputation management

2.4.1   Overview

According to Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:43), reputation is the overall assessment and collective perceptions of an organisation's ability to fulfil stakeholders' expectations. Such perceptions play significant roles in stakeholders' decision to engage in business transactions with such organisations. Investors are keen to invest in organisations with a good reputation. People tend to associate themselves with goods, services and organisations that demonstrate management skills with good reputational competencies. According to Watson and Kitchen (2008:2), reputation relates to leadership, management and organisational operations through the quality of products, services and crucially the relationships with stakeholders.

According to a Chinese proverb (Reputation proverbs: 2020), "of a dead leopard, we keep the skin, of a man his reputation." In many ways, the Chinese quote resonates with organisations because stakeholders evaluate organisations' performances based on their status and reputation within society. Organisations with a good reputation amongst stakeholders will typically attract goodwill and more mutually beneficial stakeholders (internally and externally) to the services and products offered. However, when organisations' have a terrible reputation, the chances are that such an organisation will not enjoy referrals, thereby negatively impacting on its chances of survival.

2.4.2 Reputation management aligned with corporate communication

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), states that public relations consist of reputation – the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. CIPR's overview of reputation is as follows:

- Every organisation ultimately depends on its reputation for survival and success
- Stakeholders have a powerful impact
- Whether good or bad, right or wrong, the opinions of all stakeholders' matter

- A good reputation is advantageous to organisations
- Effective corporate communication can manage reputation through communication and fostering of good relationships
- Reputation management is the strategic function of corporate communication with strategic publics

2.4.3 Reputation management as a corporate communication function

Organisations cannot operate without communication. All departments in organisations must utilise the tool of communication to achieve effectiveness and overall organisational objectives. For example, the finance department must know what the human resources department is doing, vice versa, across all departments. Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:3) states that communication is the lifeblood of all organisations. It is the channel through which organisations access resources to operate and standardise reputation.

The role of corporate communication practitioners, therefore, becomes pivotal to the organisation's quest to establish and implement corporate communication strategies to regulate the organisation's reputation between it and its stakeholders. Samson (2018:114) states that reputation management is an essential and inevitable part of the corporate communication function. According to Hutton *et al.* (2001:248), the reputation management function is the business function that rests on the foundation of corporate communication. Financial gurus are more inclined to focus on budgets and profit margins. Marketing experts, on the other hand, focus on products, services and marketing segments. However, corporate communication focusses on building on the established reputation with stakeholders through the actions of the organisation.

2.4.4 The alignment of reputation management and stakeholder management

A central theme in corporate communication is stakeholder management. De Jager and Soontiens (2010:17) states that stakeholder management is the basis of the creation and maintenance of corporate reputation through corporate communication. According to De Carvalho (2004:2), reputation is the result of the organisations' relationships with its stakeholders. Should stakeholders express bad or gratifying reviews about the organisations' products or services, it will result in either a harmful or pleasing reputation. Watson and Kitchen (2010:386) state that the development and the maintenance of reputation depend on numerous relationships (internally and externally) and they consider, relationship management linked to reputation as the new paradigm of corporate communication.

Communication scholars have aligned reputation management with stakeholder management to the corporate communication function because practitioners can measure behaviour, attitudes and perceptions of stakeholders towards organisations, especially when corporate communication practitioners have created platforms for stakeholders to express their emotions. According to Samson (2018:113), corporate communication is the management function that evaluates and measures public attitudes, identify individual and strategies to safeguard the reputation of the organisation to foster good relations. Forman and Argenti (2005:248) states that corporate communication's primary responsibility is to manage the organisation's stakeholders that will ultimately improve the organisation's reputation. The two concepts are interlinked, reputation influences stakeholders and stakeholders also directly or indirectly influence reputation.

2.4.5 Defining the role of corporate communication within reputation management

One of the objectives of this study paper is to develop corporate communication as a strategic management function. Academic literature on reputation management emphasises the credibility within the communication landscape because it indicates the pivotal role practitioners provide within an organisation:

Cravens and Oliver (2006:294) state that corporate strategists increasingly understand the importance of managing corporate communication, by identifying strategic stakeholders and implementing strategies to strengthen the overall positioning of corporate reputation, to meet organisational objectives and generating a competitive advantage.

According to Carvalho (2004:3-9), corporate reputation is a management behaviour which translates directly with communication managers who should be part of the strategic management structure. It is practitioners who develop communication programs and manage reputation, by building relationships and negotiating with diverse publics.

Carrol (2013:4) states that corporate communication practitioners provide a fundamental role in conceptualising, communicating and interpret corporate reputation.

Berrens (2007:73) suggests that the objective of all corporate communication efforts is to enhance corporate reputation, develop reputation platforms and communicate with key stakeholders.

In a time of globalisation and new technologies, organisations are obligated to engage with stakeholders (sooner rather than later), because of the concept of free speech and having a right to express. In other words, irrespective of stakeholders not having that connection with an organisation's goods or services, they (stakeholders) observe organisations through the lens of social media and the internet and express their views, that could either be harmful or good to the reputation of the specific organisations. Corporate communication practitioners should embrace the new role of the digital space and see themselves as the guardian of online organisational reputation and should proactively contribute to the reduction of reputational risk, (Alva,2020). Mbinjama-Gamatham and Olivier (2020) discuss how dark technology and the lack of cyber-ethics can affect individuals and organisations when technology and the internet used irresponsibly. Historically newspapers would publish expert reviews about restaurants, movies and other organisations' reputation. Communication practitioners had the luxury of having a delayed response or not responding at all. With instantaneity of the new digital age, a relatively small issue has the potential to spiral out of control. It can also potentially turn into a crisis and eventually incur reputational damage.

Bechan (2011:145) states that with the new social media trend that allows any citizen to publish views worldwide freely, a bad experience can potentially destroy the carefully managed reputation of entire organisations. Mbinjama-Gamatham (2014: 191-193) provides organisations with a social media ethical guideline which would help them to self-regulate their online interactions with stakeholders. She emphasises that social media specialists should function at strategic levels, including communication practitioners who are usually responsible for digital communication plans.

According to Cornelissen (2008:21), corporate communication function is a management function where the (practitioners) analyse the position and reputation of the organisation and all its stakeholder by developing strategic communication programmes. An excellent, formulated strategy informs reputation. Strategic planning, positioning and implementation will assist the organisation with reputation management because stakeholders who prescribe possible solutions to specific issues that may influence the reputation of the organisation.

According to David (2017:2), a strategically managed organisation consists of communication practitioners who develop crisis-preventing solutions to emerging issues and crisis that ultimately affect the reputation. Steyn (2009:5) suggests that the PR strategist functions at the top-level of the organisation and provide executive management with strategic advice on communication strategies on reputation risks. Benjamin Franklin's famous quote in Good Reads (2020) states that "if you fail to plan, you are planning to fail", can resonate with

organisations, that they need corporate communication to develop and implement communication strategies to prevent reputational damage.

2.4.6 Communication model for reputation management

Strategically organised organisations are open for dialogue and do not recede when faced with challenges, especially when the welcome feedback by creating a communication platform that encourages engagement. Watson and Kitchen (2008:19) state that organisations with the most robust reputation are those with an interactive relationship with their stakeholders. Open communication and stakeholders encourage interaction and build relationships. Grunig and Grunig (2008:338) states that for corporate communication to function at a strategic management level, they must embrace the two-way symmetrical to reduce reputational risk:

According to Grunig and Grunig (2008:238), the two-way symmetrical model results in:

- Ethical behaviour between organisation and stakeholders
- Produces positive effects from organisation and publics
- Empowerment and participation in decision-making between organisation and stakeholders
- Dialogue and listening to each other
- Increase of internal communication by providing internal platforms to express opinions
- Participation from stakeholders decreases authoritarian culture
- Improved relations
- Greater satisfaction
- Mutual control
- Commitment
- Trust

When an appropriate platform has been established for stakeholders to engage, it will create the impression that the organisation is transparent and that it presents an opportunity for dialogue. This will further enhance the perception that feedback from stakeholders are welcomed and creates an environment whereby communication practitioners can administer greater control, before a crisis escalates and goes viral and thus negatively affects the reputation of the organisation. Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:197) states that an effective corporate communication practitioner must ensure that the organisation has platforms in place that is consistently expressed to the organisation's stakeholders and helped build a reputation for the organisation as a whole.

In conclusion, reputation management is an essential function of corporate communication to development as a strategic management function. When managed strategically, reputation can be advantageous to the organisation. A good reputation will attract stakeholders to the services and the products of the organisation, thereby potentially leading to more investments. Fombrun and Van Riel (2007:10-36) suggest that reputation management belongs at the top of corporate communication, because of its propensity to positively affect stakeholders' of the organisation, as well as the achievement of set organisational goals. Steyn (2007:3) states that strategic corporate communication adapts to societal and stakeholder environment, thereby providing the organisation with intelligence to communicate strategically. Corporate communication practitioners can use the information they have gathered about organisational reputation once they have adapted to stakeholders and environment and apply it strategically.

2.5 Corporate governance

Within every society, people abide by a set of rules and statutes either religiously sustained, or politically enshrined. These rules, sometimes collectively agreed upon by members of the community, differ from one socio-political milieu to another. Corporate organisations, like the larger community, also have rules that govern their behaviour towards their stakeholders and the environment they operate — one of such 'rules' controlling organisational behaviour is the King III report.

The King III (2009:7) set the standard of corporate governance practices, codes and guidelines. It stipulates what acceptable, appropriate standards of conduct are. The report, therefore, acts as a benchmark in terms of ethical operating procedures for organisations. Irrespective of the type of organisation (public or private), the services rendered by the organisation has an impact on themselves (reputation) and the society (stakeholders) and the environments they operate. De Beer and Rensburg (2011:153) state that an organisations' ethical code not only need to be "well-groomed" but also perceived as being "well-governed". Although organisations do operate at a certain level of ethical standard, the message that translates with and to stakeholders must be evidence of those high standards.

Cadbury (1992:15) describes corporate governance as the system by which companies are directed and controlled". Although initially constructed for public financial institutions, it further developed into a broader (international) audience (disciplines and organisations). The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (2004:11) define corporate governance as:

> "…A key element in improving economic efficiency and growth as well as enhancing investor confidence and it also involves a set of relationships between an organisation and

> its stakeholders that provides structure by which the organisational objectives are attained by determining and monitoring performance" (OECD, 2004:11).

As the world continues to evolve, the concept of corporate governance continues to grow as well, although the principles remain intact.

2.5.1 King III Report in context

When South Africa was still a young democracy, the Institute of Directors in South Africa approached retired judge Mervyn E. King to chair a committee on corporate governance to establish and educate the South African public towards a framework on a free economy. That was the birth of the first King report and after that, was the development of the King II and King III reports. The King III report is a procedural guide to organisations to become a free economy and to function ethically towards society. The philosophy of the King III (2009:10) report revolves around "leadership, sustainability and corporate citizenship". The report states the following key aspects:

- Leadership involves ethical values of responsibility, accountability, fairness and transparency
- Sustainability is the primary moral and economic imperative of the 21st century
- Corporate citizenship which flows from organisations operating sustainably."

The report acknowledges the importance of organisations' transparency regarding profits, but it also emphasises the importance for organisations to make fundamental changes towards sustainability. The King III report (2009:12) suggests that when organisations operate sustainably, they become good corporate citizens because they acknowledge their responsibility towards *society, environment* and the *economy*, better known as the (*triple bottom line*). No organisation can run on its own, without having an impact (positively or negatively) on its society, environment and economy. The relation between them is undeniable, intentional or not intentional. For an organisation to be effective, their contribution to the triple bottom line is crucial because societies, in general, expect a return on investment when they support organisations.

When organisations consider a sustainability approach towards their operations, they immediately take ownership of the longevity of the environment they operate in and are mindful of the current society and generations to follow. It is, therefore, imperative for an organisation such as CPUT to apply sustainable operations when they fulfil their mandate. Corporate communication practitioners at CPUT should be the driving force behind the sustainability

approach and ensure that all stakeholders are on board, by incorporating sustainability processes into the communication strategy and communicating it. According to the King III (2009:12) report, "strategy, risk, performance and sustainability are inseparable and aligned it to "integrated reporting." Hence the responsibility of integrated reporting falls on communication practitioners to engage with stakeholders who will ultimately be affected by the sustainability operations of the institution. An example that the CPUT might pursue in terms of sustainability is to consider streamlining the academic programmes to an electronic function when they engage with stakeholders such as students. The sudden restrictions due to COVID19 has already demonstrated that it is possible to work electronically (remotely) and save on the cost of paper and printing that under normal circumstances would have been enormous.

2.5.2 Corporate citizenship and corporate social responsibility (CSR)

The King III (2009:11) suggests that organisations are citizens of a country as natural persons who have citizenship, and they are also responsible and have a moral obligation towards the triple bottom line (society, environment and economy) in which they operate. As highlighted, corporate citizenship is underpinned by sustainability, and hence the responsibility of being good corporate citizens on behalf of the organisation falls on corporate communication practitioners.

The King III (2009:127) further states that a broader notion of corporate citizenship is corporate social responsibility (CSR), whereby the organisation takes responsibility for how its decisions contribute to sustainable development and the welfare of society in general. Phillips (2006:34) states that corporate social responsibility is the contribution of organisations to the economic and social development of the communities where they operate and the world at large. Hayes (2008:20) redefines corporate social responsibility as corporate citizenship and states that it is organisations taking account of their social, environmental and economic footprint; the ability to build a sense of shared values by engaging stakeholders and solving broader issues together.

Organisations are always under a magnifying glass from stakeholders and communities where they operate. Organisations that portray CSR initiatives within those communities are inclined to have community support from community leaders and stakeholders, by which long-lasting relationships are developed and maintained. Venske (2016:2) states that CSR promotes ethical relationships between companies and their stakeholders and align organisational objectives to the sustainable development of society. Corporate communication practitioners are therefore responsible for managing and building relationships between the organisation

and stakeholders, by applying for corporate citizenship and managing CSR initiative on behalf of the organisation.

According to Hayes (2008:24), an essential principle of CSR is mutually satisfying relationships between organisations and stakeholders. It is crucial for long-term success. When communication practitioners provide CSR initiatives amongst society and the environment they operate on behalf of CPUT, the institution will reap long-term benefits. A good example of such lofty CSR initiative would be the distribution of old computers that are no longer in use by CPUT to members of the community or organisations within communities that would benefit from having computer sets. That way, the university saves the environment by not indiscriminately discarding the computers. Communities can perhaps also benefit from using CPUT's resources such as sporting facilities after hours that will reduce the social ills within society such as gangsterism, alcohol and drug abuse. In so doing the CPUT will also win much needed goodwill from members of the community or communities.

Ultimately, it will be the institution that will benefit from the CSR initiatives because communities' members will consider sending learners to further their studies in the institution. Considering the stakeholder and strategic affiliations to relationships between the organisations and their stakeholders, corporate communication practitioners have roles to perform within the framework of CSR, so that organisations can be more effective towards society. Kim and Reber (2008:341) define the role of corporate communication practitioners as a significant management role within CSR, expressed through counsel to executive management and contributing strategically to the planning of CSR, building relationships.

Steyn (2007:5) affirms the role of corporate communication as a strategist, functioning at the top-management level of the organisation who gathers information about stakeholder concerns and expectations; identify societal and environmental issues and provide communication strategically. The role of corporate communication practitioners is, therefore, not just operational, who drafts communication messages sporadically but should operate as a strategic management function whereby sustainable operations and CSR initiatives forms part of communication strategies.

For organisations to communicate ethically with stakeholders and vice versa, they must establish clear directives, bearing in mind that CSR is not compulsory, but mutually beneficial. According to Grunig and Grunig (2008:339), to contribute to a strategic management function, corporate communication must operate at a management level and adopt the symmetrical model of communication. By adopting the symmetrical model within the context of CSR, organisations will be more effective in achieving their objectives towards the triple bottom line

outlined within the strategy. The approach encourages dialogue and collaboration that is beneficial to both the organisation and stakeholder, that builds long-term partnerships and relationships.

2.5.3 Corporate social investment (CSI): A function of corporate governance

The King III (2009:118) report states that corporate social investment is a manifestation of corporate responsibility and refers to donations, financial assistance and at times beyond financial aid and an integral component of the triple bottom line that informs strategy. Although philanthropy takes the form of financial assistance, organisations can contribute towards the triple bottom line by making their resources available. They can also generate interest and support from internal stakeholders by allowing them to be part of the greater good and become agents of change. In the context of CPUT, they can perhaps involve staff to engage in community activities by offering additional and specialised subjects to communities where there might be a need to improve academically. Students can gain experience and improve their knowledge by applying research to uplift communities, directly positively impacting communities and indirectly gain confidence and expertise in being socially responsible.

The role of corporate communication practitioners will be crucial in the communication process of CSI initiatives. As organisations continuously face scrutiny by stakeholders, investors and communities where they operate, adherence to laid out ethical codes of conduct become inevitable if they are to attract the needed goodwill and patronage. When practitioners apply good corporate governance in terms of ethical behaviour, by providing communication services and being socially responsible, it will generate interest from various stakeholders (philanthropists, alumni). The university can apply such funds towards supporting disadvantage students by making available bursaries from the funding they received.

The communication and sharing of success stories and institutional achievements carry some weight, but acting within the framework of good governance does not just generate CSI initiatives, but establish long-lasting relationships. Gutierrez-Garcia (2008:13) states that for communication practitioners to be effective and contribute to good corporate governance, they should be leading the strategic management process in corporate communication, relationship building and management. Communication executives have the capabilities and expertise to develop, implement and monitor the communications strategies that will be mutually beneficial to both the organisations and its stakeholders.

CPUT being a government institution, they receive financial support from the government, but that is only to a certain degree. Another stream of income that CPUT relies on is student fees. Considering the economic climate where people are experiencing job losses because of COVID19, that capital will also be coming in very slowly, because the students cannot afford to pay tuition fees. A third stream such as CSI will be a viable option to consider generate capital. Bechan (2011:138) states that investors are one of the primary stakeholder groups in any organisation. Although communication practitioners provide information to investors through various communication channels, practitioners must implement a variety of strategic initiatives to build and maintain good relations with investors.

2.5.4 Ethical framework for corporate governance within a CSI context

To develop an ethical framework that incorporates corporate governance, organisations must establish and ensure a two-way symmetrical model of communication. According to Bergman and Erturk (2016:9), organisations that administer good corporate governance incorporate the two-way symmetrical communication model to achieve an interaction of mutual understanding and tolerance that includes transparency, accountability and equity. When communication models such as press agents and two-way asymmetrical models are applied, it hinders the role of the organisation and advances of corporate governance within that organisation. Grunig and Hunt (1984:22) highlight that the two (press agents and two-way asymmetrical) models that present organisations with unethical behaviour:

- Uses persuasion and manipulation to influence stakeholders so that they behave the way the organisation desires
- Does not use research to find out how stakeholders feel about the organisation

When the two models are used, the results:
• Does not improve public participation
• Inability to manage conflict with strategic publics
• Brake-down of relationships with publics
• Encouraging unethical behaviour
• Creation of imbalances between the organisation and publics

The key points mentioned above will drive away investors and donors from the organisation, and stakeholders are more incline to distance themselves from organisations that portray negative characteristics in their business operations.

In conclusion, the function of corporate governance is a strategic management function incorporated within the role of corporate communication. An organisation that applies good corporate governance towards the triple bottom line will eventually foster and maintain good relationships that will result in satisfied stakeholders who will be more inclined to give financial support and collaborate than to disagree and withdraw from the relationship.

2.6   Environmental Scanning

Every organisation has an internal and external environment. Environmental scanning is a process used by organisations to monitor their external and internal settings and develop systems that will be beneficial to the organisation.

2.6.1 Overview of environmental or boundary spanning

The triple bottom line (society, environment and economy) indicates that organisations have relationships who patronise their services, and the community where they operate. Both stakeholders and environment consist of internal and external factors that they affect, and that affects them. The environment and stakeholders can have a positive influence on the organisational activities if the organisation decide to take note and familiarise themselves with situations and issues that surround them. Should organisations adopt an "ostrich-mentality" and become complacent in their daily activities, that organisation will experience irreparable damage.

An effective organisation that executes environmental scanning or boundary-spanning functions can anticipate possible dangerous situations, and it will allow organisations with sufficient time to make necessary adjustments to avoid potential harmful problems. Grunig (2006:162) emphasises that excellent communication departments that operate at strategic management level, fully participate in environmental scanning, by scanning the social, political and the institutional environments of the organisation, to get an understanding and perspective of settings inside and outside and applying that information the strategic decision-making process. Environmental scanning or boundary-spanning practices is a progressive approach that will enable organisations to be a few steps ahead of competitions and stakeholders and allow them to plan and apply strategically, appropriate methods of action.

2.6.2 Defining environmental scanning and boundary spanning

David Dozier, one of the founding scholars of environmental scanning and boundary spanning aligned the concepts and applied it to public relations theory. Dozier (1986:5-6) states that:

> "…Environmental scanning is the gathering of information about publics, about reactions of publics toward the organisation, and about public opinion toward issues important to the organisation; boundary spanning is the gathering of information from outside the organisation's boundary to help the organisation adapt to its environment."

It is evident from Dozier's definitions that the primary function of both concepts is similar. Both environmental scanning and boundary spanning gathers information be it society or environment and both use the information that assists the organisation in adapting and taking appropriate action. Mull (2015:3) states that boundary spanners engage in essential activities, between, across, among and within the organisation and communities by absorbing and translating information from the environment and designing systems that are advantageous to the organisation.

Hunt *et al.* (2016:8) further suggest that the function of boundary spanning is to facilitate the communication and sharing of expertise, linking possibly separated groups in terms of location, division and function as well as focusing on improving the sharing and coordination of communication and willingness to collaborate.

2.6.3   Benefits of environmental scanning to the triple bottom line

According to Aungst *et al.* (2012:111), environmental scanning is beneficial to all levels of society (social and relationships), environments (environmental) and economies (organisational). Organisations operating in the textiles industries can benefit from by gathering data about fashion trends in other countries and applying it to their business environment. Stacks *et al.* (2011:4) state that communication practitioners develop and expand on future trends once they have obtained information through an environmental scanning function. Weather patterns are probably the most common forms of forecasting. In the event of possible natural disasters, it can prove to be invaluable. Failure to implement boundary-spanning activities can have dire possible outcomes, and certain situations can have significant economic disasters, especially on financial markets. Amadeo (2020:1) suggests that the crippling financial crisis during the 2008 financial market crash was avoidable, had the economic watchers (environmental scanners) recognised the early warning signs of overall instability within the economy.

Environmental scanning can also be beneficial to the health sector. The Electronic Health Records for Clinical Research (EHR4CR), (2012:5) states that environmental scanning aims at capturing the strategic insights from stakeholders and partners regarding their specific needs, interests, expectations and concerns towards the organisations". In the current climate of the Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID19) pandemic, the function of environmental scanning has become critically important for the health and wellbeing of most countries. Whilst the world could only watch the devastation of the first few countries who experienced the pandemic, other countries anticipated and made the required changes to safeguard their society.

Another lesson that governments are also currently learning through environmental scanning is the second wave of the pandemic, as countries that experienced decreases in infections and fatalities are now experiencing a second wave. Governments can now use that information to their advantage to prevent second waves by introducing further precautionary measures to protect society. Aungst (2012:110) suggests that through collaborative and cross-boundary scanning, the healthcare of societies and communities can improve through the collection of data and innovations.

2.6.4 Aligning environmental scanning or boundary-spanning with stakeholders

Organisations cannot exist without stakeholders, and communication practitioners do not just communicate to themselves or communicate amongst themselves. Grunig and Hunt (1984:3) state that corporate communication is the management function of communications between the organisation and stakeholders by managing, planning and executing communication for the entire organisation. Freeman (1984:46) defines stakeholders as any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives.

Later, Freeman (2001:6) states that management implements environmental scanning:

- To identify trends that will assist with future business environments
- To identify the best way for the organisation to adapt to stakeholders and to maximise its position

Cornelissen (2008:187) asserts that communication managers provide the environmental scanning function continuously, for issues and trends that relate to various stakeholders' groups that help manage relationships between the organisation and stakeholders.

Communication practitioners operate at management level, communicate with all stakeholders on behalf of the organisations and applies environmental scanning amongst stakeholders that will provide the organisation with valuable information that will give them an advantage and the knowledge to be proactive.

2.6.5 Aligning environmental scanning or boundary-spanning with strategy

To be able to gain a strategic advantage over stakeholders and the environment, will give the organisation the ability to make the required adjustments that will provide them with the upper hand. Boundary spanning becomes a critical function that influences the strategic management function. Laskin (2006:473) states that when management provides environmental scanning amongst publics to obtain information about their behaviour and attitudes towards the organisations that can have an impact strategy, because of the new information that might have been overlooked when strategies were originally formulated. When strategies are formulated, practitioners must make allowance for additional information to prevent negative outcomes for the organisation.

For the organisation to be successful, it is crucial to scan the environment regularly to assess and stay updated with developments and understand factors that can contribute to its success. David (2017:2) states an essential function of strategic management is environmental future scanning by which the organisation must anticipate and understand possible changes in social, economic, political and technological environmental trends, and how they can positively or negatively impact the organisation. Kodak, one of the powerhouse companies in flash photography, never anticipated the environment changes that were brought about by digital photography and soon had to close shop. According to Brand Minds (2018), Kodak became complacent and never anticipated changes within the industry. Environmental scanning would have given them the advantage to make the necessary changes and allowed them to adjust their strategies. De Beer and Rensburg (2011:153) state that communication practitioners should gather information on the legitimate expectation of stakeholders through environmental scanning with strategic intent and develop different strategies.

Once environment scanning is applied, it will allow practitioners the opportunity to develop appropriate communication strategies that include systems that predicts multiple outcomes. So, should stakeholders operate a certain way, the organisation can apply various techniques that align with the overall design that can predict possible outcomes. According to Steyn (2007:10), the corporate communication strategist who operates at top management level conducts environmental scanning and boundary-spanning functions, gathering information about stakeholders and environment that adapts the organisation to the future with strategic

thinking and strategies. Niemann and Steyn (2013:173) state that strategic role that is occupied by the communication practitioner will provide the organisation with strategic intelligence about strategic stakeholders that feeds into the strategy development processes. Subsequently, organisations have an overall strategy that has been developed by communication strategist. Boundary spanning activities influences strategy and further developments into strategy formulation takes place to facilitate the information that was obtained through boundary-spanning.

2.6.6 Role of corporate communication practitioners within the framework of environmental scanning and boundary spanning

The focus of Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence theory* is to establish corporate communication as a strategic management function. Grunig and Grunig (2008:342) states that organisations must include environmental scanning for the enhancement of corporate communication to a strategic management function. Grunig and Grunig's (2008:342) excellence theory focuses on developing and re-institutionalising corporate communication function as a strategic management function. It states that the inclusion of environmental scanning as a corporate communication function will enhance it to a strategic management role. It will also elevate the role of practitioners because the intelligence that they will provide can stand as proof that they do have knowledge of the triple bottom line and can make a strategic impact on the organisation.

Fess and Wilcox (2012:30) state that communication managers think strategically and will contribute to mutually beneficial relationships and achieve organisational objectives by conducting environmental scanning activities. Communication practitioners continuously engage and communicate the internal and external stakeholder and build relationships. Grunig (2011:20) states that communication practitioners identify publics through the environmental scanning function and collect data with various stakeholders such as community leaders, activists and government officials and different groups by identifying problems and help to solve them.

Communication practitioners are the ones that stakeholders relate with because they listen to concerns. Although sometimes irrelevant to the organisation but essential to the stakeholder and become the bridge between organisation and stakeholders Sandmann *et al.* (2014:87) states that communication practitioners provide boundary spanning activities and take on a leadership and an advocacy role between organisations and stakeholders.

When excellent corporate communication is conducted, Grunig and Grunig (2008:337) *excellence* theory states that the two-way symmetrical model produces better long-term

relationships that encompass ethical behaviour from communication practitioners and organisations. Ethical behaviour will open the organisation up to trust, honesty, transparency and satisfaction. Kriyantono and McKenna (2017:9) state that only honest leaders can conduct boundary spanning activities and that ethical behaviour amongst communication practitioners for the function is essential because they deliver public's opinions to management. The role of environmental scanning is vital to the organisation, and stakeholders feel valued, but should stakeholders get the impression that practitioners are unethical, it can be damaging to the organisation's reputation.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter described corporate communication as a strategic management function by discussing and linking the various concepts to the corporate communication function. It also addressed the research objectives set for the study. This chapter will outline the research design utilised to collect and analyse the data needed to answer the research questions. This chapter describes the theoretical framework aligned with the research approaches to conducting the research.

3.2   Research within the corporate communication discipline

This research has explored the theoretical framework that emphasises corporate communication as a strategic management function. Based on Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory, the theoretical framework included literature to contextualise the role of corporate communication practitioners as a strategic management function. The *excellence* theory has, therefore provided the theoretical framework that influenced the development of various themes and concepts, that contributed to the objectives of the study and the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function.

3.3   Philosophical worldviews and paradigms

Cresswell (2014:35) states that philosophical views influence the practice of research because they reinforce research paradigms. According to Saunders *et al.* (2019:158), all research philosophies make at least three major types of assumptions — ontological, epistemological and axiological.

3.4 Ontological assumption

Cresswell (2018:20) states that ontological assumptions relate to the nature of reality and its characteristics, embracing the concept of subjective or multiple realities (views) on a specific topic reporting on different perspectives of individuals and themes. Through the adoption of an ontological assumption towards this study, the researcher reports on different nature of reality within the space of corporate communication as to their current job functions and how they relate to strategic management function. The ontological assumptions allow participants to express their respective perspectives around various themes that transform the operational role of corporate communication practitioners to a strategic management function. Neuman

(2014:94) suggest that the ontological assumption deals with the nature of being and what exists. An objective of the study is to establish the role communication practitioners are currently practising at CPUT. By applying the ontological assumption, the researcher demonstrates the current role of practitioners and whether it is functional or strategic.

3.5 Interpretive Frameworks

Wahyuni (2012:71) suggests that researchers who apply an interpretive framework recognise that individuals with their varied backgrounds, assumptions and experiences contribute to the ongoing construction of reality within a social context.   Although the research sought to establish the role of corporate communication, the researcher acknowledged that all the participants were from different backgrounds and had various work experiences that influenced their views on reality. Daymon and Holloway (2011:118) state that a qualitative research approach is grounded in an interpretive world view, and the issue is relatively under-researched. For the study, the researcher used a qualitative approach because of the interpretive worldview to establish the current reality that corporate communication practitioners find themselves. The researcher's pre-study understanding was that there was little knowledge about the role of corporate communication practitioners at CPUT and their connection as a strategic management function.

According to Cresswell (2018:22-23), philosophical assumptions are often applied with interpretive frameworks when qualitative research is used and consists of post-positivism, social constructivism, transformation and postmodern. For the study, the researcher drew on social constructivism because it has close affiliations with qualitative research. Cresswell (2018:23) further states that social constructivism is subjective and seeks to understand the world of individuals and their experiences, the views of participants and the situation they find themselves. The researcher sought to understand the world of corporate communication practitioners, their experiences within their job function and also the perceptions of executive management about the role of corporate communication practitioners. Nieuwenhuis (2015:6) states that and interpretive framework allows the researcher to discover how people make sense of their world and their experience of it. Through the adoption of the interpretive framework that incorporates social constructivism, the researcher understood the world of the participants, by obtaining their views about their specific functions and how it relates to the study.

3.6   Empirical study

The research is an empirical study. Neuman (2014:9) suggests that empirical research describes the collection of data through the experiences of participants as to what thoughts were developed through their observation and understanding of how things are currently working. The empirical study allows the researcher to acquire knowledge through what participants were presently going through and what practitioners experienced within the field of corporate communication.

3.7   Exploratory design approach

The researcher's rationale to use an exploratory approach was to explore the current role of corporate communication practitioners and managements' perception of the function of communication practitioners at CPUT and benchmark that with Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory. Nieuwenhuis (2015:10) states that an exploratory approach seeks to investigate an under-researched aspect of social life, to discover important categories of meaning. The exploratory approach studied an under-researched aspect at a university of technology to obtain an understanding of the world of corporate communication practitioners within the context of CPUT and strategic management. Neuman (2014:38) suggests that an exploratory study allows the researcher to become familiar with basic facts and settings by generating a mental picture of conditions.

The exploratory approach allowed the researcher to get an understanding and gather new knowledge and information that enabled the organisation to understand the role of corporate communication as a strategic management function. Cresswell (2014:61) states that when a study is exploratory, the adoption of a qualitative research approach will be best suited for that study because the researcher will listen to participants and build an understanding based on what was heard. The researcher, therefore, utilised the exploratory design approach, because of its links to a qualitative research approach and listened to participants, by conducting interviews and develop an understanding of their experience.

3.8 Research design

Bryman (2012:46) states that a research design provides the framework for the collection and analysis of data. The research framework highlighted in chapter 1 describes the researcher's framework for this study.

Researcher's proposed framework:

| Research paradigm | Research method | Data Collection | Sample population | Data analysis |

| Explorative | → | Qualitativ | → | Interviews | → | Corporate Communication Practitioners & Executive Management | → | Thematic analysis |
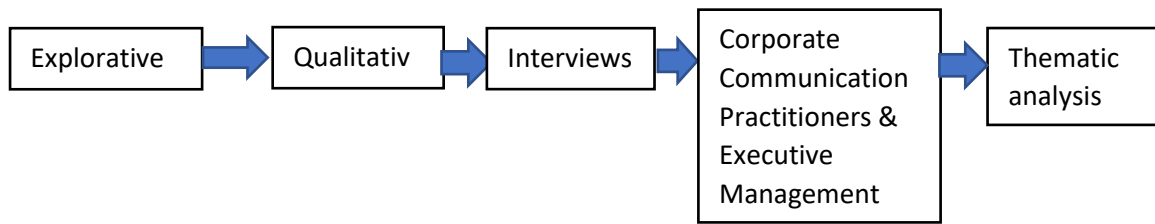
3.8.1 Research approach

Cresswell (2014:32) states that three research approaches take centre stage when research is conducted:

- "Qualitative research approach: It focuses on exploring and understanding the meaning and groups ascribe to specific issues.
- Quantitative research approach: It focuses on testing of objective theories by examining the relationship among variables.
- Mixed methods research approach: It focuses on enquiring and involvement by collecting both qualitative and quantitative data and integrating them by using distinct designs that involves philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks.

For this study, the researcher selected the qualitative research approach, to get an understanding of the role of corporate communication practitioners and the perception of executive management towards the function of practitioners. To understand the views and experience of participants, the researcher ascribed certain concepts, described in theory, that assist in the development of corporate communication to function at a strategic management level. Bell and Willmott (2014:23) suggest that a qualitative research approach seeks to understand how the social world is created and drawing on concerns and concepts that are meaningful to participants. The study draws focus on the role of communication practitioners and align concepts that elevate the role to a strategic management function that is meaningful to the participants.

Daymon and Holloway (2011:17) suggest that a qualitative research approach offers a powerful means to understand communication relationships and the social world better. Corporate communication is about fostering relationships and building mutual understanding between the organisation and its stakeholders. The research adopted the qualitative research approach to get a better understanding of the role of communication practitioners and relationships they have established amongst stakeholders.

As established in the literature review, Cornelissen (2008:32-60) describes corporate communication as a management function to build mutual understanding and relations between the organisations and stakeholders. According to Cresswell (2014:48), by adopting the qualitative research approach, the researcher seeks to establish the meaning of phenomenon from views of participants. Regarding the study, the objective is to establish corporate communication as a strategic management function and obtaining the views of practitioners and executive management about this phenomenon and the concepts that contribute to the role of practitioners to the level of strategic management.

Draper (2004:642) suggests that qualitative research approach is concerned with the quality or nature of human experiences and what it means to individuals, and tends to answer questions that start with what', how' and why and aligning these questions with everyday life and experiences from individuals. Draper (2004:643) categorises aspects of qualitative research as follows:

Categories	Aspects
Philosophical and research aims	Interpretivism: to understand social phenomena in their natural settings to produce the description
Research design	Observational, holistic and flexible
Methods and data	Mainly interviews
Approach to analysis	Codes are derived from the data themselves

Table: 3-1. Draper (2004:643) table of categories

Regarding Draper's definition and table on the qualitative research approach, the researcher adopted the qualitative research approach to the study, because the study's objectives are to establish the role of practitioners at CPUT and to understand whether the methods that they are applying align with Grunig and Grunig's (2008) excellence theory. The researcher sought to get an understanding of corporate communication's natural working environment and how management perceive their (corporate communication practitioners') role within the organisation.

3.8.2 Research methodology

Igwenagu (2016:5-8) describes research methodology as the research strategy (systematic guide) that outlines the way research will be conducted by using quantitative or qualitative methods to get an understanding of the subject and the research question. The research methodology takes the form of a qualitative approach; the researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews.

3.8.3   Data collection process

Gibson and O'Connor (2003:64) suggest that once researchers collect data, it must be organised, made sense of and concluded.

Cresswell (2014:239-242) states that qualitative approach includes the collection of data by conducting semi-structured interviews and the gathering of information in a natural setting. The researcher had, therefore, purposefully selected the participants and conducted semi-structured interviews as part of the data collection process, amongst corporate communication practitioners and executive management within their natural setting, via Microsoft Teams.

The qualitative design included purposefully selected participants who took part in the research process (semi-structured interviews) to get an understanding of the role of corporate communication practitioners.

Cresswell's (2014:239) four basic types of data collection processes are:

- Qualitative interviews: the researcher conducts face-to-face interviews, telephone and focus group interviews with participants that involve semi-structured or unstructured, open-ended questions.
- Qualitative observation: the researcher observes, by taking field notes on the behaviour and activities of individuals at the research site.
- Qualitative documents: the researcher investigates records (public or private) to gather information.
- Qualitative audio and visual materials: the researcher used audio recordings, photographs, video recordings, emails, social media text and others to obtain information.

Daymon and Holloway (2011:220) state that interviews are an important source of data collection in qualitative research approach to explore perspectives and perception of participants. They also note that qualitative research is often primarily associated with interviewing within the field of public relations and this study focuses on public relations discipline. The researcher utilises qualitative, semi-structured interviews to obtain data to get an understanding of corporate communication practitioners' perspectives and the perceptions of executive management about the function of corporate communication at CPUT. The researcher also used qualitative audio and visual equipment to capture and record information from participants. The researcher undertook virtual interviews due to COVID19 restrictions.

According to Leitch and Neergaard (2015:3), qualitative interviews provide a deeper understanding of a social phenomenon, by obtaining the views, feelings and beliefs of

purposefully selected participants to produce knowledge of the world that participants find themselves in. The qualitative interviews assisted the researcher in gaining a deeper understanding of the role of communication practitioners by obtaining their views and perspectives and a general feel towards communication practices at CPUT of communication practitioners and the management of CPUT.

According to Maxwell (2012:236), it is essential to select participants for the interview process that will provide data that will contribute to the objectives of the research. The purposeful selection of participants helped the researcher to zone-in and collected data on precisely what was necessary for the study. Leitch and Neergaard (2015:5) state that the application of semi-structured interviews, allows the researcher to use critical themes and questions derived from theory to explore new avenues of thought. The semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to use concepts highlighted within the literature review and aligned with the theoretical framework, to examine the concept of corporate communication practitioners operating within strategic management function at a university of technology.

According to Wahyuni (2012:73), the data collection process takes two forms; primary data (semi-structured interviews) and secondary data (publications and publicly available data). The selected qualitative approach will use a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews to collect primary data, directly from participants to gain the precise understanding of their environment, that will assist with the answering of the research questions.

3.8.4 Sampling

Blood and Wood (2006:153) describe sampling as the selection of participants from a broader population, by which the samples are representative concerning the characteristics that are important to the study in question. The researcher chose the study's sample from a larger group (population) of people at CPUT. The samples are representative and all deal with communication and stakeholders, perhaps internally or externally or both, either at a functional level or at the management level determined through the research interview process. Neuman (2014:247) suggest that the goal of qualitative sampling is to obtain a more in-depth understanding of a more extensive process or social scene. In the context of this study, the goal is to get a deeper understanding about the current role of corporate communication practitioners and to accentuate the strategic position that corporate communication practitioners can provide at the executive management level at CPUT.

3.8.5 Purposeful Sampling

Coyne (1997: 623-627) suggest that sampling is a very complex issue in qualitative research, as there are many variations of the qualitative sample. Purposeful sampling is always intentional in approach because the researcher selects information-rich participants according to the needs of the study. This study consists of qualitative sampling that includes purposive samples (intentionally selected participants) to take part in the semi-structured interviews. The goal was to gather rich data as it relates to this study because the concept (corporate communication as a strategic management function) is relatively new at CPUT.

According to Palinkas *et al.* (2013:2), purposeful sampling is embedded within qualitative research to identify and select information-rich participants related to the phenomenon. Maxwell (2012:235) states that a sampling technique is purposeful when the researcher deliberately selects participants for important information that only they (participants) can provide and which may be unobtainable from others. The researcher purposively chose participants for the study because they are all responsible for communication and stakeholder engagement efforts and has their views and understanding of corporate communication at CPUT.

The purposeful sample for this consists of:

Designation	The objective of the study
1 Public relations practitioner	To evaluate the current role and concepts within the strategic management function
3 Corporate communication practitioners	To evaluate the current role and concepts within the strategic management function
1 Media Relation's practitioner	To evaluate the current role and concepts within the strategic management function
2 Executive members	To evaluate the perception/perspective of management of corporate communication within a management function

Table 3-2 Purposeful sampling

Maxwell (2012:235) states that there are four critical uses for purposeful sampling. Reacher's alignment of the purposeful sampling to the study:

Number	Maxwell (2012:235) advantages of purposeful sampling presents:	Researcher's alignment of purposeful sampling with Maxwell's
1	Uniformity: participants all share representativeness	All participants share a connection with corporate communication
2	Diversity: capturing the heterogeneity adequately in the sample	Participants consist of different backgrounds and designations
3	Examination: Aligning participants with theory	Examining of practitioners' thoughts on theoretical concepts within the strategic management function
4	Comparisons to illuminate reasons for differences	Comparing the current role and highlighting strategic management role of corporate communication

Table 3-3. Maxwell's categories of purposeful sampling

The table above highlight's advantages of adopting Maxwell's views on purposeful sampling to the qualitative approach to the study.

3.8.6 Sampling methods

Cresswell (2014:239) suggest that the objective of qualitative research is to purposefully select participants that will assist the researcher in understanding the problem and the research question. Purposeful sampling will help the researcher to achieve the objectives and to accentuate the strategic role that corporate communication practitioners can provide at the executive management level. The researcher acknowledges purposeful sampling consist of various categories and many times overlap with each other. For the research, the researcher draws attention to Etikan *et al.* (2015:3) purposive sampling categories.

Etikan *et al.* (2015:3) categories are as follows:

- Maximum variation sampling
  - The purpose is to observe a subject from all available angles
- Homogeneous sampling
  - Participants share similar traits or specific characteristics

- Typical case
    - The purpose is to focus on extensive programmes
- Extreme/deviant case sampling
    - The purpose is to focus on participants that are unusual and peculiar
- Critical case sampling
    - The purpose is to focus on more in-depth studies, where funds are limited
- Total population sampling
    - The purpose is to cover the entire spectrum of the population because total sampling is relatively small
- Expert sampling
    - Purpose of the sampling is to call on experts in the respective field

Etikan *et al.* (2015:3) states that the objective of purposeful sampling is to intentionally select characteristics which will be able to assist with the relevant research. By applying purposeful sampling to this study, the expert sample becomes synonymous to the participants chosen for the study, because they are considered experts in the field of corporate communication, but within their respective roles as practitioners.

3.8.7 Sampling size

Maxwell (2012:245) states that a qualitative approach to research consists of single settings and a small number of individuals. Bloor and Wood (2006:155) share the same sentiments that qualitative research designs are synonymous with small numbers of participants and highlight's that some researchers might use a single case but extracts various themes and sub-settings from it.

The researcher applied a qualitative research approach to the study consisting of a relatively small group of participants. Still, all individuals are under the umbrella of corporate communication and executive management. Daymon and Holloway (2011:120) state that the sample size is generally small when applying a qualitative research approach. Although small in sample size, the theme and sub-concepts will allow the researcher to gather a good amount of data. Schutte and Steyn (2015:4) suggest that the sample size should be large enough to enable the researcher to make adequate conclusions to meet objectives. The sample size consists of all communication practitioners at CPUT and a selected number of executive management. It enabled the researcher to gather enough quality data to analyse and apply it to the study.

3.9 Interview Guide

Bryman (2012:471) states that the interview guide refers to the researcher's list of questions or fairly specific concepts to be covered. The researcher prepared a list of questions for the semi-structured interview process that reflected on the role of corporate communication practitioners at a university of technology.

3.10 Data Capturing

According to Daymon and Holloway (2011:232), before data analysis, the research must first capture and preserve participants' words as accurately as possible. The best way to capture and preserve the data is through audio-recordings, but participants must give consent. The researcher requested permission from participants before the commencement of the interviews. Once approved, the researcher utilised two recording devices to capture the responses of participants. The reason for the two devices was to have a back-up, should one of the devices present technical difficulties, and it will allow the researcher to engage with participants fully. The researcher used the two devices to capture the exact words of participants and preserved the data in a lockable (password required) device 1) laptop and 2) smartphone. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews via Microsoft Teams. The researcher also recorded conversations with participants via this platform and the smartphone. The platform, Microsoft Teams, was approved by the research committee, due to the international COVID19 restrictions and regulations.

3.11 Transcription

Bloor and Wood (2006:166) describe transcription as the technical typing procedure for representing spoken discourse in text, and it is the critical step in research between the data collection and data analysis processes. The researcher transcribed the data by tying out the conversations and capturing the exact words from the audio-recordings. Bryman (2012:717) states that transcription is the written translation of recorded interviews. The researcher captured words in written form from the audio recording devices and applied them to the research. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:17), researchers must transcribe verbal data such as interviews into written form to conduct a thematic analysis. The researcher adopted a thematic analysis to analyse the qualitative data from the transcribed interviews.

3.12   Thematic analysis and coding

Braun and Clarke (2006:6) state that thematic analysis is a method used in research for identifying, analysing and reporting themes within the data and minimally organises, describes

and interprets various concepts of the research topic. The researcher utilised thematic analysis to examine the transcribed data and coded the findings into common themes that related to concepts highlighted in the literature review and research questions. Neuman (2014:374) suggests that coding requires carefully looking at the text and converting it in a very systematic manner into measures of significant words, symbols and messages. The researcher carefully examined at the transcribed data and converted it into a systematic order by scrutinising responses and documenting the findings. The researcher utilised Braun and Clarke's 6-phase guide when applying a thematic analysis to the study

Bruan and Clarke (2006:16-22) 6 phase guide includes:

- Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the transcribed data
- Phase 2: Generating initial codes
- Phase 3: Searching for themes
- Phase 4: Reviewing themes
- Phase 5: Defining and naming themes
- Phase 6: Producing the report

3.13 Evaluation of research

Bryman (2012:711) indicates that evaluation research is concerned about the evaluation of real-life interventions in the social world. Based on Bryman's view on evaluation research and for the study, the researcher evaluated the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology. Monitoring processes are essential in the evaluation of research; its reliability and validity monitor research. Neuman (2014:212) states that reliability means dependability or consistency and suggest that the same thing is repeated under identical or very similar conditions.

The researcher gathered information by conducting semi-structured interviews, and by using the same questions for all participants under similar conditions. The interview questions were structured and aimed at corporate communication practitioners, and another set of questions were aimed at participants from executive management. The same platform (Microsoft Teams) was used for all participants, and the same data capturing devices (audio and visual recording) were used during the interview process. The visual devices were used to engage with participants, and the audio devices were used to record the interviews. Neuman

(2014:212) states that validity suggests truthfulness and addresses the question of how well social reality will be measured using concepts about it. The researcher used the concepts that were highlighted in the literature review to address the research question of, how does corporate communication contribute to the development of the strategic management function?

3.14 Summary

In this chapter, the use of a qualitative research approach was detailed, as well as how it answered the main research question — how does corporate communication contribute to the development of the strategic management function? The next chapter presents the findings according to the objectives highlighted in chapter one and themes and concepts highlighted in the literature review.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the design used during the data collection process. This chapter presents the findings of the research that was gathered through semi-structured interviews of participants who play corporate communication roles and the perspective of executive management (EM) about the role of corporate communication practitioners at CPUT. The overall results have been grouped according to the research objectives, with sub-themes that was created through the thematic analysis that answers the research questions followed by the themes highlighted in the literature review in chapter two.

The title of the study is to evaluate the role of corporate communication practitioners in strategic management. It is therefore essential to align the objectives of the research with the main research question of, how corporate communication contributes to the development of the strategic management function?

The study was conducted at a university of technology, specifically CPUT. The sample population for the engaged research are all currently working within the marketing and communication department, (5 communication practitioners in total). Members of the executive (2 representatives) was also interviewed, to acquire their understanding and expectations of the corporate communication discipline and the roles performed by those working as communication practitioners. For the purpose of anonymity and ethical considerations, the researcher will highlight findings of participants and align it to communication practitioner (CP) 1/2/3/4/5 and executive management (EM) 1/2.

4.2 Evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners: Participants

4.2.1 Establishing the functional role of communication practitioners:

Five sub-themes were established and presented to participants during the semi-structured interviewing process.

4.2.1.1 Understanding of corporate communication:

Participants' understanding of corporate communication discipline is that they are responsible for a good reputation and good publicity. They suggest that corporate communication practitioners are also responsible for the communication of the organisational function and purpose (internal and external) on behalf of executive management. They stated that although they are responsible for communication, it is how they and the organisation engage with stakeholders by giving information to stakeholders and receiving feedback from stakeholders. One of the participant's suggested that:

CP5 *"PR is about communicating strategically at all levels of the organisation and having a good understanding and knowledge about the organisation".*

4.2.1.2 Determining responsibilities as communication practitioners:

Participants suggested that they maintain communication between management and stakeholders and distribute organisational announcements to stakeholders via newsflash platform. The majority of participants perform functional roles within communication that consists of drafting, writing, editing communication to mostly internal staff via internal platforms and organisational website that portrays CPUT in a positive light on behalf of management. Some of the participants deal with external staff and conduct a functional role by providing communication that consists of report writing, press releases, speech writing, networking, interacting and building relations with stakeholders by organising and hosting events and giving corporate gifts on behalf of executive management.

4.2.1.3 Distinguishing between the roles

Participants indicated mixed views on the difference between corporate communication, media relations and public relations practitioners. Most of the participants suggested there is a difference because of some focus on internal communication and others on external communication. Some participants indicated that although the profiles and units are different, everyone is linked and perform the same function in different ways, because everyone's work function, falls under Marketing and Communication Department (MCD) and should therefore function as one. They suggested that some practitioners do focus on brand and image building through various events. A participant suggested that

CP5 *"Although the names are different all of them should work together, because they do the same function although different titles therefore everyone must say the same thing".*

4.2.1.4 Communication focus

Participants clarified their respective stakeholder focus in terms of communication.

Several of the participants focus on both internal and external communication of the organisation. Although some of the participants' primary focus is internal communication, they also focus on external communication sporadically, but only 1 participant concentrates on the internal communication within the organisation.

4.2.1.5 Learning experience

The views and experiences of all participants are all different, and how they want to improve themselves are also different from each other.

A participant indicated that being more proactive in terms of communication will assist in crises communication. In comparison, many of the participants noted that by engaging more directly, but at the same time being more restrained and cautious towards stakeholders will be more beneficial to them as communication practitioners. Another participant suggested not to neglect crucial stakeholders. One participant indicated that operating within MCD has advantages, because of the different units within the department that are knowledgeable about the organisational environment. A participant noted the importance of:

> CP4 *"Establishing platforms for crucial stakeholders such as students".*

4.2.2 Accentuating the strategic role:

Three sub-themes were established and presented to participants during the semi-structured interviewing process.

4.2.2.1 Level of operation within the organisation

Participants expressed their opinion as to what would be the best level to operate within the organisation and why. The proposed levels included lower, middle and executive management levels.

A majority of the participants believe that corporate communication should operate at the executive management level. They also suggested that corporate communication practitioners have the expertise to communicate with stakeholders, and stakeholders are the essential component in any organisation. Still, although corporate communication practitioners should operate at the executive management level according to the participants, some believes that corporate communication should become only observers and gather information at top management level. A few of the participants believe that corporate communication is best

suited at the middle level of the organisation to act as an intermediary between top-level and lower level, but one of the participants also feel that lower level will also suffice for corporate communication to operate. A participant noted the reason for corporate communication to operate at an executive management level is because:

> CP2 *"The decisions made at this (EM) level have a direct impact on communication with internal and external stakeholders".*

4.2.2.2 Possibility of communications in strategic management

All the participants think that corporate communication can provide an essential role in terms of strategic management because they have a great understanding of the organisational environment and its stakeholders. They can translate complex issues and messages into communication that stakeholders can relate to and practitioners can provide management with a communication strategy that will assist management in crisis communication and be proactive in the process, instead of reactive. A participant indicated that:

> CP5 *"Practitioners can provide an important role and operate at all levels and they can be strategic communicators, because they are more in touch with stakeholders than EM".*

4.2.2.3 Most critical component in communication

Practitioners shared their views on what they think is the most critical component of corporate communication.

Some of the participants believe that an essential component of corporate communication practitioners is excellent communication, as well as the ability to interpret complex issues through writing effectively to convey the appropriate message. Several of the participants suggested that understanding the needs of stakeholders and being knowledgeable about their organisational environment and providing feedback to executive management are the most critical component of corporate communication. One participant thinks safeguarding the brand by publishing good reports is the most crucial component of corporate communication.

4.2.3 Aligning corporate communication practitioners' methods with Grundig and Grundig's (2008) *excellence* theory:

Three sub-themes were established and presented to participants during the semi-structured interviewing process.

4.2.3.1 Communication model used in the institution

Participants have expressed various views on the model of communication that are being used by themselves and the institution when they communicate with stakeholders.

Many of the participants believe that communication practitioners and CPUT as an organisation applies a one-way communication model. A majority of the participants think that attempts are made to communicate in a two-way communication model, but no or formalised platform is in place for stakeholders to engage. Although one participant believes that by using social media platforms and personal emails, they are using 2-way communication.

4.2.3.2 Corporate communication theory

Participants highlighted their position on corporate communication theory and how it influences their corporate communication practice.

Only a handful of the participants state that theory influences their job function. Some of the participants say that theory only impacts moderately of job their function and the remaining some indicated that experience informs their job function. The majority of the participants believed that theory does not affect their job function, that their role is more instinctual and practical. They aver that theory might influence their functions, but they are unaware of its application.

4.2.3.3 Independence of corporate communication

Practitioners stated their opinion on what they think would be better suited for corporate communication, operating independently or operating under the Marketing and Communication department (MCD).

Majority of participants indicated that corporate communication is better suited under the Marketing and Communication Department (MCD) because the functions are interrelated, dependent on each other and staff within the unit support each other. Only one of the participants expressed the need for independence because practitioners can be more effective, and because of the possibility of enhancing check and balances in terms of corporate communication. A participant suggested that;

> CP4 "Instead of reporting to someone who does not have the expertise in corporate communication, that only results in damage control".

4.3 Themes of strategic management function: A literature review

The excellence theory provided the theoretical framework that has to strengthen the various themes such as strategic management, corporate governance, social responsibility, reputation

management, stakeholder management and boundary spanning discussed in detail in chapter two. The themes highlighted in the literature review contributed to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function discussed during the interview process to get their understanding of the various themes.

It was important for continuity purposes to allow the themes highlighted in the literature review to follow after the evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners.

According to Grunig and Grunig (2008:339), the most critical component of the theory is the contribution of corporate communication to strategic management and the value it brings to operate at a strategic management level. It is, therefore, essential for communication practitioners to understand the value they bring to the boardroom in terms of the themes highlighted in the literature review and to manage the communication process.

4.3.1 Strategic management:

4.3.1.1 Communication strategy

Embedded within the strategic management function is the importance of the communication strategy highlighted in the literature review of this study. Participants expressed their views on having a communication strategy in place and how it applies to their daily job function. Participants have all indicated that there is a communication strategy in place.

- Some of the participants indicated that they adhere to it
- One participant stated to have a separate strategy, but do adhere to it
- A few participants indicated that the strategy is in place, but it does not influence their job function and therefore, do not adhere to it.

4.3.1.2 Importance of communication strategy:

Participants stated the importance of having a communication strategy in place. All participants believe that executive management should have a communication strategy in place. They suggest that a communication strategy will allow the organisation to adopt a proactive approach towards crises when it arises. They also aver that it will serve as a step by step guide that executive management can use to respond faster and more efficiently towards crisis communication, rather than a haphazard and reactive approach. A participant stated that:

> CP2 *"External service providers are not always best option during crisis situations, because they are unfamiliar with the environment".*

4.3.1.3 Responsible for Communication Strategy:

Participants noted who should be responsible for the creation and the communication of the communication strategy. Some participants stated that communication director should be responsible for the communication strategy. Another suggested that the vice-chancellor (VC) should also be responsible for the communication strategy because it is a high-level job function. One participant indicated that director of MCD should be responsible for the communication strategy, whilst another participant argued that the responsibility should be an MCD function. Another suggests the advisor to the VC should take responsibility for the communication strategy.

4.3.2 Stakeholder Management

4.3.2.1 Understanding:

Participants highlighted their respective views regarding their understanding of stakeholder management. They state that stakeholder management refers to dealing with stakeholders. Understanding and managing stakeholder needs and communicating with stakeholders to build relationships to maintain harmony between stakeholders by giving the right message at the right time. Participants highlighted the various groups like staff, students, prospective students, parents, board members, council members, vendors, suppliers, other universities and communities. Participants stated that there is always a need to engage various stakeholders regarding what is happening, and whatever the institution is doing.

4.3.2.2 Stakeholder approach:

Participants expressed their views on executive management's strategy in the way they communicate with stakeholders. A consensus amongst participants about executive management's process and suggests that EM can do more and improve their communication with stakeholders. Improvements such as regular staff communication, more interaction with stakeholders and be proactive in their approach and allow public relations to guide the communication process. A participant suggested that:

CP3 "Stakeholders should be made a crucial part of the communication strategy".

4.3.2.3 Stakeholder communication:

Participants stated the reasons why they communicate with stakeholders, whether it is to meet organisational objectives or to get a response. Majority of the participants suggests that they

communicate with stakeholders to meet corporate goals. However, one participant communicates with stakeholders to get a response, while another attributed their communication with stakeholders to situational base, as the need arises. Only one indicated that they communicate with stakeholders to meet their own goals.

4.3.3 Reputation Management

4.3.3.1 Contribution during a crisis

Participants indicated their contribution in terms of communication during the times of crisis when the institution was suffering reputational damage.

Only one of participant provided an active role during the crisis period of the organisation and is satisfied with the contribution. But considers the period very draining because only one practitioner communicated on behalf of communication director and EM, by creating content of EM's desired message.

Some of the participants were not present during a crisis period, but by observation suggests that organisation could have been proactive in their approach and should incorporate reputation management within a communication strategy.

A few of the participants who were present during a crisis period indicates that the organisation was reactive in terms of communication and could have minimised reputational damage if the organisation were proactive. A participant stated that:

> CP5 *"Executive management consulted the wrong people, and they were not experts in communication, and corporate communication should have played a more significant role during the crisis period".*

4.3.3.2 Corporate communication function:

Participants stated that they considered reputation management a corporate communication function.

An overwhelming majority of the participants suggests that reputation management is a corporate communication function and although one participant were not forthright with a yes or no answer, but suggested reputational damage would have been at a lesser degree, had corporate communication provided a role during a crisis.

4.3.4 Corporate social responsibility or corporate social investment

4.3.4.1 Understanding: Participants explained their understanding of corporate social responsibility and corporate social investment.

The overall understanding that participants have of CSR and CSI is that organisations invest in the social upliftment of communities around them and beyond. It occurs when an organisation uses its capital, human capital and research to improve and society using their set skills.

Some of the participants feel that CSI is closely related to community engagement and have close relationships with the department that deals with CSI and states that CSI delivers social justice and addresses burning issues in their immediate localities and communities. Although CSR/CSI is essential, CPUT is an NPO.

4.3.4.2) Responsibility: Participants indicated who should be responsible for CSR and CSI functions and the communication thereof.

Only one of the participants indicated that corporate communication plays a pivotal role in CSR and CSI functions. Most of the participants stated that it is not a corporate communication function. Still, it is the function of a specialised unit such as community engagement or even the office of the VC. Another participant suggested that corporate communication can provide a supportive role but should not be responsible for the actual function. A participant indicated that all departments should include CSR and CSI in their strategy because everyone is responsible for it.

4.3.5 Corporate governance

Participants stated whether corporate communication has a role to play in corporate governance. Most of the participants believe that corporate communication does have a role to perform in terms of corporate governance by ensuring good management through communication and keeping stakeholders informed about the organisation's operations. Several of the participants stated that corporate communication practitioners do not have a role to play in corporate governance. However, one thereof indicated that the communication manager or communication director should perform the function of communicating corporate governance. The other participant suggested that EM should fulfil the role of corporate governance and corporate communication should only execute the communication strategy that is informed by executive management.

4.3.6 Boundary spanning or environmental scanning

4.3.6.1 Understanding:

Participants expressed their understanding of the term environmental scanning. Only one of the participants were forthright and indicated that it is a new concept, although many

participants only grasp the concept after interviewer explained it. Some of the participants suggested that it has to do with the current environment, where you are situated and the target audience. A few participants indicated that environmental scanning has to do with assessing and anticipating the organisational environment by scanning social media and evaluating issues that affect the organisation.

4.3.6.2) Strategic communication:

Participants indicated that the function of environmental scanning would assist executive management in strategic communication.

All the participants indicated that it will be beneficial for the organisation and can contribute to the strategic communication process; practitioners will know about future events and the organisational environment because practitioners know how to engage. A participant stated that:

> CP4 *"Environmental scanning will go a long way, so that you know exactly what the burning issues are and researchers can propose solutions to those issues"*.

4.3.6.3) Corporate communication role:

Participants expressed that corporate communication practitioners could provide a critical strategic function of environmental scanning.

The majority of the participants suggests that corporate communication can provide this important function. Still, EM should not seem aloof from stakeholders, whilst corporate communication continues to build relationships between stakeholders and EM, they also gather the information that affects the organisation. One participant thereof indicated that the function of environmental scanning should only be a partial function of corporate communication and that the function should be that of risk management within the executive management. A participant suggested that:

> CP5 *"Practitioners could play an important role, because they build good relationships amongst stakeholders and are therefore able to collect data that affects the organisation"*.

4.4 Overview of executive management's perspective.

The research has explored executive managements' understanding and perspective about the corporate communication function at CPUT and also their views on the concepts

highlighted in the literature review that suggests corporate communication to operate at a strategic management level. Various questions relating to the function of corporate communication were presented to members of the executive management and their views were captured as follows:

4.4.1 EM's understanding of the role of corporate communication practitioners at CPUT.

EM's understanding of corporate communication discipline itself is that it is a professional qualification. EM perspective and understanding of the role of corporate communication practitioners is that they provide a significant activity. They suggest that corporate communication is about the image and what the institution stands for and part of the strategic plan and vision is to have good communication by empowering stakeholders through regular and timely communication. They state that communication with stakeholders should be at a level of understanding for everyone and practitioners should establish a sense of shared information, that when communication takes place, it is clear. The impact lack of communication has on the organisation should not be underestimated because information obtained through the grapevine can be hazardous.

4.4.2 EM's understanding of the role of public relations (PR) practitioner at CPUT.

An EM participant stated that the role of PR at CPUT is always to be conscious of our standing, because of "stirred" communication (internally and externally) and to have and build a good reputation, we must be able to counter and provide real truth.

4.4.3 EM's opinion, whether there is a distinction between corporate communication, public relations and media relations.

EM suggests that you do get variations and it cannot be together, because PR is a public view and MR fights off incorrect communication. But, although the profiles differ, the link between them is critical, because they have the same philosophy and approach. They cannot be isolated but rather complement and supplement each other. EM states that the person overseeing the various portfolios provides a critical function in terms of contribution to the organisational brand, image, reputation and communication with internal and external stakeholders.

4.4.4 EM's opinion about the level (lower/middle/executive) of the organisation should CC operate.

EM suggests that the VC has an awareness of everything that relates to the organisation, and corporate communication can make contributions and engage with stakeholders. EM also

suggested that head of communication must be part of meetings, pick up conversations at EM level and not just during a crisis, because that will enhance the quality, content and enable corporate communication to be on top of conversation and issues to respond appropriately to the relevant target audience.

4.4.5 EM's view on CC practitioners, whether they can provide an essential role in terms of strategic communication?

EM suggested that corporate communication can provide an essential role with regards to strategic communication, by developing and building a story, followed by communication. Still, it does, however, takes proper planning. EM also notes that it is a work in progress and that there might be some confusion because certain issues are more complicated than others and it requires different strategy and approach. EM also suggested that a step might be missing regarding the responsibility of the accurateness of the content in terms of corporate communication. Although amazing things are ongoing, the focus must be on the gaps and do better.

4.4.6 EM's opinion on the most critical component of CC to be considered, for CC to operate as a strategic management function.

Corporate communication should be strategic, because of the high level of competition from other universities, and it includes the packaging and getting the message out clearly and consistently, according to EM. EM further stated that corporate communication must understand the vision of the organisation and that must filter through when they communicate. The previous 20/20 vision was more of lip service. But the 20/30 vision should have a different approach, and corporate communication should live up to strategy, communicate everything, successes and achievements and they should speak about how to achieve vision 2030, by providing clear direction to all stakeholders and that all forms part of communication strategy.

4.4.7 EM's view on communication strategy in terms of good governance and crisis communication.

EM stated that there is always a need for a communication strategy because of the vast number of stakeholders. EM indicated that planning must take place for the most unlikely or unexpected thing that might happen and might lead to crisis management. Although the culture towards crisis management is reactive, EM is pushing hard to change that culture and be more proactive.

4.4.8 EM's experience during crisis respectively and communication and situations that could have been handled differently.

During the times of crisis, it was a combination of leadership, and they could not do things without direction, because the council and the VC were dealing with their challenges. Another EM member shared crisis experiences during the time at another university and highlighted the bad experience, because they never anticipated the backlash they received from media and other stakeholders, because of bad decision making and lack of training on how to deal with the media. The EM participant suggested the establishment of platforms to engage more stakeholders and media.

4.4.9 Themes that elevates corporate communication to a strategic management function: EM's perspective on (themes). Is it an EM function or CC function, or should it be aligned?

Number	Corporate communication concept	EM's Perspective
4.4.9.1	Strategic management	Participants suggest that the function should be aligned between EM and CC, but also believe that EM should provide the leadership, brief CC about strategic management function. Still, CC should take the lead in the format and the execution thereof.
4.4.9.2	Reputation management	A participant (EM1) suggests that it is an EM function; another (EM2) indicated that it should align with EM and CC the interaction and communication.
4.4.9.3	Stakeholder management	One participant (EM1) suggests that stakeholder management should include everybody and all be responsible for the function in one way or another, however, another (EM2) participant suggested that EM and director of communication should lead the function, but it could also be a joint responsibility.
4.4.9.4	Corporate Social Responsibility	All the participants suggested that CC should be involved in CSR on an execution level, and they should come up with innovative ideas and see opportunities. (EM2) suggests that EM should ultimately lead the function and the strategy, but EM has the final decision.
4.4.9.5	Environmental scanning	(EM2) suggests that because corporate communication knows the environment, MCD must gather information and feed EM with the necessary knowledge and come up with the strategy. However, (EM1) suggests different senses require different scans and fit into a strategic plan, and if not sufficiently done, forecasting will not be possible, and they will not know what is coming.

4.4.9.6	Corporate governance	(EM2) indicates that corporate governance is an EM function unless EM expects and instruct the directorate (MCD) to report on certain issues.

Table 4-1. EM's perspective on themes

4.4.10 Does EM participant think abovementioned concepts will elevate CC to a strategic management level?

An EM participant suggested that:

> *EM1 "I'm a bit agnostic to be quite honest."*

4.4.11 EM's view on the independence of the corporate communication function, or is it better suited under marketing and communication.

An EM member states that from a perspective of affordability that at this stage, the independence of CC cannot be possible, because of the effects of COVID19, but participant suggests that EM cannot ignore the function of corporate communication, because it can be detrimental in the long run. Another EM member suggested that complete independence for corporate communication always carries a risk, because of lack of filters and structures, although independent thinking and innovation is encouraged.

4.4.12 EM's view on the communication model that is used by the institution or by themselves.

EM suggests that they prefer two-way communication where they can communicate periodic trends and where the university is going but would encourage real platforms to be established for stakeholders to react, respond and also contribute to developments. They suggest the current VC does not have a problem with open and two-way communication to the benefit of the organisation and has made considerable efforts and serious attempts to build and improve relationships with stakeholders.

4.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, the findings of research about the evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology were presented. The conclusion and recommendations of the findings will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

5.1 Introduction:

This chapter presents the conclusions of the research findings that the study explored in chapter four. In the previous chapter, the interview questions were grouped, according to the research objectives that answer the research questions, followed by the themes highlighted in the literature review.

Similar to chapter four, this chapter concludes the evaluation of the role of corporate communication with sub-themes, followed by the themes of the strategic management function highlighted in the literature review section of this study.

This chapter will also reflect on the limitations of the study and suggests overall recommendations and possible future research, followed by the researcher's conclusion.

5.2 Evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners: Participants

5.2.1 Establishing the functional role:

5.2.1.1 Understanding of corporate communication

To establish the functional role of communication practitioners, the researcher had to discover the understanding of participants of the corporate communication discipline. Although all the participants had different views of the profession itself, the researcher can conclude that their opinions aligned with corporate communication theory in their separate way and to a certain degree. One participant has indicated that corporate communication is about reputation management, and another has indicated that corporate communication is about communicating strategically, for example. However, it is safe to conclude that participants do have an understanding of the discipline itself.

5.2.1.2 Determining responsibilities

By determining the responsibilities of participants, it will establish whether the hypothesis about the role corporate communication practitioners is accurate or not. The findings conclude that the role that practitioners provide at CPUT is operational and not strategic. The hypothesis proves to be correct because practitioners have highlighted their responsibilities, such as drafting, writing press releases and reports, editing, writing content and stories for web content

and organising events to mention a few — Steyn (1999:26) referring to that specific role as technicians.

5.2.1.3 Distinguishing between the roles

It was important for the participants to express their views as to whether or not there might be a distinction between the different portfolios, because once there is clarity, there will be an understanding amongst themselves and stakeholders. They will also understand that corporate communication can operate as a strategic management function. The findings suggest that according to participants, there is a distinction between the different portfolios, but that they are all interlinked because they share a commonality, and that is Marketing and Communication (MCD). The researcher concludes that there is a difference in their portfolios and job function. They are all connected because of their affiliations with MCD and their engagement with stakeholders, respectively. Still, some functions performed by practitioners are more marketing-related than communication.

5.2.1.4 Communication focus

All participants engage with stakeholders, but the main difference is that some focus only on internal stakeholders, although at times some communicate with external stakeholders sporadically, whilst others focus on external and internal stakeholders exclusively

5.2.1.5 Learning experience

All the participants have had different experiences within their respective job functions, and it is safe to say that from the findings that all would like to improve in various areas of their job function.

5.2.2 Accentuating the strategic role:

5.2.2.1 Level of operation

To be able to accentuate the strategic role that corporate communication practitioners can provide, it was essential to gather the views of participants as to what level they think corporate communication can operate. Although theory suggests that corporate communication should operate as a strategic management function within an organisation, practitioners should understand the importance of their role and that they can make a useful contribution in terms of strategic communication. Although some participants suggested that the medium level of the organisation is sufficed and act as intermediaries, the majority of participants believed that they could operate at an executive management level. This is because they have the expertise in stakeholder management and because stakeholders are an essential component of any organisation.

5.2.2.2 Possibility of strategic management

The participants are all of the opinions that they can all provide an essential role in terms of strategic management function because of their knowledge of the organisational environment and various stakeholders. It is safe to conclude that knowing the corporate environment and stakeholders is advantageous because that knowledge can be beneficial to CPUT and its stakeholders. It can foster and build relationships between the parties, and as participants suggested, it will assist management in crisis communication, be proactive, instead of reactive.

5.2.2.3 Most critical component

Although the findings highlight various critical components that corporate communication can provide in terms of strategic management function such as excellent writing ability, giving feedback to executive management, understanding stakeholder needs and safeguarding the brand. The functions highlighted by participants are still operational. Although it does require a unique skill set to perform operational job functions, it is still not strategic as highlighted in the literature review. This is because corporate communication practitioners are not part of the strategic planning but only receive, execute and implement communication on request from management. To a certain extent, the findings will all enhance the effectiveness of communication, but they are not as strategic according to theory.

5.2.3 Aligning corporate communication practitioners' methods with Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory:

5.2.3.1 Communication model

For any organisation to be more effective, the two-way symmetrical model presented by Grunig and Hunt (1994) is encouraged. Grunig and Grunig's (2008) excellence theory suggests the adoption of the two-way symmetrical model of communication for corporate communication to operate at a strategic management level. The findings indicate that communication practitioners and CPUT applies the one-way communication model, although there are attempts to utilise a two-way communication model. Corporate communication and CPUT, in general, does not operate at an excellent level, because they use a one-way communication model and not a two-way symmetrical communication model that promotes *excellence* in communication.

5.2.3.2 Corporate communication theory

Methods are generally underpinned by theory. The theory, therefore, gives the user directions on the form or approach to adopt for a particular situation. Regarding the study, the researcher asked participants whether they apply corporate communication theory to their respective job functions. The theory has an insignificant influence on corporate communication practise, and the experience of participants considerably influences the role of corporate communication.

5.2.3.3 Independence of corporate communication

Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337) *excellence* theory states that for corporate communication to function as a strategic management function, it should be an independent management function separate from other functions. The findings suggest that only one of the participants share the view, and an overwhelming majority indicated that corporate communication is better suited under the Marketing and Communication Department (MCD). Although MCD provide an excellent function for the institution, it still does not operate excellently, because corporate communication is not yet independent from marketing. As a participant indicated "safeguarding the brand" is a critical component and that underpins marketing as a crucial component. It does not have the independence, and it operates under a department who has marketing objectives other than just communication.

5.3 Themes of strategic management function: The literature review

5.3.1 Strategic management

Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory provides the theoretical framework that elevates corporate communication as a strategic management function. Embedded within the strategic management function is the importance of the communication strategy and who is ultimately responsible for strategy, the communication and the management thereof. Participants have indicated that they have strategies in place, and as one participant suggested that strategy is a "high-level job function". All the participants agreed that the highest office within the institution, that of the Vice-Chancellor and director of communication is responsible for strategic management function. The views of participants that corporate communication is a strategic management function and that should be included and facilitated at the highest level of the organisation such as executive management, the VC or director of corporate

communication. The findings are, therefore, in-line with that of Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory that elevates corporate communication as a strategic management function.

5.3.2 Stakeholder Management

Grunig and Grunig's (2008:339) excellence theory indicates that the function of corporate communication practitioners is to "manage communication between management and publics to build relationships with publics to contribute to the strategic decision process of the organisation" when they occupy a role within strategic management. Participants were also accurate in their understanding when they suggested that stakeholder management is about,

> "Dealing with stakeholders, and understanding stakeholders' needs, managing those needs and communicating to stakeholders".

> "Maintain harmony between various stakeholders through communication".

The findings suggest that participants communicate with stakeholders to meet objectives and on behalf of the executive management. Participants do, however, indicate that executive management can be more proactive because there is always a need to communicate and engage with all stakeholders. It can, therefore, be concluded that participants have a good understanding of stakeholder management because they communicate with stakeholders daily to meet organisational objectives and maintain harmony. However, to become *excellent* as Grunig and Grunig suggests, the function of stakeholder management should be a strategic management function and as a participant suggested about stakeholder management that "executive management should be guided on communication by public relations".

5.3.3 Reputation Management

Participants' opinion on what they have experienced during the period of crisis are relatively different from each other because CPUT did not employ many at the time. Only one participant was involved in the drafting and disseminating of communication of which executive management and the communication director had full autonomy over. The communication that was shared amongst and with stakeholders. As highlighted in the literature review, Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337) *excellence* theory encourages the two-way symmetrical model of communication, because it enhances public participation and manages conflict with strategic publics. In a previous question of this research presented to the participants about models of communication, participants highlighted that the institution does not have formal platforms to execute two-way communication. Participants noted that during the crisis period that,

> *CP4 & CP5 "Management did not consult; they should have spoken to people who knew how to deal with crowds. Corporate communication should have*

> *played a bigger role during the crisis period. Had corporate communication provided a role during the crisis period, reputational damage would have been at a lesser degree".*

The findings have shown that an overwhelming majority of the participants suggested that reputation management is a corporate communication function and one participant noted that the reputational damage could have been kept to a minimum, had corporate communication been played a role during the crisis period. Corporate communication has an important and a bigger role to perform during times of crisis, to manage reputation and to minimise possible reputational damage, because they have the expertise to deal with stakeholders and to manage issues as it arises even before they turn into a crisis.

5.3.4 Corporate social responsibility and corporate social investment

Grunig and Grunig's (2008:337) excellence theory states that a two-way symmetrical communication model within an organisation fosters a participative culture, improve relationships and generates interest from and amongst stakeholders. All the participants have a good understanding of corporate social responsibility and corporate social investment. They suggest that organisations invest back into communities and socially uplift them by using resources to improve them. When organisations display an interest in social upliftment of society, that generally attracts interest from investors and other stakeholders.

Although a few of the participants highlighted that corporate social responsibility is the function of another department like community engagement, some indicated that corporate communication has a pivotal role to play. Another suggested that CSR and CSI "is the responsibility of everyone". Although the concept of corporate social responsibility is, in many ways, linked to a specific department at CPUT, corporate communication has a vital role to perform. Participants have indicated through an earlier proposed question that they do consider two-way communication, although unofficial when communication takes place between themselves and stakeholders. Should they consider establishing an official platform for two-way communication, it will assist in fostering a participative culture amongst stakeholders, and it will generate investors interest.

5.3.5 Corporate governance

According to Grunig and Grunig's (2008:339) excellence theory, when corporate communication forms part of strategic management, they will assist the organisation with the interaction with its stakeholders, in its environment of operation, in an ethically and socially responsible manner, thereby fostering long-term relationships. The findings have revealed that

corporate communication does have a role to perform in terms of corporate governance by ensuring good governance through communication and keeping stakeholders informed about the organisation's operations. However, some of the participants acknowledged that the function of corporate governance consists of high-level intervention and suggest that communication director and executive management should lead the process.

The overarching theme of corporate governance is the importance of stakeholder management and the ethical framework that organisations utilise to fulfil their mandate towards stakeholders. Corporate communication has a vital role to perform in terms of corporate governance and decisions made concerning corporate governance issues should be at the executive management level, with the involvement of the Director of Communication. A participant suggested that,

> *CP4 "Corporate governance is an executive management function and how corporate communication execute the communication strategy is subject to whether executive manage approves it or not".*

5.3.6   Boundary spanning or environmental scanning

The concept of environmental scanning required a little explanation, and after clarifying the concept, participants shared their views on it. Although one participant was quite honest and indicated the environmental scanning is a new concept, some participants suggested that environmental scanning involves assessing the environment of the organisation and how to deal with issues when they arise. Another suggested that they use social media to anticipate possible threats on various campuses. Participants were asked whether forecasting future outcomes will assist management in strategic communication. The participants responded with an overwhelming yes that environmental scanning would be beneficial to executive management should they know and understand the environment that they operate in.

They also suggested that corporate communication has a vital function to perform because they (CP5) "*build good relationships amongst stakeholders and can collect data that can affect the organisation*". A participant suggested that with (CP1) "*informal research, you will know the environment and that will help you with your communication strategy*". The theory highlighted in the literature review, strongly suggests that environmental scanning is a corporate communication function and participants after grasping the concept also indicated that it would benefit the organisation in terms of the communication strategy, should they apply it. Grunig and Grunig (2008:342) states that "the *excellence* theory is evolutionary". It can therefore be concluded that to enhance corporate communication to a strategic management

function, environmental scanning must be included into the role of corporate communication practitioners, to foster good relations and that will ultimately contribute to organisational effectiveness. However, possible training for communication practitioners on environmental scanning will undoubtedly go along way when the function does become part of the strategic role of corporate communication.

5.4 Executive management's perspective on the role of corporate communication practitioners and themes of strategic management function.

5.4.1 Understanding: The information gathered from the interview process suggests that they do have a clear understanding and perspective of the function of corporate communication practitioners and they do acknowledge that practitioners do provide an extremely important activity, by providing the communication function (internally and externally) and building a good reputation. They do recognise that corporate communication forms part of the strategic plan and vision to exhibit good communication by empowering stakeholders through regular and timely communication. They do, however, suggest that corporate communication is about the image and what the institution stands for. That might point more towards the marketing arm of which corporate communication are affiliated with at CPUT, specifically the Marketing and Communication Department (MCD).

5.4.2 Distinction between corporate communication, public relations and media relations

Participants indicated that the job functions of the abovementioned have variations because some practitioners focus on internal and others on external stakeholders, whilst others on both (internal and external) stakeholders. Importantly, they have noted the head of the MCD has a critical role to perform, because although the profiles may be different, they have the same philosophy and approach and cannot be working in isolation, but rather complement each other. They do suggest that corporate communication contributes in terms of reputation and communication with all stakeholders, they do mention the importance of organisational brand and image, and that also leans towards the marketing component and objectives of the department.

5.4.3 Level of operation: They suggest that corporate communication can contribute. They have also indicated that the head of communication must be part of executive management meetings and that emphasises Grunig and Grunig's (2008) excellence theory. The head of communication will feed information to corporate communication practitioners who will communicate with stakeholders.

5.4.4 Strategic communication: They suggest that corporate has a vital role to perform in terms of strategic communication, but indicates that the function consists of assisting in the development and building of a proper plan, followed by the communication of the plan. They state that a communication strategy is always needed because of the high number of stakeholders. That is, however, contrary to the literature review about strategic communication that highlights strategic management is a corporate communication function, from inception, drafting, execution and managing of the communication strategy. They do acknowledge that there are gaps, and specific issues are more complicated than others and require different approaches and responsibilities needs to be established.

5.4.5 Most critical component: The most crucial component of corporate communication for them is that corporate communication should be strategic. It appears there is an understanding of the importance of aligning corporate communication with strategic and that corporate communication must understand the vision of the organisation and live up to strategy by driving the new vision 20/30 through to stakeholders through communication. Grunig and Grunig's (2008:238) excellence theory states that corporate communication should be an integral part of every organisation, contributing to strategic decision processes to contribute to strategic management.

5.4.6 Experience during crisis and communication

They have shared their experiences, and although they were at different institutions during times of major crisis, they have highlighted the importance of communication and the impact of limited communication. An EM member noted that during a crisis period, executive management was waiting on communication from the council. Another pointed out that a crisis erupted because the council were not able to forecast the outcome of their decision that eventually caused a major crisis. Had communication played a role, the strategy would have informed the council on the direction for executive management to take control and corporate. Effective communication could have scanned the environment, gather information before council decision they had made at the time and could have prevented the crisis that occurred.

5.4.7 Themes that elevates corporate communication to strategic management level

The researcher proposed the various themes described in chapter two and the functionality thereof to executive management participants. The overall perceptions of the themes are that the concepts are executive management functions. However, they suggested that corporate communication has a role to perform in the execution of the functions. They acknowledged that with all the different themes, executive management and in some selected themes, the head of communication should take the leadership role and corporate communication should

be aligned with the functions of executive management and execute the functions on direction from executive management.

5.5 Limitations of the study

- COVID19 brought the world to an abrupt standstill when governments-imposed lockdowns around the globe to stop the disease from spreading, and to save lives. Many companies had to close their doors. There were also restrictions to movements to stop the virus from spreading. Due to the restrictions, the researcher had to focus only on CPUT and could not expand the research and benchmark with other universities. Thus, it resulted in a smaller sample of participants. Although the participants made valuable contributions to the study, it could have been more beneficial to examine and compare corporate communication practitioner functions and perspectives of executive management from other universities.
- An essential function of any organisation is to evaluate whether or not their services or products satisfy the needs of its stakeholders by introducing monitoring processes. An appropriate approach to a monitoring process is to engage with stakeholders and evaluate their responses. However, for this study, the time frame to conduct the research and being able to engage with stakeholders was minimal because of COVID19.

5.6 Overall Recommendations

- The research has presented an opportunity for corporate communication practitioners and executive management with a chance to evolve their traditional thoughts of the communication discipline with new and improved ways of strategic management function.
- The old cliché that knowledge is power is very relevant to conclude the study. Both corporate communication and executive management must be educated in the theory of corporate communication because the approach and the environment they find themselves in are forever developing and evolving. Being proactive and moving with the times has inherent benefits for the individual and as a collective and ultimately for organisational effectiveness and stakeholder satisfaction.
- Corporate communication can have a more significant impact within the organisation should their role be transformed from theory to practice and from an operational

function to a strategic management function. The role of corporate communication technicians is essential. Still, practitioners can re-evaluate their positions and realise they can be part of strategic management function, through the adoption of the various functions highlighted in the literature review.

- Although each corporate communication practitioner understands the discipline in their way but considering the background of participants are diverse and not streamlined towards corporate communication. It will assist their overall output if practitioners have a solid grasp of the discipline in terms of strategic corporate communication. Everyone needs to be on the "same page", "speak the same corporate language" and to have a clear understanding of corporate communication objectives.

- In the context of communication models, Grunig & Hunt's (1994) two-way symmetrical model of communication has made a significant impact in various disciplines and industries. Corporate communication should take the lead by establishing and executing official and appropriate platforms that will encourage two-way symmetrical communication to take place between CPUT and stakeholders that will ultimately enhance and build relationships.

- Executive management should be encouraged to explore further training on how corporate communication has evolved over the last 20 years. The function of corporate communication is no longer just operational, it has a place within the top levels of the organisation, and practitioners can contribute to a strategic management function. Possible workshops or a short course on the fundamentals and the value of what corporate communication can provide will give management a better understanding of the strategic impact practitioners can make at top-level of the organisation.

- The communication department must revive and utilise the current communication strategy that appears to be dormant because participants have indicated that the current communication strategy is not being used and does not influence their current job function. Another communication practitioner also noted that some make use of their strategy, so the strategy of practitioners must be aligned with the overall institutional strategy and not work in isolation. They should instead ensure that they share the aims and objectives of the institution.

- It is no surprise that many of the participants, practitioners and executive management alike are in favour of the current format of Marketing and Communication Department (MCD) because the traditional system was instituted almost 20 years ago. The

traditional format has been inherited in many ways, and the majority of the employees within MCD and executive management have all come into the respective departments over the last 15 years and some just over a year ago. Much of the information that was gathered during the interview process where respondents were aligning marketing activities and objectives to communication functions. The two disciplines should be separate entities because their goals and functions are different. An executive management participant noted that from an affordability perspective, the independence of corporate communication would not be possible anytime soon, because of the effects of COVID19. For corporate communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness and operate at a strategic management level, the function should be separate from marketing and have its independence, because the role of corporate communication has evolved from technicians to strategists and are different to that of marketing.

- Although participants showed a good understanding of the concepts that align corporate communication with strategic management, further research is needed in terms of boundary spanning or environmental scanning and corporate social responsibility for practitioners to apply theory in practice. Once practitioners and executive management understand the value of environmental scanning and what it can bring to the table of strategic management, they will realise its immense importance. It is crucial, especially when one considers the volatile environment they have found themselves in over the last few years with student protests and other institutional issues.

- As suggested in chapter two, practitioners can lead the processes of sustainability operations, CSR and CSI functions, by incorporating the suggestions of working remotely sharing of knowledge and resources amongst communities.

- Future research to examine and benchmark the function of corporate communication practitioners and the perspectives of executive management from other universities is recommended, to contribute to the development of corporate communication as a strategic management function.

5.7 Conclusion

To answer the research question, how does corporate communication contribute to the development of the strategic management function? The research has established that the role that corporate communication practitioners provide at CPUT is operational and not strategic. The study has revealed through theory and responses that corporate communication practitioners can make a valuable contribution and operate within the context of strategic

management function. The desire is evident amongst practitioners, but a lack of understanding and knowledge of how the profession and theory of corporate communication have evolved through the contributions of various academics, specifically Grunig and Grunig's (2008) *excellence* theory, has limited the development of the discipline in practice.

The study also revealed that executive management does acknowledge the contributions of practitioners. They to do not understand that the function has developed and evolved from being operational to a strategic management function. The theory has already been established, and as more theories are developed, communication practitioners can start by using existing theory and apply it in practice, from providing a good communication function and moving towards *excellence* in corporate communication. The application of theory in practice is the only way executive management will genuinely understand the value of corporate communication. When practitioners become the change, they know they can be so that the perceptions of the discipline can change amongst executive management. Once corporate communication practitioners start applying themselves within a strategic management function, the corporate communication gaps at the top level will reduced.

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Appendix 1: Understanding the role of the corporate communication (CC) practitioner:

1) What is your understanding of the corporate communication discipline?

2) What are your responsibilities as corporate communication practitioner?

3) In your opinion, do you think there is a distinction between CC, PR and MR and why? Can you please explain?

4) In your opinion at what level (lower/middle/executive) of the organisation, should CC operate and why?

5) Do you think, you as a CC practitioner can provide a more important role in terms of strategic communication and why?

6) In your opinion what is the most critical component of CC to be considered in order for corporate communication operate as a strategic management function and why?

7) In your experience, what methods do you /CPUT use to effectively communicate with stakeholders and do you consider the two-way symmetrical model when communicating with stakeholders and why the preferred methods?

8) As part of your job requirement, do you only focus on internal or external communication or both and why?

9) In your experience as a corporate communication practitioner, to what extent does corporate communication theory influence the way in which you practice corporate communication?

10) Do you have a communication strategy in place? If yes, do you adhere to it?

11) In your experience as corporate communication practitioner and to operate at an optimum level, do you think that corporate communication function should operate independently or is it better suited under marketing and communication and why?

12) In terms of good governance and crisis communication, do you think executive management should have communication strategy in place and why?

13) Who do you think is responsible to create and communicate the communication strategy?

14) Part of responsibility of executive management is to administer corporate governance, do you think you as CC practitioner has a role to play and how?

15) When the university was experiencing crisis and suffering reputational damage, what was your contribution in terms of communication during this period? Do you think there was anything that you could have done better and why?

16) Do you consider reputation management a corporate communication function?

17) Stakeholder engagement/management, what is your understanding of the concept?

18) Do you think that executive management should/could change their approach in the way they communicate with stakeholders, why and how?

19) In your capacity as corporate communication practitioner, do you communicate with stakeholders to meet organisational objectives or get a response?

20) What is your understanding of corporate social investment (CSI)?

21)   In terms of CSI, who should be responsible for this concept and the communication thereof?

22)   What is your understanding of boundary spanning or environmental scanning?

23)   Do you think that in order forecast future outcomes and how stakeholders might react to certain issues will assist management in strategic communication?

24)   The function of boundary spanning could be considered as a management function, do you think corporate communication practitioners could provide this important strategic function and why?

25)   What have you learned from your role as CC/PR/ML practitioner in the manner in which you have conducted your communication with stakeholders and how can you and the institution improve on that?

Appendix 2: Semi structured interview questions directed at executive management:

1) What is your understanding of the role of corporate communications (CC) practitioners and discipline itself?

2) What is your understanding of the role of public relations (PR) practitioners and discipline itself?

3) What is your understanding of the role of media relations (MR) practitioners or the spokesperson?

4) In your opinion, do you think there is a distinction between CC, PR and MR and why? Can you please explain?

5) In your opinion at what level (lower/middle/executive) of the organisation should CC operate and why?

6) Do you think that CC practitioners can provide a more important role in terms of strategic communication?

7) In your opinion what is the most critical component of CC to be considered, in order for it (CC) to operate as a strategic management function and why?

8) When CC practitioner operate at a strategic level, should they only focus on internal or external communication or both and why?

9) In your opinion, what is a communication strategy?

10) Who do you think is responsible for the creating and administering a communication strategy?

11) In terms of good governance and crisis communication, do you think CPUT should have a communication strategy in place and why?

12) When the university was experiencing crisis and suffering reputational damage, do you think there was anything that CPUT could have done differently in terms of communication and why?

13) With reference to corporate communication and the theory thereof, what is your understanding of the following?

13.1) Strategic management

13.2) Reputation management

13.3) Stakeholder management/engagement

13.4) Corporate governance

13.5) Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

13.6) Boundary spanning or environmental scanning

14) In your opinion, do you think there is a link between the abovementioned concepts and corporate communication?

15) In your opinion, to function at an optimum level, do you think that the corporate communication function should operate independently or is it better suited under marketing and communication and why?

16) What methods do you use to effectively communicate with stakeholders and do you consider the two-way symmetrical model when communicating with stakeholders and why the preferred methods?

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06 April 2020

Dear Members of the FID Research Ethics Committee

I, Dr Garth van Gensen, in my capacity as Director of the Marketing and Communication Department at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, give consent in principle to allow Grant Barends, a student at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, to collect data in this institution as part of his M Tech Public Relations Management research. The student has explained to me the nature of his research and the nature of the data to be collected.

This consent in no way commits any individual staff members to participate in the research and it is expected that the student will get explicit consent from any participants. I reserve the right to withdraw this permission at some future time.

In addition, the institution's name may or may not be used as indicated below;

	Thesis	Conference Paper	Journal Article	Research
Yes	Yes			
No				

Dr Garth van Gensen
07 April 2020

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor:
Research, Technology Innovation & Partnerships

Bellville Campus

P O Box 1906

Bellville 7535

Tel: 021-9596242

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19 August 2020

Mr Grant Barends
Student number: 194070743
MTech: Public Relations Management
Faculty of Informatics and Design
Cape Peninsula University of Technology Dear

Mr Barends

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH AT CPUT

The Institutional Ethics Committee received your application entitled: "*An evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology*" together with the dossier of supporting documents.

Faculty Ethics Committee Approval Date: 19 August 2020.

Faculty Ethics Committee Approval Reference Number: N/A

Permission is herewith granted for you to do research at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Wishing you the best in your study.

Sincerely

Dr David Phaho
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Research, Technology, Innovation & Partnerships Cape Peninsula University of Technology | #WeAreCPUT

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Office of the Research Ethics Committee	Faculty of Informatics and Design

19 August 2020

This serves to confirm that ethics approval was granted to Mr Grant Barends, student

number 194070743, for research activities related to the MTech: Public Relations

Management in the Faculty of Informatics and Design, Cape Peninsula University of

Technology (CPUT).

Title of dissertation:	An evaluation of the role of corporate communication practitioners within strategic management function at a university of technology

Comments

Research activities are restricted to those detailed in the research proposal.

[signature] _____ **Signed: Faculty Research Ethics Committee**	~~19 August 2020 Date~~ _____