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CEO Expectations in terms of PR roles

ABSTRACT

The aim of this empirical study was to determine the chief executive's *role expectations* of the most senior manager or practitioner responsible for the corporate communication (public relations) function in the organisation, in terms of the *PR strategist* (a strategic role at top management level), the *PR manager* and the *PR technician.* A conceptualisation of the role of *PR strategist* preceded the empirical study, differentiating it from the historical roles of *PR manager* and *PR technician.* The most important finding was that CEOs in the sample empirically verified the conceptualised role of the *PR strategist.*

In view of the findings of the Excellence Study that shared expectations between top management and the corporate communication manager should exist for an organisation to achieve excellent communication (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig 1995), this study made an important contribution by establishing a benchmark regarding CEO expectations of the most senior manager responsible for the corporate communication function.

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PROBLEM STATEMENT

Almost two decades ago, Lindenmann & Lapetina (1982) wrote the following:

> The public relations *function* is viewed by corporate management as extremely important for the 1980s. The public relations *practitioner*, however, is viewed as often failing to assume broad decision making roles.....and is lacking in what it takes to climb to the top of the corporate hierarchy.

The main weaknesses of corporate communication practitioners, as pointed out by Lindenmann & Lapetina (1982), were that they often lacked a comprehensive understanding of the social, political and business problems and issues about which they wrote and counselled—they also lacked good management skills and the ability to look at the 'bigger picture'. They adopted a role as implementers of policy rather than as shapers and moulders of policy.

The more recent international body of knowledge on public relations points to the fact that there is still dissatisfaction with the performance of corporate communication managers/practitioners. According to Budd (1991:9), the way in which corporate communication/public relations is practised reduces it to nothing more than *communications*, meaning the exchange or transmission of information. Corporate communication is peripheral to policy formulation, not a legitimate part of the process—"*a major industry, with corporate titles abounding, but no closer to decision making than it was in the 1970s.*"

An international study of CEOs and communication executives showed that these two groups approached (internal) communication and its role in the organisation from two different perspectives. When communication executives spoke about communication, they were usually referring to the products, programmes and activities that the communication team had created. When the CEOs talked about communication, they usually described it in terms of results, or solutions to critical problems (Esler, 1996).

The perceptions of chief executives (CEOs) are that the corporate communication function is focused on *communication* goals and objectives without necessarily linking them to the achievement of *business* goals—they are not seen as making a contribution to the bottom line. Practitioners generally perceive their work as fire-fighting, as 'doing' or implementing their thinking is tactical, rather than strategic (Fleisher & Mahaffy 1997). They either do not evaluate their work (Esler, 1996) or they measure *outputs* rather than *outcomes* (Lindenmann, 1993). Furthermore, the intelligence obtained is not integrated into the strategies of the larger organisation nor the function

into its larger organisational domain (Fleisher & Mahaffy, 1997).

Top management feels that the corporate communication function should be less obsessed with its own activities and media, and more focused on key organisational issues and outcomes (Esler, 1996). They want corporate communication managers to think strategically, to look at the goals and mission of the organisation, and to assist in delivering honest, open communication programmes or to develop systems that will reach their employees and help them understand the business of doing business. However, communicators have never been up to the task to any great extent—they are not around when decisions need to be taken on the direction to be followed (Neubauer, 1997).

The situation described above might also be applicable to South Africa. During informal interviews with some South African CEOs, Blum (1997) found that most lacked of faith in the ability of their communication staff. They felt that corporate communication managers needed to adopt a more professional business approach—they often had the inability to present communication strategies coherently, and to see the 'bigger picture'. They had little understanding of other aspects of the business and did not have a holistic view of the industry. Communicators needed to know what the vision and real purpose of the business were. They should not isolate themselves within their own departments. CEOs complained that communicators were merely reactive and awaited the decisions or initiatives of the CEOs. Although CEOs expected valuable input from their communicators—information that they could use to further the aim of the business—they did not necessarily receive this.

It is clear from the above that the role of corporate communication is ill-defined in many organisations. There is a lack of understanding and agreement about the role of communication between the communication executive and his/her most important stakeholder—the chief executive (Woodrum, 1995). This indicates a vicious cycle in the industry, which if not broken, will reflect negatively on the position of the corporate communication manager, and indeed on the entire communication profession.

According to Broom & Dozier (1983:5), "*practitioners must change their practice or see PR relegated to a low-level support function reporting to others*". The question that arises is how practitioners are to change their practice. Most corporate communication managers become communication technicians through training (Burger, 1983)—without knowledge of the (strategic) management role. They often fill a managerial position by virtue of the fact that they are the most senior practitioner, or because they perform well in their technician roles. This does not necessarily equip them for the role that seems to be expected by their top management.

Some corporate communication practitioners filling managerial positions play the role of a manager at *middle* management level. Having obtained management and/or business skills through experience or by attending short courses, they manage their function according to classic management principles (planning, organising, co-ordinating and controlling). If they are more knowledgeable, they draw up a corporate communication strategy based on the corporate strategy—their communication plans and programmes flow from the corporate communication strategy.

Such corporate communication managers can be said to be 'good'. However, they cannot necessarily be considered 'excellent'. Even though they are aligning communication programmes to the corporate strategy, they are functioning at the micro and meso levels of the organisation. They are not functioning at macro level (Neubauer, 1997), called the level of strategic environmental management by Holtzhausen (1995), at which input to the strategy formulation process is made. They develop a corporate communication strategy 'reactive' to the corporate strategy— they do not play a strategic role at top management level by proactively influencing the formulation of the *corporate* strategy.

In the public relations literature, reference is increasingly being made to the need for the corporate communication manager to participate in strategic decision-making and contribute to strategy formulation. However, little evidence can be found as to exactly *how* this should be done, *what* indeed constitutes a strategic role for the corporate communication manager at macro level, or according to Tibble (1997), *what* strategy actually means in a communication context.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- The first objective was to conceptualise a strategic role for the corporate communication manager at the top management or macro level of the organisation— called the role of the *PR strategist*.
- The second objective was to redefine the existing role of the *PR manager* as a role at functional or meso level, and the role of the *PR technician* as a role at micro/ implementation/programme level.
- The third objective was to differentiate the role of the *PR strategist* from the roles of the *PR manager* and the *PR technician*.
- The fourth objective was to empirically determine the chief executive's role expectations of the most senior manager/practitioner responsible for the corporate communication function in the organisations that formed the population, in terms of the *PR strategist*, the *PR manager* and the *PR technician.*

DEFINITION OF TERMS

● Public relations
The following definitions are seen to be the essence of public relations as employed in this study:

□ The First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations, held in Mexico City in 1978, defined public relations as *"the art and social science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisational leaders, and implementing planned programmes of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest"* (Jefkins & Ugboajah, 1986).

□ Public relations is *"the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends"* (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994).

● Corporate communication
Corporate communication can be defined as "the integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at relevant target groups" (Van Riel, 1995:24), both internal and external to the organisation. This term will be used interchangeably with public relations. However, 'corporate communication' is preferred when referring to an overall strategy for the function (i.e. corporate communication strategy), since 'public relations' is seen by some in South Africa as referring only to an organisation's external communication. Corporate communication is seen as the broader term, encompassing both internal and external communication.

● Role
Members of an organisation occupy different positions or ranks, each of which has a different role (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Role can be defined as the patterns of behaviour or the everyday activities of a corporate communication practitioner (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

● Function
According to Grunig & Hunt (1984:96), functions are the output or performance variables of a system (e.g. an organisation) or a subsystem (e.g. a department in the organisation).

□ Mirror function
   The monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for organisational strategies/policies (adapted from Van Riel, 1995:2).

□ Window function
   The preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, resulting

in messages that portray all facets of the organisation (adapted from Van Riel, 1995:2).

● Strategy

A strategy can best be described as an indication of an organisation's positioning for the future, i.e. *what* should be done rather than *how* it should be done. According to Drucker (*in* Kotler 1988:61), it means *doing the right thing,* rather than *doing things right.* It is therefore the thinking, the logic behind the actions (Robert, 1997:22).

● Corporate communication strategy

A corporate communication strategy provides the focus and direction for an organisation's communication with its stakeholders, i.e. it determines *what* should be communicated to assist in achieving organisational goals. It is a process of identifying the organisation's key strategic issues, determining their impact on the organisation's stakeholders, and deciding *what* should be communicated to solve the problem or capitalise on the opportunity (Steyn, 2000).

● Communication plans

A communication plan puts the corporate communication strategy into practice, i.e. it breaks down a set of intentions into steps, formalising those steps so that they can be implemented almost automatically (Digman, 1990).

● Stakeholders

Individuals/groups are *stakeholders* of an organisation when the actions/decisions of the organisation have consequences on them or vice versa—stakeholders are often passive (Freeman, 1984).

● Publics

When stakeholders (or other individuals/groups) experience organisational consequences as problematic and communicate this actevely, they can be described as publics (Grunig & Hunt,1984).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Most organisations have practitioners playing the role of a *PR technician*, providing the communication and journalistic skills to implement the decisions made by others (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). However, for corporate communication to contribute to organisational effectiveness, there must be a practitioner playing the role of a *PR manager*, taking part in the organisation's strategic decision-making processes (Dozier, *in* Grunig 1992:327).

The concept of pr role

According to Katz & Kahn (1978), 'role' refers to the standardised patterns of behaviour required of individuals in specific functional relationships, i.e. their everyday activities. Broom & Smith (1979) introduced the concept of roles to public relations, conceptualising four theoretical roles: *expert prescriber*, *communication facilitator*, *problem-solving process facilitator* and *PR/communication technician.*

Broom (1982) and Dozier (1984) found the first three roles to be interchangeable, conceptual components of the same empirical role, the PR *manager* role. Practitioners in the manager role make communication policy decisions and are involved in all corporate communication/public relations decision-making. They frequently use research to plan or evaluate their work, and to counsel management (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). They are held accountable for programme outcomes—they view themselves and are viewed by others in the organisation as communication experts. They facilitate communication between management and publics, and they conceptualise and direct communication programmes (Grunig, *in* Grunig 1992:19).

PR/communication technicians do not participate in management decision-making, but "carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decisions made by others". Top management makes strategic decisions, specifies actions and designates the communications directed at publics. *PR technicians* provide the communication and journalistic skills—writing, editing, audiovisual production, graphics and production of messages—needed to carry out communication programmes (Dozier, 1984; Broom & Smith, 1979). The manager and technician roles are uncorrelated, indicating that they are both empirically and conceptually distinct.

Practitioner roles are key to understanding the function of corporate communication (Dozier, *in* Grunig 1992). However, most research on PR roles draws on self-reports from the perspective of practitioners (Johnson, 1989:244). The role approach, on the other hand, proposes that roles are a function of a social system made up of *role senders* and *role receivers* (Katz & Kahn, 1978). The role performed, at least in part, depends on others' expectations—a description of role behaviours should therefore include the *role sender's* perspective (Sypher & Sypher, 1984). An intriguing question is whether top management perceives the same role for the corporate communication manager as the manager does (Johnson, 1989:244-245).

This study attempts to provide the role sender's perspective by determining the chief executive's role expectations for the corporate communication manager (the most senior manager/practitioner responsible for the corporate communication function in the organisation).

Open systems approach to effectiveness

Systems concepts such as input, output, throughput and feedback describe the behaviour of a system. Organisations as systems receive *input* from the environment, e.g. as information that identifies problems that have caused the organisation to lose equilibrium with interpenetrating systems in its environment. The information inputs are processed through an activity known as *throughput*—the information is organised, and solutions to the problems that generated the inputs are formulated. O*utputs* are then released into the environment in an effort to restore equilibrium with interpenetrating systems. After those outputs affect the environment, the organisation seeks *feedback* to determine if it has solved the identified problem. This process continues until the organisation restores the equilibrium with its interpenetrating systems (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:94-95).

Based on the systems approach, the role of the *PR strategist* is conceptualised as the participation of the most senior communication manager in the *input* phase by assuming responsibility for identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders; monitoring and proactively probing the macro and task environment to detect and predict changing conditions; and identifying issues that influence the attitudes of internal and external stakeholders towards the organisation. During *throughput,* this information is disseminated internally to the decision-makers and used in the strategic decision-making process, the outcome of which is corporate strategy. The role of the *PR manager* is redefined as developing a corporate communication strategy and a strategic communication plan for the function, based on the corporate strategy. In the *output* phase, practitioners in the *PR technician* role implement the corporate communication strategy.

An open systems approach is a necessary condition for any organisation to achieve ongoing effectiveness in the management of interdependencies with the environment (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 1994). This approach is maximised through the process of *strategic management* in which the organisation strives to balance its mission—what it is, what it wants to be, and what it wants to do—with what the environment will allow or encourage it to do.

The corporate communication function is therefore essential to the survival and growth of organisations facing increasingly unstable and threatening environments, through the provision of strategic information that reduces uncertainty in strategic decision-making.

General theory of effectiveness and excellence in public relations and communication management

In seeking an answer to how corporate communication should contribute to organisational effectiveness, the qualitative phase of the *Excellence Study* (Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, *in* Grunig 1992) pointed out that the behaviour of strategic constituencies, called *stakeholders* by Freeman (1984) and *publics* in the literature on public relations, has consequences for the organisation (or vice versa) and is the justification for the existence of the corporate communication function. By identifying and stabilising relationships with strategic stakeholders, and by reducing conflict and uncertainty, corporate communication contributes to organisational effectiveness (Grunig, Grunig & Ehling, *in* Grunig 1992). However, this contribution is possible only if corporate communication is part of top management, because the latter takes the decisions on the identification of, and communication with, critical stakeholders/ publics (Grunig, *in* Staff 1988).

Grunig (1990) maintained that corporate communication had to be practised at three organisational levels to be excellent—at micro level, where PR programmes were planned, implemented and evaluated; at meso level, where a practitioner in the *PR manager* role positioned corporate communication as a management function; and at macro level, where various conditions determined the function's contribution to organisational effectiveness.

Holtzhausen (1995) viewed the role of corporate communication in strategic management as the determining factor for whether it made a contribution towards organisational excellence. The role played at the macro level also determined the way in which corporate communication was practised at the meso and micro levels of the organisation. Decisions at macro level determined the attitude of the organisation towards communication with stakeholders, the PR model practised, and the stakeholders considered strategic. Holtzhausen's viewpoint is important in the conceptualisation of the role of a *PR strategist*—it emphasises the need for the corporate communication manager to be part of top management and to play a strategic role at the macro level.

The empirical findings of the *Excellence Study* supported the above by *inter alia* pointing out that if an organisation does not have a practitioner in the role of PR *manager,* knowledgeable on strategic management, the function cannot make the organisation more effective (Dozier, *in* Grunig 1992) or by implication, fulfil top management expectations. In addition, *shared expectations* had to exist between top management and senior communication managers/practitioners on what constituted communication management, the role communication should play in the overall management of the organisation and the way in which communication could benefit the organisation

(Dozier *et al,* 1995).

The *Excellence Study* (Dozier *et al,* 1995) indicated that chief executives valued corporate communication managers who made inputs into the strategic management process by:
- acting as boundary spanners, environmental scanners and 'early warning systems';
- contributing this intelligence to the organisation's strategy formulation process;
- acting as advocates for publics, stating their viewpoints to top management— informing them as to what publics know, how they feel, and how they might behave relevant to strategic decisions under consideration;
- designing programmes and messages to communicate effectively the desired outcomes among targeted publics after decisions were made; and
- practising two-way, symmetrical communication.

If top management understands and demands this role of the excellent corporate communication manager, and if the communication manager has the knowledge to deliver, then critical linkages evolve between the corporate communication function and top management—reinforcing the expertise in the corporate communication department to deliver communication excellence, and the strategic view of communication among top management (Dozier *et al,* 1995:14-17).

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This study conceptualises the role of the *PR strategist* as a strategic role at the top management or macro level of the organisation, and the role of the *PR manager* as a role at the organisational or meso level. The role of the *PR technician*—as conceptualised by Dozier (1984) and Broom & Smith (1979)— is seen as a role at the micro or implementation level of the organisation.

This conceptualisation is based firstly on the *mirror* and *window* functions of corporate communication (Van Riel, 1995:2), and secondly on *boundary spanning* roles, as portrayed in the strategic management literature by authors such as Katz & Kahn (1966), Adams (1976), Aldrich & Herker (1977) and Leifer & Delbecq (1978). The views expressed by these authors will be detailed in paragraph 5.2.

The mirror and window functions of corporate communication

Van Riel (1995:2) regards the contribution of corporate communication in achieving organisational objectives as 'professionally carrying out the *mirror* and *window* function'. The researcher broadens Van Riel's conceptualisation of the mirror function to the 'monitoring of relevant environmental developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the *organisation's policies and strategies, with regard to managing*

relationships with stakeholders' and the window function to 'the preparation and execution of a communication policy *and strategy*, resulting in messages that portray *all facets of the organisation'*.

Boundary-spanning roles

The researcher regards the mirror and window functions as the output variables typically produced by an organisation's boundary spanners. Most authors concur that boundary-spanning roles are involved with either *(information) inputs to* the organisation and *(information) outputs from* the organisation. This corresponds with Adams' (1976) boundary-spanning roles of *acquisition* and *disposal*, and with Aldrich & Herker's (1977*) information processing* and *external representation* roles.

Katz & Kahn (1966) see three boundary-spanning roles: procuring resources and disposing of outputs; *relating the organisation to its larger community* or social system; and *adapting the organisation to the future by gathering information* about trends and *planning to meet these developments.* Leifer & Delbecq (1978) regard boundary-spanning activities as *protecting the organisation from environmental stress* and *acting as regulators of information* and material flow between organisation and environment.

In summarising these different views on boundary spanning, it can be said that informational boundary spanning is a two-part process—*firstly*, obtaining information from outside sources to adapt the organisation to the future by gathering information about trends, processing this information, acting as regulators of information by disseminating it internally, and planning to address external developments to protect the organisation from environmental stress, and s*econdly*, disposing information to the outside world, representing the organisation in the external environment.

Differentiating the role of *pr strategist* from the roles of *pr manager* and *pr technician*

The *mirror* function (as adapted from Van Riel, 1995) is regarded as the information gathering and processing role of the boundary scanner, being part of the planning team that adapts the organisation to the future. This is the role of the *PR strategist,* a strategic role for the corporate communication manager at the top management or environmental level. (In the strategic management literature, this is referred to as the macro or corporate level.) This role consists of monitoring relevant environmental developments and anticipating their consequences for the organisation's policies and strategies, especially with regard to the stakeholder environment. It also constitutes corporate communication's input into the organisation's strategy formulation processes, resulting in a contribution to corporate strategy.

The *window* or external representation function is the information disposal function of the boundary spanner. It is seen by the researcher as consisting of two roles:
- Firstly, the role of the *PR manager* at the organisational or meso level. (In the strategic management literature, this is referred to as the functional or departmental level.) This role consists of developing *a* corporate communication strategy and policy for the organisation (derived from the corporate strategy), determining *what* should be communicated to stakeholders in order to solve problems or capitalise on opportunities.
- Secondly, the role of the *PR technician*—as conceptualised by Dozier (1984) and Broom & Smith (1979)—which is performed at the micro or programme level. (In the strategic management literature, this is referred to as the implementation level.) A practitioner fulfilling this role is responsible for implementing the corporate communication strategy in the stakeholder environment by developing and implementing communication plans/functional tactics—deciding *how* communication with stakeholders should take place.

The stakeholder environment

When organisations make decisions, they do so based on a set of shared perceptions of the organisation and its environment. From the academic literature, it is evident that there is a lack of a definite interpretation of the term *environment* (Grunig & Repper, *in* Grunig 1992:122). Some authors depict the environment as a set of general components—e.g. technical, economic or social components—called the remote, macro or societal environment by Pearce & Robinson (1997:15). Others see it as a set of cognitive maps (Duncan, 1972; Weick, 1969). Lenz & Engledow (1986) view the environment as represented by a patterning of strategic issues. Van Wyk (*in* Spies 1994) calls the macro, task and micro environment the decision-making environment. Mitroff (*in* Spies 1994) includes the stakeholder environment, thus adding behaviouralist methodology to the procedure. Pearce & Robinson (1997:46) also mention the stakeholder approach to the environment.

For the purpose of this study, the environment is conceptualised as both a collection of stakeholders (Digman 1990) and a patterning of strategic issues (Lenz & Engledow, 1986). Executives are often compelled to subordinate the demands of the organisation's internal activities and external environment to the multiple and often inconsistent requirements of its various stakeholders (Pearce & Robinson 1997). The environment can therefore be seen as the product of the strategic decisions of stakeholders (the government, media, investors, customers, the community and pressure groups) and a host of other outside influences.

Empirical study

In the following section, the achievement of the fourth research objective will be described—namely to determine empirically the chief executive's role expectations for the most senior manager/practitioner responsible for the corporate communication function in the organisations that participated in the survey, in terms of the *PR strategist*; the *PR manager* and the *PR technician.*

The sample

The population consisted of the CEOs of public and private companies as well as tertiary educational institutions. (Corporate communication/public relations consultancies were excluded, as they were not considered relevant to the study.) For lack of a sampling frame, the membership lists of professional PR/communication associations such as PRISA and the IABC, UNITECH (Association for the Marketing and Public Relations Departments of Southern African universities and technikons) and SACOMM (Southern African Communication Association) were used to identify the *accessible* population. This implied a two-stage sampling process:
● identifying the *initial or primary sampling units* (corporate communication practitioners belonging to professional associations);
● identifying the *final sampling units*—the chief executives of the above-mentioned practitioners (Smith, 1988:76).

Since the above procedure produced a list of only 400 CEOs, a census rather than a sample was taken. Using the rule of thumb of four to five times as many observations as there are variables to be analysed, 100 - 125 realised questionnaires were required for statistical analysis. This number necessitated a response rate of 25% from the 400 CEOs. The self-administered questionnaire was distributed among CEOs by electronic mail—103 usable questionnaires resulted from the survey.

Measurement

A measuring instrument was designed to collect the data. To measure the role of *PR technician*, the researcher constructed an index by developing new items, and adapting items developed by Groenewald (1998) and Broom (1982). In measuring the newly-conceptualised *PR manager* and *PR strategist* roles, the researcher constructed indices—most of the items were new, others were based on adaptations of Groenewald (1998). A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure CEO expectations on 25 statements: 9 statements formed the index for measuring the role of the *PR strategist*, 10 statements the role of the *PR manager* and 6 statements the role of the *PR technician*. According to Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black (1998), five or more variables should be included to

represent each proposed factor if a study is being designed to assess a proposed structure.

Analysis

Factor analysis was used as a deductive approach in hypothesising that the above three roles existed. According to Hair *et al* (1998:97), factor analysis is most efficient when conceptually-defined dimensions can be represented by the derived factors. If the ultimate goal is to obtain several theoretically-meaningful factors or constructs, an oblique solution is appropriate. Realistically speaking, very few factors are uncorrelated. Principal axis factoring, also known as common factor analysis (Malhotra, 1996:651) was selected. Factors resulting from common factor analysis are based only on the common variance—with its more restrictive assumptions and use of only the latent dimensions (shared variance), common factor analysis is often viewed as more theoretically based (Hair *et al*, 1998). The SAS Proc Factor programme was used to rotate the factors to an Oblique Promax solution. The Scree and Re-order options were used in all the cases.

The results were evaluated according to the following decision rules:
● Factor loadings above 0.5 were identified—loadings above this level are generally considered practically significant when the sample size is 100 or larger (Hair *et al*, 1998).
● Variables loading >0.35 on one or more of the *other* factors were eliminated.

Three-factor solution

In the initial Common Factor Analysis on all 25 variables, three factors were extracted in terms of the Mineigen criterion, as three Eigenvalues larger than one were obtained, namely 7.49, 4.55 and 1.47. Hair *et al* (1998:103) consider the Eigenvalue for establishing a cut-off most reliable when the number of variables is between 20 and 50. According to the decision rules, eight variables were subsequently eliminated.

In round two of the analysis, a Common Factor Analysis was done on the 17 remaining variables, again extracting three factors (Eigenvalues 4.93, 4.19 and 1.41). Since all factor loadings were now acceptable (above 0.5), this factor structure was accepted as the final three-factor solution, containing 7, 5 and 5 variables respectively.

Table 1: FINAL THREE-FACTOR SOLUTION
(N=3 and R=Promax)

FACTOR 1 Technician	FACTOR 2 Strategist	FACTOR 3 Manager
0.867	0.829	0.856
0.863	0.776	0.802
0.840	0.772	0.716
0.788	0.748	0.640
0.777	0.684	0.628
0.682		
0.523		

To determine the internal consistency of the three factors, Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were calculated on the indices representing each factor. After deleting one variable, which threatened the internal stability, the final Cronbach Alpha Coefficients of the three-factor solution were as follows:

Table 2: RELIABILITY COEFFICIENT FOR THREE-FACTOR SOLUTION

CRONBACH ALPHA FOR THREE FACTORS	
FACTOR 1: Technician	0.89
FACTOR 2: Strategist	0.83
FACTOR 3: Manager	0.81

The internal stability on the variables representing the roles of the *PR technician*, the *PR strategist* and the *PR manager* can be said to be sufficient, since 0.70 is generally regarded as the minimum Alpha coefficient, which a factor should reach in order to be acceptable.

The total variance explained by the three factors was 62%, which is considered an acceptable percentage for the social sciences (Hair *et al*, 1998). The three factors respectively explained 29%, 25% and 8% of the total variance. The common variance explained by the three factors were 47%, 40% and 13% respectively.

As can be seen in Table 3, there is a negligible correlation between Factor 1 and Factor 2 (0.036) and between Factor 1 and Factor 3 (0.035). The role of the *PR technician* is not correlated to the role of the *PR manager* or the *PR strategist*. However, there is a substantial correlation between Factor 2 (strategist role) and Factor 3 (manager role), namely 0.485 (see Table 3).

Table 3: INTERFACTOR CORRELATIONS OF THE THREE-FACTOR SOLUTION

	FACTOR 1: Technician	FACTOR 2: Strategist	FACTOR 3: Manager
FACTOR 1 Technician	1.000	0.036	0.035
FACTOR 2 Strategist	0.036	1.000	*0.485*
FACTOR 3 Manager	0.035	*0.485*	1.000

Two-factor solution

Because of the substantial correlation of 0.485 between Factor 2 (the *PR strategist* role) and Factor 3 (the *PR manager* role) as well as the fact that the Eigenvalues of Factor 3 were marginally > 1 (namely 1.41), a two-factor solution was extracted as a control measure. High intercorrelations might permit a reduction of the three-way typology to a more parsimonious two-way typology.

The Eigenvalues of the two-factor solution were 4.93 and 4.19 respectively. The items representing the *PR technician* role remained exactly the same as in the three-factor solution (all factor loadings were >0.527). However, the items representing the *PR strategist* and the *PR manager* roles combined perfectly into one factor in the two-factor solution (all factor loadings were >0.567). Cronbach's Alpha coefficients were 0.861 for Factor 1 (the *PR Manager* and *PR Strategist* roles combined) and 0.894 for Factor 2 (the *PR Technician* role).

Interfactor correlations on the two-factor solution were negligible, namely 0.04 between Factor 1 (*PR manager* and PR strategist) and Factor 2 (*PR technician*).

Confirmatory factor analysis

In order to determine the preferred solution, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (using SAS Proc Callis) was carried out on the "clean" two- and three-factor structures obtained. The indices from the three-factor solution of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis represented a (marginally) better fit than the two-factor solution. However, the three-factor model did not represent a 'good' fit on the data, but was accepted as a 'reasonable' fit. The three factors were: Factor 1—Role of the *PR technician*; Factor 2—Role of the *PR strategist*; and Factor 3—Role of the *PR manager*.

Measurement indices

The indices that measured the three roles are shown in Table 4. Only the variables in the final three-factor solution are presented, from the highest to the lowest factor loadings for each factor. (All the factor loadings are above 0.62.)

Table 4 : MEASUREMENT INDICES

Factor 1: ROLE OF THE *PR TECHNICIAN*	
0.867	Write articles for the organisation's publications.
0.863	Keep a media clipping service (clip articles that appeared in the media about the organisation).
0.840	Generate publicity, e.g. write media releases.
0.788	Produce audiovisual materials for presentations.
0.777	Organise special events, e.g. open houses, exhibitions or gala evenings.
0.682	Edit corporate communication materials, e.g. speeches or the annual report.

Factor 2: ROLE OF THE *PR STRATEGIST*	
0.829	Explain to top management the impact of their behaviour (obtained through research) on key external stakeholders (media, investors, communities).
0.776	Act as 'early warning system' to top management before issues erupt into crises.
0.772	Act as advocate for key external stakeholders by explaining their views to top management.
0.748	Reduce uncertainty in strategic decision-making by interpreting the external environment to top management.
0.684	Initiate dialogue with pressure groups limiting the organisation's autonomy, e.g. environmentalists or consumer advocates or legislators.
Factor 3: ROLE OF THE *PR MANAGER*	
0.856	Take responsibility for the success/failure of corporate communication plans.
0.802	Take responsibility for the success/failure of corporate communication strategy.
0.716	Develop corporate communication strategy that supports corporate strategy.
0.640	Manage the implementation of corporate communication plans.
0.628	Monitor the performance of corporate communication practitioners/sub-divisions.

DISCUSSION

The findings presented in the previous section provide empirical support for the conceptualised role of the *PR strategist* (research objective 1); the CEO's expectations of such a role (research objective 4); and its differentiation from the historical roles of the *PR manager* and the *PR technician* (research objective 3).

Empirical support was also provided for the researcher's redefinition of the existing *PR manager* role as a role at the functional or meso level of the organisation. The role of the *PR technician* remains unchanged as described by Broom & Smith (1979) and Dozier (1984), i.e. an implementation role at micro level (research objective 2).

The correlation of 0.49 between the roles of the *PR strategist* and the *PR manager* (in the final three factor solution) can theoretically be explained, as both are management roles. Whereas in practice these roles might be played by the same person in a smaller organisation, the empirical evidence suggests that the *PR strategist* and the *PR manager* might indeed be two conceptual roles, which can be played by two different people operating at different organisational levels, in a bigger organisation at corporate/ multinational level.

However, no claim can be made to the empirical verification of a newly-conceptualised role based on one study only. More empirical research on the "split" of the historical manager role into the role of *PR strategist* and *PR manager* needs to be conducted, both in South Africa and abroad. The possibility that the third factor occurred by chance due to the design of the study, or chance covariance in the data matrix or other peculiarities of the sample has to be ruled out.

In spite of the caution expressed above, the findings merit further research for the following reasons: An extensive investigation of the public relations and strategic management literature preceded the empirical study. Whereas the role of the *PR strategist* was mainly conceptualised from the public relations literature, an attempt was made to establish 'fit' by investigating the strategic management literature to establish whether a need for such a role indeed existed at the top management level. Theoretically speaking, this was found to be the case.

The following should also be mentioned:
- Further statistical analysis of the data on CEO *expectations* is to be conducted, to determine for instance, whether CEO expectations of the role of a *PR strategist* are significantly higher than for the role of a *PR manager.*
- The data on the CEO's *perceptions of the performance* of the most senior corporate communication manager/practitioner (collected in this same study) is still to be analysed, in order to determine whether the three roles re-emerge, and what the CEO perceptions are of the performance in the different roles.
- Empirical support of the literature investigation was provided by the findings of an open question that followed the scaled questions on the questionnaire. CEOs were requested to provide the most important reason for their dissatisfaction with the most senior manager/practitioner responsible for the corporate communication function. The content analysis provided various categories, of which the two

categories with the highest frequencies were:
- corporate communication managers/practitioners were not proactive;
- corporate communication managers/practitioners were not regarded as playing a strategic role in their organisations.

The above corresponds with the opinions expressed by various authors referred to in the 'Problem Statement' (under heading 1).

An interesting finding was the empirical verification—by chief executives who participated in the study—of the historic PR roles (the role of the *PR manager* and the role of the *PR technician*), conceptualised and empirically verified from the self-reports of practitioners during the 1980s. This finding was deduced from the two-factor solution, in which Factor 1 represented the role of *PR strategist* and *PR manager* combined, and Factor 2 the role of the *PR technician*.

The above finding is logical when taking into consideration that, in essence, the conceptualisation of the role of a *PR strategist* was based on 'splitting' the historical *PR manager* role into items that represented PR activities *firstly* at macro level (the *PR strategist* role) and *secondly*, at meso or organisational level (the *PR manager* role). Since the roles of *PR strategist* and *PR manager* combined perfectly into one factor in the two-factor solution, the historical view of two empirical roles (the *PR manager* and the *PR technician*) are therefore supported from the perspective of chief executives who participated in the study.

However, the three-factor solution is still preferred as it indicated a better fit, both statistically and conceptually.

CONCLUSION

This study conceptualised and empirically verified the role of the *PR strategist* (from the perspective of the CEO's expectations) as a strategic role at the top management or macro level of the organisation—taking responsibility for identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders and their concerns; identifying the publics and activists that emerge around key organisational issues; and determining the consequences of organisational policies and strategies on the strategic stakeholders. The role of the *PR strategist* includes feeding this strategic information into the organisation's strategy formulation processes, thereby influencing top management decisions on the organisation's attitude towards, and communication with, strategic stakeholders.

The role of the *PR manager* was redefined as a role at the organisational or meso level—taking responsibility for developing a corporate communication strategy that supports corporate strategy as well as *managing* the planning, implementation and evaluation of

communication plans/programmes. This can be described as a managerial role at functional level. (Developing a corporate communication strategy for the organisation is an important new activity for a practitioner in the role of *PR manager*—this was the item on the questionnaire which, according to the descriptive statistics, produced the highest mean.)

The role of the *PR technician*—as conceptualised by Dozier (1984) and Broom & Smith (1979)—is viewed as a role at the micro or implementation level of the organisation, uncorrelated to the roles of the *PR strategist* and the *PR manager*. Practitioners in the PR technician role provide the communication and journalistic skills needed to carry out communication programmes—generating communication products that implement policy decisions made by others.

In providing a description of the activities to be performed by a person in the role of the *PR strategist*, the study addressed a vacuum in the public relations literature. It also attempted to provide some answers to Dozier's question of '*who* will manage the corporate communication function, *how* will it be managed, and what are the *role expectations* of the role sender" (Dozier, *in* Grunig 1992:329).

Whereas most research on PR roles draws on self-reports from the perspective of corporate communication practitioners (Johnson, 1989), this study provided both the theoretical and empirical perspective of the chief executive as the 'role sender'. In view of the findings of the Excellence Study that there must be shared expectations between top management and the corporate communication function in order to have excellent communication (Dozier *et al* 1995), this study made an important contribution by establishing a benchmark regarding CEO expectations for the most senior manager/ practitioner responsible for the corporate communication function.

In conceptualising the role of the *PR strategist*, this research broadened the theoretical viewpoint of the field of public relations. The Excellence Study pointed out that in order to be excellent, an organisation must have a practitioner playing the role of the *PR manager* (Grunig, *in* Grunig 1992). This study posited that to be excellent, an organisation should also have a practitioner playing the role of *PR strategist*. Furthermore, it provided insight into the role that is to be played by the most senior manager/practitioner responsible for the corporate communication function, in order to fulfil CEO expectations.

In its preliminary findings on the CEO's *perceptions of the performance* of the most senior corporate communication manager/practitioner, this study indicates some support for the dissatisfaction expressed in the international public relations literature and by Blum (1997), the then President of the Southern African chapter of the IABC. Should

these findings be validated by a further data analysis, an important reason for the problem might be said to lie with the *training* that corporate communication managers (and CEOs) receive.

Research by Groenewald (1998) on the knowledge base of corporate communication managers indicated that they were not unaware of their shortcomings. Findings of the study were, *inter alia*, that corporate communication managers perceived *strategic communication skills, management communication skills* and *management skills* as significantly more important than technical communication skills. However, the perceived effectiveness of their training was significantly lower in these skills than in technical communication skills.

It is therefore suggested that tertiary institutions and professional associations providing education and training to senior corporate communication students and practitioners should pay attention to providing them with the strategic management and strategic communication skills and knowledge required to fulfil the expectations that top management seems to have of them. Furthermore, strategic communication management should be introduced as a course in business schools (e.g. MBA programmes) and other short courses through which CEOs/other managers often receive their training. This will provide the core knowledge base and the shared expectations pointed out by the Excellence Study (Dozier, *et al* 1995) as being the prerequisites for achieving communication excellence in today's organisation.

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