

The prevalence of the strategist role in senior communication manager roles at South African universities

N Nieuwenhuys

 **orcid.org/0000-0002-0929-3538**

Dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree *Master of Arts in Communication* at the North-West University

Supervisor: Prof LM Fourie
Co-supervisor: Prof MN Wiggill

Graduation: March 2021
Student number: 21154732

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank the following people who supported me throughout the culmination of this five-year journey:

I am eternally grateful to my darling mother, Barbara Anne, the most benevolent, courageous woman I know – thank you for your unconditional love, steadfast support and sympathetic ear every single day! I love you dearly!

“Let everything happen to you, beauty and terror. Just keep going, no feeling is final.”
— Rainer Maria Rilke

To my father, Lawrence, even though you are not here and haven't been for so many years, I want you to know, I did it! You would be so proud of me! Love you always!

“Remember to enjoy every minute of a new adventure and savour it who knows when it will ever come again?” – Lawrence Nieuwenhuys – Travel journal

I'm grateful to my twin brothers, Nolan & Nikander – remember mommy and I raised you both to be warriors, just like us! Remember, no matter how hard life gets, keep fighting, never ever give up, no matter how hard the struggle.

“One life, one shot, give it all you've got! Hope for the hopeless, a light in the darkness!” – Parkway Drive

To my Godfather, Steven, thank you for all your adoration and wise counsel. I love you!

“The harder the battle the sweeter the victory.” – Bob Marley

Thank you to my closest friend, sister and colleague Jennekin de Beer, for all your impetus and for giving me the strength to give every day my all.

“It may be that when we no longer know what to do we have come to our real work, and that when we no longer know which way to go we have come to our real journey. The mind that is not baffled is not employed. The impeded stream is the one that sings.” – Wendell Berry

To my best friends, Twang Gang - Zhane, Massie, Photi, Veda, Nik, and Nola - thank you so much for all your stimulating discussions, love and compassion. I love you all so very much!

Couldn't find anything that beats the “we are the champions” quote. At least not at this point in my life. – Zhane Tannous

To my dear friends Danitza and Willem Klopper, thank you for all your unwavering support throughout this journey, especially your calls and chats during lockdown. I love and appreciate you both so much!

“The fight is won or lost far away from the witnesses, behind the lines, in the gym, and out there on the road; long before I dance under those lights.” — Muhammad Ali

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to my supervisor, Prof. Lynnette Fourie, thank you for believing in me, all your thoughtful comments, guidance, patient understanding and profound belief in my abilities.

To my co-supervisor, Prof Marlene Wiggill, thank you for being my mentor and for all your practical suggestions and extensive knowledge.

A special thanks to my executive director, Clement Manoko! Another leader like you, I have yet to find. May I follow in your footsteps.

“Live for yourself and you will live in vain; live for others, and you will live again.” — Bob Marley

To Simone Barroso and her team at Language Matters, thank you for the technical and language editing of this dissertation. Also, thank you Simone for all your pep talks and for keeping me enthused when I needed it the most.

“It is well known that a vital ingredient of success is not knowing that what you're attempting can't be done. A person ignorant of the possibility of failure can be a half-brick in the path of the bicycle of history.” — Terry Pratchett, Equal Rites

I would like to recognize the invaluable assistance of Anneke Coetzee and her staff members at the Ferdinand Potsma Library.

To my colleagues from the CRM division of the NWU, particularly the Department of Corporate Communication and the Department of Marketing and Student Recruitment, I cannot thank you enough!

“One love (universal love and respect to all regardless of race, creed, class, colour and all the schisms)” – Clement Manoko

in lumine tuo videbimus lumen

ABSTRACT

South Africa's higher education sector is a highly unpredictable environment in various respects, which, in recent years, has faced severe adversity. Many of these adversities are a result of the country's volatile economy, amongst others, and several related issues in the country had elicited several student demonstrations that also relate directly to the country's economic challenges, such as income disparities and the high level of unemployment.

Communication at universities has and continues to serve a critical purpose, especially when considering these recent challenges. To deal with this unpredictable environment in which practitioners operate, the communication management function at universities needs to fulfil a strategic role, in particular when it comes to the tasks executed by senior communication practitioners, communicating with stakeholders, and identifying current and emerging issues timeously.

If senior practitioners are to fulfil a strategic communication management role, they need to be trained and experienced in performing these strategic tasks. Steyn and Puth (2000:20-21) identify three dominant roles in South Africa, namely the strategist, manager, and technician. With reference to these communication practitioner roles, the practitioner, exemplifying the role of the strategist, will execute strategic duties such as environmental scanning or research.

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which the communication strategist is prevalent in senior communication management roles at South African universities, since little research has been conducted in this regard. Against this background, the following general research question was asked: *To what extent is the communication strategist prevalent in senior communication practitioner roles at universities in South Africa?*

In this qualitative study, semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior communication practitioners to explore the current views they hold regarding their roles. Furthermore, a literature study was conducted to determine the importance of the strategic role of communication management in attaining organisational goals.

This study found that the majority of senior communication practitioners at participating universities do perform a number of strategic duties related to the role of the strategist – despite the fact that they occupy contrasting positions and function at different levels, which affects the type of decision-making they participate in. Hence, only a few of these practitioners function at the top management level of their universities and form part of the dominant coalition based on their membership and advisory functions within these university decision-making governance

structures. Furthermore, very few practitioners operate according to varying degrees of a symmetrical worldview, which is also evident in the task of two-way communication and achieving social responsibility and good governance within their university. The execution of the organisational communication strategy is evident according to other terms mentioned and not the term enterprise strategy. Nevertheless, it is evident that certain universities in South Africa are outsourcing their research needs as in the case of environmental scanning, or at least certain stages of this process.

The study revealed that a majority of practitioners also execute tasks associated with the role of the manager, and in the minority of cases these practitioners operate at the macro level and are regarded as both stakeholder experts and trusted advisors. The other tasks that practitioners perform include participation in communication decision-making in terms of the communication strategy and policy, communication programmes and the communication plan, as well as the formulation of key messages and managerial duties related to managing staff and their departmental budget. In terms of the tasks practitioners execute which are associated with the role of the technician, these tasks appear to be interrelated, such as writing, website management and publications. However, internal communication expertise tasks definitely dominate media relations expertise.

Keywords: communication practitioners, senior communication practitioners, communication management, universities, two-way symmetrical communication, corporate communication, environmental scanning, boundary spanning, strategist, manager, technician.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	I
ABSTRACT	III
CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS	1
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 The importance of strategic communication	5
1.3 Problem statement	6
1.4 General research question	7
1.5 Specific research questions	7
1.6 General research objective	7
1.7 Specific research objectives	7
1.8 Central theoretical argument	8
1.9 Research approach	8
1.10 Research methods	9
1.10.1 Literature study	9
1.10.2 Empirical study	13
1.10.2.1 Semi-structured interviews	13
1.10.2.2 Population and sampling	13
1.10.2.3 Data analysis	14
1.10.2.4 Ethical considerations	14
1.11 General overview of the study and chapter layout	14
CHAPTER 2: THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS	16

2.1	Introduction	16
2.2	The Excellence theory	16
2.3	Grunig and Hunt's (1984) communication models	18
2.3.1	Press agency model	18
2.3.2	Public information model	19
2.3.3	Two-way asymmetrical model	19
2.3.4	Two-way symmetrical model	19
2.3.5	Mixed-motive model	20
2.4	Broom's (1982) communication practitioner roles	23
2.4.1	Expert prescriber	23
2.4.2	Problem-solving process facilitator	23
2.4.3	Communication facilitator	24
2.4.4	Communication technician	24
2.5	The European Body of Knowledge (EBOK) research on communication practitioner roles	24
2.6	Steyn's communication practitioner roles	25
2.6.1	The strategist	25
2.6.1.1	Tasks and characteristics of the strategist	26
2.6.1.2	The reflective strategist	30
2.6.1.3	Reflective strategy in action – the Melbourne mandate	32
2.6.1.4	Theoretical statement 1	35
2.6.2	The manager	36
2.6.2.1	Tasks of a manager	37

2.6.2.1.1	The attributes and primary tasks of communication managers at universities	40
2.6.2.2	Theoretical statement 2	42
2.6.3	The technician	43
2.6.3.1	Tasks of a technician	46
2.6.3.2	Theoretical statement 3	47
2.7	Steyn's (2000a; 2000b) roles and the importance of the strategist role	47
2.8	Conclusion.....	49
 CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.....		51
3.1	Introduction	51
3.2	The qualitative research approach.....	51
3.3	Research design.....	52
3.3.1	Research questions, research methods, and theoretical statements	52
3.3.2	Population and sampling	57
3.3.2.1	The nature of departments housing communication practitioners at participating universities	58
3.4	Data collection	60
3.4.1	Semi-structured interviews.....	60
3.4.1.1	The interview schedule	61
3.4.1.2	Process followed during the interviews	74
3.5	Data analysis.....	76
3.6	Validity.....	76
3.7	Reliability	77

3.8	Ethical issues.....	78
3.9	Conclusion.....	79
 CHAPTER 4: PERCEPTIONS OF SENIOR COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS REGARDING THEIR ROLES..... 80		
4.1	Introduction	80
4.2	The strategist role analysis.....	80
4.2.1	Training	81
4.2.2	Symmetrical worldview	84
4.2.3	Achieve social responsibility and good governance within organisation	87
4.2.4	Top management and participation in management decision-making.....	88
4.2.5	Environmental scanning	90
4.2.6	Two-way communication	94
4.2.7	Organisational communication strategy	97
4.3	The manager role analysis.....	98
4.3.1	Stakeholder expert	98
4.3.2	Trusted advisor.....	100
4.3.3	Participation in communication decision-making.....	102
4.3.4	Communication programmes and plans.....	103
4.3.5	Formulating key messages.....	106
4.3.6	Managerial related duties	108
4.4	The technician role analysis	110
4.4.1	Technical skills	110
4.4.2	Internal technician expertise	112

4.4.2.1	Website management.....	112
4.4.2.2	Editing	113
4.4.2.3	Proofreading.....	114
4.4.2.4	Design	114
4.4.2.5	Video	114
4.4.2.6	Publications	115
4.4.3	Media relations expertise.....	115
4.5	Conclusion.....	116
 CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION		119
5.1	Introduction	119
5.2	The importance of the strategic role of communication management in attaining organisational goals	119
5.2.1	The descriptive characteristics and tasks of the strategist	120
5.2.2	The descriptive characteristics and tasks of the manager.....	121
5.2.3	The descriptive characteristics and tasks of the technician	122
5.3	The views of senior communication practitioners regarding their roles..	123
5.3.1	The strategist.....	123
5.3.2	The manager	126
5.3.3	The technician	130
5.4	The prevalence of the communication strategist in senior communication practitioner roles	133
5.5	Future opportunities for research	136
 LIST OF REFERENCES		137

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1-1:	The studies that serve as a foundation for this study.....	10
Table 1-2:	Other literature relating to communication practices at different organisations and universities	11
Table 3-1:	Research questions and research method	53
Table 3-2:	Specific theoretical statements.....	53
Table 3-3:	Semi-structured interview schedule.....	62
Table 3-4:	Interviewees.....	75

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

APP	Annual performance plan
CASE	Council for Advancement and Support of Education
CEO	Corporate executive officer
CPUT	Cape Peninsula University of Technology
CRM	Corporate relations and marketing
CSP	Corporate social performance
CUT	Central University of Technology
DUR	Department of University Relations
DUT	Durban University of Technology
EBOK	The European Body of Knowledge
ECS	Executive management committee of the senate
GA	Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management
HE	Higher education
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
IA	Institutional Advancement
IABC	International Association of Business Communicators
IABC	International Association of Business Communicators
MACE	Marketing, Advancement and Communication in Higher Education
NMMU	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
NMU	Nelson Mandela University
NRF	National Research Fund
NSFAS	Nations Student Financial Aid Scheme
NWU	North-West University
PPE	Personal protective equipment
PRISA	Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa
PRSA	Public Relations Society of America

ROI	Return on investment
SACOMM	Southern African Communication Association
SAPS	South African Police Service
SMG	Senior management group
SU	Stellenbosch University
TUT	Tshwane University of Technology
UCT	University of Cape Town
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UFS	University of the Free State
UJ	University of Johannesburg
UKZN	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
UKZN	University of Kwa-Zulu Natal
UMC	University management committee
UNISA	University of South Africa
UniZulu	University of Zululand
UP	University of Pretoria
USAf	Universities South Africa
UWC	University of the Western Cape
Wits	University of Witwatersrand
WSU	Walter Sisulu University

CHAPTER 1: CONTEXT, PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1.1 Introduction

The tertiary education landscape in South Africa is rapidly expanding and constantly changing. This dynamic environment along with the increasing demand for higher education has brought with it a plethora of new challenges, including those political in nature, as well as economic pressures. Challenges include the increasing participation of groups who were previously excluded and not afforded the opportunity to access higher education, which have made higher education increasingly diverse (Brown, 2014:209; Didisse *et al.*, 2019:1113; Sánchez & Singh, 2016:25; Van der Berg & Knoesen, 2018:30).

Increased incidences of student protests since 2015 are a testimony of the challenges mentioned (Kamga, 2019:89, 97). The student-led protest movement that started in October 2015 gave rise to a series of violent and disruptive acts across South Africa. Universities were literally brought to a standstill, resulting in the forced shut down of some universities and the cancellation or postponement of examinations (Ejoke *et al.*, 2019:71; Kamga, 2019:100). The demand for tertiary education in South Africa is likely to become an even greater challenge in future, as new student generations finishing school will generate have even greater expectations in this regard (Van der Berg & Knoesen, 2018:22).

In 2015, students demanded free and quality education and refused to accept tuition fee increases due to their inability to afford tuition fees that increase each year (Kamga, 2019:98; Tjønneland, 2017). Towards the end of October 2015, these demonstrations escalated as student and university worker protests coalesced. New issues that were brought forward included demands for debt relief for all students, curricular transformation, and the abolishment of the outsourcing of service workers at universities. In 2016, students called for the removal of symbols at different universities that were associated the apartheid era, which resulted in movements like “Rhodes Must Fall” and the removal of a statue that honoured the colonial icon Cecil John Rhodes. Language policy issues arose at certain universities, including the University of Pretoria (UP), where students became occupied with abolishing Afrikaans at South African universities as a medium of instruction and demanded that lectures be presented in English only (Kamga, 2019:99-100; Langa, 2017:6; Svrluga, 2015; Tjønneland, 2017). The uprisings resulted in millions of rands worth of damage, estimated at a cost of R500 million in June 2016 (Kamga, 2019:99-100).

In 2017, former president Jacob Zuma announced that students from poor and working-class families would be entitled to free higher education through the National Student Financial Aid

Scheme (NSFAS). However, this scheme only applies to students who are accepted at a public university or TVET college. This government scheme would convert loans to grants for students whose combined family income was between R122 000 and R350 000 (NSFAS, 2020).

These events and the aftermath are indications of what challenges higher education can expect over the next five years – student unrest has become a reality for South African universities, and the slowing economy has placed further strain on the affordability of higher education (UWC, 2016:51).

Moreover, the outbreak of the recent COVID-19 pandemic has once again exposed the vulnerability of traditional universities in South Africa in a technological age, namely the great divide that exists between those who have access to technology, which requires universities to be far more adaptable in terms of how they operate (Cloete, 2020).

Evidentially, the environment in which South African universities exist and operate today has become increasingly volatile. In the face of the adversities that confront universities now and seemingly in the near future, the role of communication practitioners will become increasingly prevalent, and these practitioners will have to work very closely with university management in strategic processes to identify risks such as those mentioned in this discussion (Elken *et al.*, 2018:1119; Wits, 2018:174).

The communication that an organisation engages in is a key factor in the level of success they achieve; this is true for any organisation, whether it is a non-profit or academic organisation (Marques, 2010:56). Accordingly, methods that universities use to communicate with stakeholders are a key consideration, especially given their high visibility in the towns and cities in which they exist and their significant impact on communities (Chaplo & Sims, 2010). For universities to commit to sustainability, they are therefore required to produce communication in all forms – from unprompted communication impulses and initiatives to the skilled management of on-going consultation practices and other collaborations that involve the participation of their stakeholders (Franz-Balsen & Heinrichs, 2007:431; Kettunen, 2015:63).

The resulting communication process is the link between the university and its various stakeholder groups (Avram, 2015:274). Therefore, communication departments at these universities focus on building meaningful relationships with different stakeholders, keeping them up-to-date, and creating opportunities for them to engage by undertaking a variety of diverse activities such as corporate social responsibility, internal communication, and media relations (Gupta, 2011:118). The stakeholders of a university are divided into two categories. The first category is external-level stakeholders, which comprises prospective students, parents, government, alumni, the

media, the public, and customers in the form of service providers (Avram, 2015:275; Benneworth & Jongbloed, 2009:570). The second category is internal-level stakeholders, which include students and university employees consisting of academic and support staff, research teams, and academic management. The importance of communication at the internal level has risen in prominence as communication with parents and students has come to be largely based on government policies such as university funding and participation, as in the case of South Africa (Chaplo & Sims, 2010; Pangalele, 2017:25).

To fully understand what these departments do and how they communicate, it is necessary to understand the structure in which they function at university level. Universities in South Africa have various support or service departments (which are non-academic) that exist as part of their structures. These include, amongst others, support services such as Human Resources, IT Support, Protection Services, Finances, and Communication (Elken *et al.*, 2018:1120; NWU, 2020b). Practitioners within these departments are responsible for various communication functions which go by different names in different universities and are usually made up of different units. Communication departments comprise different divisions which range from stakeholder relations, corporate communication, communication, and marketing (or marketing and communications), student recruitment and marketing, alumni, events and fundraising to web services, branding, and advertising and promotions (NWU, 2020a; TUT, 2020; UFS, 2020).

These divisions have a range of responsibilities mostly of a technical nature that include formal engagement with the media; corporate, internal, and ad-hoc publications; digital communication in terms of social media platforms; and the university's website, which includes calendar events published on their website. Internal communication includes the following functions, among others: the staff intranet; strategic communication and planning such as institutional and key messages; stakeholder relations, for instance events planning and updating the stakeholder database; brand and corporate identity, as well as marketing and institutional advancement within the academic environment (NWU, 2017; 2020a; UFS, 2020; UP, 2020; SU, 2013b).

Based on the responsibilities discussed above, practitioners operating within these communication departments each have individual tasks, occupy different roles, perform diverse functional activities within their respective departments, and operate according to a particular mandate. Katz and Kahn (1978:189) explain: "roles guide actions of individuals, such that actions mesh with repetitive activities of others to yield predictable outcomes". Hence, the role for which practitioners are employed will aid in the description of the functional activities that they must carry out on a daily basis – in other words, functional activities entail those tasks that will occupy the majority of their time each day. Their mandate, on the other hand, refers to what communication practitioners are mandated to do according to the university they work for and/or

professional body they are affiliated with or serve. A mandate can be referred to as an agreement, an instruction, or a commitment to perform a particular set of duties and may also refer to the description of a person's role (Dwyer, 2012:204).

The roles of communication practitioners at institutions such as universities entail, among other things, communicating and maintaining relationships with internal and external stakeholders, and replying and responding to external appeals for information from a wide range of stakeholders, and handling internal communication within their institutions (Elken *et al.*, 2018:1119).

Within their roles, practitioners are required to manage particularly complex and diverse operations within organisations, including universities. They must not only be knowledgeable of business-related activities but also other areas such as advertising, marketing, information systems, research, as well as other orthodox roles relating to communication management activities (Harris & Bryant, 1986:20). Communication practitioners may, therefore, not only be required to fulfil their duties for which they were appointed but may also be expected to perform other duties which have become prevalent during different scenarios that emerged, such as those described in this section. In terms of their roles as practitioners, these challenges may have also filtered through to their daily tasks and as a result affected their primary responsibilities.

In terms of risks, they identify the challenges and changes in their university's external environment, gearing their university for future challenges. In view of how communication practitioners operate within these departments, and against the backdrop of South Africa's higher education sector in order to manage the issues causing distress in their sector and retain their positions despite the current economic conditions of South Africa (Dlamini, 2020), it is evident that their roles at universities in South Africa continue to change and therefore their need to adapt accordingly is imperative.

Evidentially, there is an increasing demand and need for practitioners to serve a more strategic role and make a strategic contribution within their institutions. (Alkhouli, 2012; Dornyo & Adiku, 2015; Le Roux & Naudé, 2011; Luo, 2005; Muchena, 2018; Narteh *et al.*, 2011; Venter, 2004; Yang, 2005).

Despite this, the more technical daily duties of these practitioners (Franz-Balsen & Heinrichs, 2007:431; Gupta, 2011:118; Harris & Bryant, 1986:20; Kettunen, 2015:63) seem to dominate (Alkhouli, 2012; Dornyo & Adiku, 2015; Le Roux & Naudé, 2011; Luo, 2005; Narteh *et al.*, 2011; Muchena, 2018; Venter, 2004; Yang, 2005), not only in the field of communication but also at universities (see NWU, 2017; 2020a; UFS, 2020; UP, 2020; SU, 2013b), over the more strategic duties which are so necessary for handling unforeseen challenges such as those mentioned

earlier in this section (Chaplo & Sims, 2010; Elken et al., 2018:1119; Ejoke *et al.*, 2019:71; Kamga, 2019:99-100; Langa, 2017:6; Svrluga, 2015; Tjønneland, 2017; Van der Berg & Knoesen, 2018:22; Wits, 2018:174). Due to the dominance of strategic duties, practitioners are unable to execute strategic duties and ultimately enact a strategic role which is precisely what is required of them in order to not only flourish within their role but handle the circumstances or external factors which threaten the higher education sector of South Africa.

1.2 The importance of strategic communication

Given all the challenges that South African universities face (see 1.1), communication practitioners must be equipped for the unforeseen and initiate actions to deal with their unpredictable environments strategically. In other words, they must be proactive and learn from previous incidents to avoid the same pitfalls. Environmental scanning can assist the university in identifying or mitigating future and current issues that may otherwise have turned into crises.

Environmental scanning is one of the prime responsibilities of the practitioner acting in a strategic role. Environmental scanning can be used as a strategic tool, especially in terms of sharing strategic information involving stakeholders and other organisational issues with top management (Jansen van Vuuren, 2002:221). As such, environmental scanning is highly relevant to strategic communication management given that information collected with environmental scanning can be used for strategic management purposes (Wiggill, 2009:183).

The importance of stakeholder groups – which form part of the task of environmental scanning – varies over time according to various factors and incidents (Chaplo & Sims, 2010) (see 1.1), so practitioners must be informed on stakeholder matters at all times. Therefore, two-way communication is of strategic importance for the strategic stakeholders of any institution. The primary function of the model for two-way symmetrical communication is to engage with all stakeholders toward ensuring strong, mutually beneficial organisation-stakeholder relationships based on mutual understanding and trust. This model's approach premises that communication practitioners function from a symmetrical worldview, thus, taking society into consideration in all the decisions they make (Grunig & White, 1992) (see 2.2). According to the Excellence theory, there are 14 characteristics of excellent communication management (referred to as public relations in the excellence study) programmes. For the role of the strategist it is recommended, firstly, that the practitioner be educated in strategic communication management, which includes the ability to perform environmental scanning or research. Secondly, they should be able to apply the two-way symmetrical model and, thirdly, have a senior managerial role that forms part of executive management or the organisation's dominant coalition (Grunig *et al.*, 2002).

Based on the Excellence theory and international research (see Dozier, 1992:341; Moss *et al.*, 2000:301; Toth *et al.*, 1998:158; Van Ruler, 2000:412; Wright, 1995:186), Steyn (2000a:39-41) refined the communication practitioner's roles in South Africa as being that of the strategist, manager, and technician, after which the strategist was relabelled as the reflective strategist. The strategist referred to in this study encompasses the role of both the strategist and the reflective strategist (see 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.2).

The strategist participates in and advises on organisational strategy formulation which is based on research (or environmental scanning) on the relevant issues and stakeholder needs and views. Environmental scanning, moreover, involves the application of the two-way symmetrical model to engage in meaningful dialogue with stakeholders and ascertain their needs and views.

This information is analysed and translated into strategy formulation. Environmental scanning as conducted by the strategist assists the organisation in adapting to a changing environment, the timeous detection of issues and challenges and, thereby, avoiding crises and attaining organisational goals. The strategist influences the decisions made by executive management in terms of the organisation's attitude concerning stakeholders and communication with key stakeholders.

However, as is evident from the discussion in 1.1, the technical roles of the profession dominate and as a result, communication practitioners are unable to execute strategic duties and ultimately enact a strategic role which is precisely what is required of them to handle the circumstances or external factors which threaten the higher education sector of South Africa. Given the increasing need for institutions to thrive within these highly volatile environments, there is a great need for strategic communication practitioners.

1.3 Problem statement

Communication practitioners at universities in South Africa are tasked with numerous responsibilities. These practitioners take on a variety of roles, within their particular position of employment which either classify them as a communication technician, manager, and more importantly, the strategist, based on their primary duties and the level at which they operate (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b; 2009) (2.6.1.4, 2.6.2.2 and 2.6.3.2). However, research indicates that the technician role and/or technician-related duties prevail and as such, there are not enough practitioners functioning at the strategic level, not only at universities but also within the field of communication (Alkhouli, 2012; Dornyo & Adiku, 2015; Le Roux & Naudé, 2011; Luo, 2005; Narteh *et al.*, 2011; Muchena, 2018; Venter, 2004; Yang, 2005) (see 1.1). The current circumstances in which universities and communication practitioners function within the higher

education sector of South Africa and the constant changes impact on their range of functional activities relative to the role which they enact on a daily basis. Furthermore, the result of post-modernism that is characterised by rapid change and disarray requires of practitioners to adopt a more strategic and reflexive approach to communication with their primary stakeholders.

These circumstances refer to the transformation, restructuring, economic downturn, and numerous challenges universities have endured which are very likely to increase in the coming years (see 1.1). Hence, there is a call for practitioners to evolve and in doing so perform certain strategic duties and, more importantly, reflective duties as opposed to tasks of a predominantly technical nature. Thus, the demand and requisite for communication practitioners to fill a strategic role within their universities and in so doing transition from the role of a technician to the role of a strategist by acting as the regulator between their university and its external environment has become dire.

This problem statement has led to the following research questions:

1.4 General research question

To what extent is the communication strategist prevalent in senior communication practitioner roles at universities in South Africa?

1.5 Specific research questions

1.5.1. What is the importance of the strategic role of communication management for the survival of universities in South Africa, according to literature?

1.5.2. What are the current views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles?

1.6 General research objective

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent the communication strategist is prevalent in senior communication manager roles at South African universities.

1.7 Specific research objectives

1.7.1. The first objective of this study was to determine the importance of the strategic role of communication management in attaining organisational goals by conducting a literature study.

1.7.2. The second objective of this study was to explore the current views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles by means of semi-structured interviews.

1.8 Central theoretical argument

This study was informed by the two-way symmetrical communication model (Grunig *et al.*, 1992; 2002), supported by strategic communication management as found in the Excellence theory (Grunig *et al.*, 1992; 2002). Therefore, the strategic communication management model developed by Steyn and Puth (2000), integrated with the Excellence theory, was of consequence in this study. Furthermore, in their research on developing this model, Steyn and Puth (2000:20-21) empirically verified the three communication practitioner roles in the South African context, namely that of the strategist, manager, and the technician.

The main point of departure in the current study was that senior communication managers in the higher education environment should have a strategic role. To perform a strategic communication management role, the practitioner must not only be experienced but also educated in strategic duties (see 0). This practitioner must also function at the required top management level in order to perform their strategic tasks, which include participation in management decision-making and the enterprise strategy (2.6.1.1). Theoretical arguments are further elucidated in Chapter 2.

1.9 Research approach

This study followed a qualitative research approach due to its flexibility. This flexibility allowed for greater spontaneity and incorporation of the interaction that took place between the researcher and the participants (Du Plooy, 2009:89). Qualitative research aims to explore areas where marginal or no prior information exists (Du Plooy, 2009:88; Mack *et al.*, 2005:1). Accordingly, this research focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomena it aimed to explore (Flick, 2009:160-161; Patton, 2015:116).

A qualitative approach always involves some form of personal encounter with the world, which may range from taking on the shape of everyday life to communicating with a particular group of individuals (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002:199). For the purposes of this study, senior communication practitioners from universities in South Africa represent that group of individuals. These participants enabled the researcher to gather rich data and, in doing so, gain a deeper understanding of the roles that each of the participants enacted, which would not have been possible with a quantitative approach (Nassaji, 2015:129). Qualitative researchers are not only concerned with accurate quantifiable 'facts' or 'experiences' but also with the manner in which people construct, understand, and give meaning to these experiences, as well as their insight into

causes and motivations, since each case is different for each individual (Gerson & Horowitz, 2002:199; Tench & Yeomans, 2006).

1.10 Research methods

1.10.1 Literature study

Du Plooy (2009:64) explains that the purpose of a literature study is to:

- Establish what research was conducted in the specific research field;
- determine whether the literature contains certain discussions regarding the specific field of focus;
- determine from which theoretical perspectives the research problem can be approached;
- establish which research methods have been used to gather the abovementioned knowledge;
- establish results that have been generated by these research actions; and
- investigate what has been done with the results of previous research.

A literature study positions the study in the context of prior research conducted and academic sources related to the topic of the study. Furthermore, it presents a crucial fusion of empirical literature according to relevant themes and/or variables and validates how a study addresses a gap or issue in the literature. It also sketches the theoretical framework of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016:10). Within the research process there are numerous factors that require the use of literature, including the planning, analysis and writing up of findings as well as consulting present literature focusing on other research, theories, and the techniques used within your own study (Flick, 2014:72).

One of the key features in carrying out qualitative research is the use of existing literature and determining its importance for the study at hand (Flick, 2014:72). In this study, a literature study was conducted to answer the first specific research question (see 1.5.1), which is answered in Chapter 2, by studying the research relating to communication practitioner roles. The central theoretical statements that emerged from the literature were formulated and are presented in Chapter 2.

The literature study covered the Excellence theory, the communication models developed by Hunt and J. Grunig (1984), as well as the communication practitioner roles established by Broom (1982) and adapted and redefined by Steyn (2000a; 2000b; 2009). The databases that were used

to conduct the literature search include: Ferdinand Postma-library catalogue, Scopus, EbscoHost, Google Scholar, Emerald Insight Journals, JSTOR, ProQuest, Nexus and the National ETD Portal: South African theses and dissertations (NRF).

The dissertations and theses conducted in South Africa that served as a foundation for this study are presented in Table 1-1:

Table 1-1: The studies that serve as a foundation for this study

Author	Title	Study focus	Relevance to this study
Steyn, B. (2000b)	Strategic management roles of the corporate communication function (MCom – dissertation)	The most important focus of this study was the conceptualisation of the corporate communication practitioner's strategic role at the macro level of the organisation. Steyn (2000b) provides both a description for this role and specifies the behavioural characteristics of the role of the strategist.	This provided a better understanding in terms of the activities of the strategist that may result in the realisation of top management's expectations of the strategist.
Jansen van Vuuren, P. (2002)	Environmental scanning – A South African corporate communication perspective with special emphasis on the tertiary sector (PhD – thesis)	This study focused on the use of environmental scanning as potential strategic tool for an organisation to acquire a competitive advantage. In her research, Jansen van Vuuren (2002) focused on the tertiary education sector and the scanning activities that have been used. More specifically, she investigated these can be used to advance the role and impact of the communication practitioner in achieving organisational goals. In this study, the marketing and communication department and top management were responsible for environmental scanning at their institutions.	Similarly, in this study, the task of environmental scanning is one of the critical tasks of the strategist.

Other literature that was consulted relating to the topic of this study, specifically on the communication practices at different organisations and universities in particular are presented in Table 1-2 below:

Table 1-2: Other literature relating to communication practices at different organisations and universities

Author	Title	Study focus	Relevance to this study
Steyn, B. (2000a)	CEO expectations in terms of communication management (public relations in study) roles	This study was able to determine chief executive officer's (CEO) role expectations of the most senior practitioner who is responsible for the corporate communication function within the organisation, the strategist, as well as the manager and technician.	The study also initiated a benchmark in terms of CEOs' expectations of the most senior communication practitioner as the strategist, which is the most prominent role in this study.
Luo, Y. (2005)	Communication management (public relations in study) function in a higher education setting: an examination of communication management in two eastern U.S. universities	Luo (2005) focused on public universities, which is regarded as a limitation due to the exclusion of private institutions.	Similarly, this study focused on universities, and it included the Excellence Theory, which originated from the two-way symmetrical model. The most important characteristics of the Excellence Theory, also highlighted by Luo (2005), include two-way symmetrical communication and power in the dominant coalition, significant to the role of the strategist in this study.
Le Roux, T. and Naudé, A. (2011)	A profile of South African communication management (public relations in study) practitioners in top	Le Roux and Naudé (2011) describe what communication practitioners are faced with and the skills and knowledge they require within their particular environment. Furthermore, they establish that	The population of Le Roux and Naudé's (2011) study differed from that of this research study.

	performing organisations	older practitioners are more likely to perform senior roles, specifically those that embody the role of the strategist in terms of their position of employment and the tasks they execute. The participants in Le Roux and Naudé's (2011) study were not members of a professional body that could provide them with the necessary information and assist them in understanding their function. This may explain why a vast number of technicians are active in the profession, as these practitioners do not gain the knowledge and skills needed to understand their function from these bodies.	This study focused on all practitioners regardless of their affiliation with corporate communication bodies such as and the IABC, as this would exclude many practitioners and thus limit the study.
Dornyo, P. and Adiku, E.A. (2015)	Communication management (public relations in study) practice in Ghanaian tertiary institutions: a study of Islamic University College and Valley View University	Their study found that communication practitioners fail to manage communication at their universities strategically. The study further revealed media relations to be a prevailing role that these practitioners performed.	Subsequently, their study contributed to this research study by revealing practitioners' inability to function on a strategic level.
Narteh, B., Akwensivie, D.M. and Agyapong, K. (2011)	Communication management (public relations in study) practices: a study of selected private universities in Ghana	Their study found that communication practitioners do occupy management positions at universities in Ghana; however, they were not represented at a council level that would enable them to communicate decisions made at the managerial levels to university stakeholders. The task and requirement mentioned above are in accordance with those of the strategist.	These tasks together with a number of other tasks were used in this research study to determine the prevalence of the strategist role with respect to the senior communication practitioner roles at South African universities.

A search on the Nexus database revealed that no other study with the same topic has been or is currently being investigated.

This study focused on the extent to which the strategist role is prevalent at universities in South Africa as well as the tasks of the manager and technician. The sample for this study consisted of senior communication practitioners from universities in South Africa only, whereas Steyn's

(2000a) population consisted of CEOs from public, private, and tertiary education institutions. The membership lists of professional PR/communication associations including PRISA, IABC, UNITECH (Association for the Marketing and Communication Management) (public relations in study), departments of Southern African universities and technikons), and SACOMM (Southern African Communication Association) were used to identify the available population for the lack of a sampling frame.

1.10.2 Empirical study

Semi-structured interviews were used as the research method to obtain information on the roles of senior communication practitioners employed at South African universities.

1.10.2.1 Semi-structured interviews

The data for this study was collected by conducting semi-structured interviews (see 3.4.1). This data was collected to determine the extent to which the strategic role is performed by senior communication practitioners at selected South African universities as well as to obtain an in-depth understanding of the views these communication practitioners held regarding their roles. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim to assist the researcher in identifying patterns within the data. The questions asked during the semi-structured interviews were based on the theory as discussed in Chapter 2. The interview findings were used to answer the second specific research question (see 1.5.2).

1.10.2.2 Population and sampling

Universities South Africa (USAf) (2017), formerly known as Higher Education South Africa (HESA), is a membership organisation representing the universities in South Africa. According to USAf (2017), South Africa comprises 26 public universities distributed across all nine provinces. The target population of this study was senior communication practitioners at universities in South Africa.

The researcher focused on senior communication practitioners at universities that have been confronted with the challenges and changes explained in 1.1. Communication practitioners from 23 institutions across South Africa were contacted to arrange one-on-one interviews, and 12 practitioners from nine of these universities agreed to participate in this study. Sampling is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

1.10.2.3 Data analysis

The researcher was immersed in the transcripts of each interview and analysed the data by means of a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is described as the method of recognising, analysing, and reporting on the themes that emerge from in the data. Thematic analysis allows researchers to describe the data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). The researcher worked through each of the participant's transcripts to identify patterns in the data. These patterns were based on the constructs identified in the tasks associated with each role, namely the strategist, manager, and technician, as performed by the communication practitioners that were interviewed.

1.10.2.4 Ethical considerations

Before the researcher began to conduct interviews with individuals from various universities, potential participants were contacted in advance to confirm their participation in this study. As soon as their confirmation was received regarding their participation in this study, permission was also obtained to conduct the interviews. Participants were aware of the nature of the study, the fact that their participation was voluntary, and that they could withdraw from the study at any time if they chose to do so (see Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:101).

To delve deeper and understand the views held by these practitioners regarding their roles, the interviews were conducted in a private setting where participants felt most comfortable. The responses provided by the participants were handled with academic integrity.

The researcher assured participants that the aim of the study was not to compare which university's communication practitioners dealt with the challenges facing higher education in South Africa more effectively, nor the strategic contributions made only by some and not others. Rather, the aim was to determine the extent to which the strategic role is performed by senior communication practitioners at selected South African universities and to obtain an in-depth understanding of the views they held regarding their roles. Participants were informed that a mobile recording device would be used to record their responses for the transcription process. Participants were told that they would receive a copy of the dissertation once completed (if they preferred). Since one of the options used to acquire their informed consent was email, the researcher kept a record of this correspondence together with any notes made during telephone conversations.

1.11 General overview of the study and chapter layout

Chapter 1: Context, problem statement and research questions

Chapter 1 provided the framework of the study. The study was set within the background and context of the roles of senior communication practitioners at universities within South Africa. The specific research questions and objectives were described in this chapter, as well as the methods that were applied to answer these research questions. Lastly, ethical issues of the study were also discussed.

Chapter 2: The roles of communication practitioners

The literature study is presented in Chapter 2. This chapter aims to explore communication practitioner roles. A historical overview of communication practitioner roles and communication models are explained and, more specifically, the prominent communication roles found within the South African context according to literature. This chapter also explores the functional activities and mandate of communication professionals relating to various roles, specifically that of the strategist.

Chapter 3: Research method: Semi-structured interviews

This chapter discusses the research methods and processes of empirical research in greater detail. The planning and execution of the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with participants from various universities within South Africa are also discussed in depth.

Chapter 4: Perceptions of senior communication practitioners regarding their roles

This chapter expands on the results of the semi-structured interviews and how these findings relate to literature.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

In the final chapter, the findings of the study are summarised, and final conclusions drawn. The chapter focuses on highlighting the prevalent roles within South African universities and whether these roles lean more towards that of the strategist, manager, or technician.

CHAPTER 2: THE ROLES OF COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS

2.1 Introduction

Chapter 1 proposed that communication cannot be managed strategically without a practitioner fulfilling the role of a strategist and focusing on environmental scanning or research. However, it appears that the technician role dominates the communication industry, which is also the case at university level (see 1.1 and 0). Against this background, Chapter 2 will focus on answering the first specific research question, namely: *What is the importance of the strategic role of communication management for the survival of universities in South Africa, according to literature? (see 1.5.1)?*

In answering this question, this chapter will focus on the importance of the strategic role of communication management in attaining organisational goals. The argument will be elucidated by outlining the Excellence theory, the communication models identified by Hunt and J. Grunig (1984), the communication practitioner roles established by Broom (1982), Steyn's (2000a; 2009) communication practitioner roles, namely the strategist, manager and technician and their individual tasks that determine their role, and finally, the communication practitioner's mandate. Lastly, the research question will be answered by concluding with the importance of the strategist role in communication management.

2.2 The Excellence theory

In 1985, the IABC Foundation funded the Excellence study, which at the time was regarded as the most extensive study ever conducted within the communication profession (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:31). The IABC Foundation commissioned this research project to decide in what way, to what degree, and why communication has an impact on the achievement of organisational goals (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:ix).

The results published in 1992 and in 2002 respectively illustrated how communication management adds monetary value to an organisation and society with specific reference to the 14 characteristics of an excellent communication department, how communication management functions, and how its component programmes contribute to organisational effectiveness (Grunig *et al.*, 2002; Grunig *et al.*, 2006). Within the Excellence study, the value of communication could be determined at four levels, namely the programme, functional, organisational, and societal levels (Grunig *et al.*, 2006:27). With respect to the basic premise of the Excellence theory, the following points of departure are important:

- Organisations are effective when they achieve their goals; however, these goals must be attainable and realistic to begin with. (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:10; Grunig *et al.*, 2006:28).
- Organisations strive for independence from their stakeholders and, in doing so, aim to mobilise those that support their goals. However, these goals must fit their environmental (employees, clients/customers for the services or products they produce and raw materials) and cultural contexts (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:10; Grunig *et al.*, 2006:29).
- Organisations wish to attain complete autonomy and they work towards this goal by building relationships with their stakeholders, because good relationships allow organisations more independence to accomplish their mission (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:11).
- Communication departments plan their programmes strategically to manage conflict or potential conflict with strategic stakeholders. Communication programmes are directed at particular groups that are of strategic importance to the organisation, both internally and externally. These programmes are in effect continuously and aim to influence stakeholder attitudes, opinions and/or behaviours (Steyn, 2000b:279). As such, they are included in the communication plan. These programmes furthermore assist organisations in building stable, transparent, and trusting relationships with their stakeholders. As noted by Grunig *et al.* (2002:11), the value of relationships with strategic stakeholders is a significant benchmark of the enduring role that communication management fulfils when it comes to organisational effectiveness. The communication plan stems from the communication strategy and deals with specifics – a definite course of action that will be followed for how the department will go about achieving certain goals, including on-going communication programmes such as managing corporate identity and publications (Steyn & Puth, 2000:73-75; Steyn, 2000a:34, 144).
- A trained communication practitioner should manage the communication function. This implies that the practitioner has gained the necessary knowledge to carry out the manager role through university education or continuing education (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:11, 14).
- These relationships manifested between organisations and their stakeholders are characterised by two-way symmetrical communication. The two-way communication symmetrical model was conceptualised after the findings of the Excellence study had been analysed (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:355). The Excellence theory emerged from the Excellence study and was derived from the two-way symmetrical model, which will be discussed in the next section. Having a symmetrical nature means that the organisation adopts the worldview in

which communication practitioners serve the interests of both the organisation and society (Holmström, 2006:6).

- The outcome of these strong relationships is that both the organisation and its stakeholders are saving money that would otherwise be spent on conflict management exhibited by way of rules, legislature, lawsuits, movements, and other forms of pressure from activists and/or authoritative bodies (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:11).
- Within the organisation itself, excellent communication management results in higher levels of employee satisfaction, thus avoiding consequences such as strikes, low employee morale, absent staff members, and a high staff turnover (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:8-12).

The Excellence theory also focuses on other aspects such as the effective planning and the implementation and assessment of communication programmes, as well as the characteristics of excellent communication departments, organisational conditions that allow for excellent communication, and lastly, how an excellent communication department adds to an organisation's bottom line (Grunig, 1992:xiv). The Excellence study emphasises that communication cannot be managed excellently without two-way communication. The next section will discuss the nature of the various communication models with specific emphasis on the two-way models.

2.3 Grunig and Hunt's (1984) communication models

From as early as the 19th century, various communication models have been used by communication practitioners. In 1984, Hunt and J. Grunig first identified four communication models, namely the press agency model, the public information model, the two-way asymmetrical communication model, and the two-way symmetrical communication model (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:285). The two factors that determine which communication model will be used are purpose and direction. The *purpose* of communication generally refers to the organisation's reason for communication, whereas the *direction* indicates the flow of communication between the organisation and the intended recipients, which can be either one-way or two-way (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:287).

2.3.1 Press agency model

The press agency and the public information models embody one-way approaches to communication management or disseminating information from the organisation to the public, usually through the media (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288). The earliest communication professionals were the press agents of the mid-19th century. These individuals were performers

who promoted themselves and used propaganda and publicity to achieve their objectives (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:287-288).

2.3.2 Public information model

During the 20th century, a second communication model emerged as a result of the need of large corporations and government organisations to respond to being belittled in the media. Leaders of these corporations realised that they needed more than the propaganda of press agents to counter the attacks on them in the media. However, these entities did not provide truthful information to journalists reporting to the public and were thereby held accountable for half-truths (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288). They then decided to employ their own journalists “as public relations practitioners” to write “press handouts” to “explain[ing] their actions” (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288). Although these practitioners wrote selectively positive things about their organisation, this information was still generally honest and accurate, unlike communication according to the press-agentry model (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288).

2.3.3 Two-way asymmetrical model

The introduction of the scientific approach to communication management led to the adoption of a two-way communication approach where it had once been driven by one-way communication. Here, practitioners required information from as well as provided information to stakeholders (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288). The widespread success of the Nazi propagandists’ communication methods during World War II made practitioners realise that people could be manipulated for bad but also for good intentions. Persuasion could thus be used to “engineer consent” (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:288). In this model, communication is imbalanced, as its primary aim is to change stakeholders’ perceptions without the organisation having to change or alter their own behaviour (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289; Waddington, 2012). Persuasion and manipulation were used to make audiences behave in a manner that would benefit the organisation, and research was not used to determine how the stakeholders felt about the organisation but rather to benefit only the entity (Waddington, 2012).

2.3.4 Two-way symmetrical model

With the symmetrical two-way model, communication practitioners’ ultimate aim is to understand their stakeholders in order to build strong, long-term and mutually beneficial relationships and not to persuade them as in the case of the two-way asymmetrical model (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289).

As noted by Grunig (2008:12), in terms of the two-way symmetrical model, practitioners make use of research as well as communication to achieve mutually beneficial changes and understanding

for their organisation and stakeholders. The idea is not only to change and influence stakeholders but also the behaviour of the organisation as a whole, since two-way communication transfers information back and forth to enable conversation and the exchange of information – thus, a dialogue (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:289). Communication practitioners who focus on implementing this model also play a notable role in altering the behaviour of the dominant coalition and in doing so allow stakeholders and the dominant coalition to come together (Grunig *et al.*, 2002). For this reason, Grunig and Grunig (1992:291) stress that the two-way symmetrical model should be the normative model for communication management and defining how excellent communication management should in fact be practised.

2.3.5 Mixed-motive model

Although the two-way symmetrical model is the normative and most ethical way of practising communication management, many practitioners believe it to be too idealistic and therefore unrealistic (Grunig & White, 1992:45-46). The reality is that few organisations will appoint communication practitioners who do not first serve the interests of the organisation and who blindly accept the demands of stakeholders with different priorities than that of the organisation (Laskin, 2009:45). When communication practitioners must decide between their loyalty towards the organisation on the one hand and their concern for stakeholders on the other, this is referred to as the “incidence of mixed motives” (Grunig & White, 1992:46) or as “divided loyalties”, as noted by Murphy (1991) (as cited by Grunig & White, 1992:46). According to Grunig and White (1992:48), the mixed-motive model is based on reciprocal communication where organisations will negotiate and make compromises with their stakeholders and in turn their stakeholders will do the same.

Another point of criticism on the application of the two-way symmetrical model is that persuasion, which is an intrinsic feature of asymmetrical communication, is not necessarily unscrupulous (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:310). Critics of the two-way symmetrical model maintain that understanding is encouraged between the organisation and its stakeholders when both parties attempt to persuade each other concurrently of the rationality of their respective viewpoints (Grunig & Grunig, 1992:310). This frame of reference makes it possible to incorporate mixed motives into a symmetrical worldview (Grunig & White, 1992:48).

Organisations that adopt a symmetrical worldview are more likely to practise the two-way symmetrical model and/or mixed-motive model where communication management has a strategic management function (Grunig & White, 1992:31-64). This is because a symmetrical worldview offers supportive and shared adjustments instead of focusing on control and adjustment (Grunig & White, 1992:31-64; Wiggill, 2009:3). A symmetrical approach will thus result

in the use of the two-way symmetrical model and/or the mixed-motive model (Grunig & White, 1992:43-44). In this case, communication management will be regarded as having a managerial function with a greater likelihood of incorporating the two models listed previously in practice (Wiggill, 2009:181).

To further understand and illustrate the difference between worldviews, it is noteworthy to refer to the difference between reflexive and reflective organisations (see 2.2). With reflexivity, the organisation is characterised by blind self-presentation that comes from within, and asymmetrical communication and conflict are neither acknowledged nor silenced. Contrary to this, reflection recognises potential conflict, focuses on uncovering its background, and facilitates an exchange of opinions (Holmström, 2006:16; Kjaerbeck & Holmström, 2007). Within a reflective organisation that adopts a symmetrical/mixed-motive model, dialogue is a key aspect in the reflective process (Amulya, 2011:4).

To summarise, the value of a communication management department within an organisation and society is determined by the relationships developed with strategic stakeholders and how these relationships are maintained (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:550). Managing communication according to the two-way symmetrical model and/or mixed-motive model should, as prescribed by the Excellence theory, leads to strong, mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders (Wiggill, 2009:181). As indicated in 2.2, strong organisation-stakeholder relationships are the most important outcome of strategic communication management and thus central to the practice of communication management (Steyn, 2003b:179-180). Strategic communication management focuses on (a) achieving organisational goals and at the same time (b) maintaining relationships with its key strategic stakeholders.

Various studies (Dornyo & Adiku, 2015; Higgins, 2017; Luo, 2005; Pirožek & Hesková, 2003) indicated that the practise of communication within communication departments at certain African, European, and American public and private universities were mainly one-way or asymmetrical, which hampered effective communication management.

To understand and engage in effective communication with stakeholders at a university level, the implementation of two-way symmetrical models is crucial (see 1.1 and 0). To illustrate, Pirožek and Hesková (2003) focused on the practise of communication management at a tertiary institution in the Czech Republic and showed how a better understanding of their key stakeholders' attitudes could be acquired by making use of feedback systems at universities. A few cases of two-way symmetrical communication were also observed by Luo (2005) in terms of communication with students, alumni, and donors in the form of dialogue (phone conversations) and communication campaigns.

In one study by Luo (2005:22), the communication practitioner employed as vice president of communications at the university college emphasised the importance of dialogue when communicating with students. Students were given the opportunity to express their views about the university by means of different channels, which illustrates that symmetrical communication was present, because the university was willing to make adjustments to its services based on the concerns highlighted by students. Furthermore, two-way symmetrical communication was evident at the state university from their efforts to mitigate hooliganism at the university's sponsored events (Luo, 2005:22) – the executive director of marketing communication explained how the university handled incidents of their own students harassing visiting teams at basketball tournaments. Hundreds of emails were received over the course of two weeks which expressed how parents and students wanted the university to react. These emails were reviewed and included in the university's decision-making in consideration of what they might do differently in the future. The reactive decisions imposed by the university were based efforts to understand the needs and concerns of those who were dissatisfied with the institution's approach to conflict management and other matters that could have an effect on the students.

In a study conducted by Dornyo and Adiku (2015:38), the two-way symmetrical model was evident in some of the communication activities in which the university engaged. The university relations officer of the Valley View University explained how they made use of meetings and other group discussions like public forums to obtain the opinions of internal and external stakeholders (see 1.1) and how they integrated these views in their decision-making processes of the dominant coalition.

Higgins (2017:83) found that universities regard social media as an essential part of two-way symmetrical communication that can be and is used to engage with stakeholders. Social media communication enables practitioners to receive feedback and learn more about their stakeholders through social listening and data-mining activities (Neil & Lee, 2016:6).

The communication practitioners that provided the answers above are each employed under a specific job title and, as such, assume different roles within their positions at universities. Although, not all communication that occurs is two-way, as is evident in this section – the importance and need for two-way symmetrical communication is emphasised by the role and function it must fill. Ergo, it is important to remember that not all roles make use of two-way communication because functions differ, and it is these functions that define the roles.

Roles research within the field of communication has been studied extensively, with each of these studies producing its own set of roles. Notable examples include Broom's (1982) communication practitioner roles research in America, the European Body of Knowledge's (EBOK) research

conducted in Europe (Van Ruler *et al.*, 2002; Verçiç *et al.*, 2001) and Steyn's (2000a; 2000b; 2009) roles research conducted in South Africa.

The four communication practitioner roles established by Broom (1982) will be discussed accordingly.

2.4 Broom's (1982) communication practitioner roles

Broom (1979) identified five major communication practitioner roles. These roles were the expert prescriber, the problem-solving/task facilitator, the communication process facilitator, the technical services provider, and the acceptant legitimiser. Given that the empirical findings did not support the conceptualisation of the acceptant legitimiser role, it was later excluded from the major roles that had been identified. A few years later, during the 1980s, Broom (1982:18) redefined and correspondingly renamed the four roles as the expert prescriber, the problem-solving process facilitator, the communication facilitator, and the communication technician.

2.4.1 Expert prescriber

The main task of the expert prescriber is to prescribe solutions to communication problems and issues which are mainly based on one-way communication (Dozier & Broom, 1995:8; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:598). The expert prescriber defines and investigates the problem, establishes the programme, and takes responsibility for its implementation (Hogg & Doolan, 1999:598). However, this role leads to passive management, as the expert prescriber prescribes to management, who conforms to "getting back to business" (Dozier & Broom, 1995:8; Dozier, 1992:329; Steyn & Puth, 2000:15). This relationship between management and the expert prescriber can be compared to that of a doctor and a patient with the difference being that the practitioner is the only person to be blamed should their decisions have disastrous outcomes (Dozier, 1992:329; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:598). Practitioners therefore need to be mindful of maintaining the trust of those who hold the most power in the organisation, even when they are required to communicate troubling and undesirable responses from the organisational environment (White & Dozier, 1992:103). In an organisation where the environment is not only threatening but also dynamic, the role of practitioner is usually that of the expert prescriber (Dozier, 1992:344).

2.4.2 Problem-solving process facilitator

The role of the problem-solving process facilitator is similar to that of the expert prescriber in terms of its scope. This individual takes on the responsibility of providing guidance in all aspects of communication duties performed by the department as well as assisting others within the organisation with resolving corporate communication problems (Hodis, 2017:76; Steyn & Puth,

2000:15). This practitioner assists top management with working through communication problems and finding solutions. The process strives for active management where joint problem-solving is employed, which in turn leads to a strong ownership of solutions reached (Dozier & Broom, 1995:8). In an organisation where the environment is aggressive yet stagnant, the role portrayed by the practitioner is that of a problem-solving process facilitator (Dozier, 1992:344).

2.4.3 Communication facilitator

The third role is that of the communication facilitator, and this practitioner is responsible for maintaining on-going communication with all the organisation's stakeholders (Hodis, 2017:76). Dozier (1992:347) notes that this role is referred to as a high-level communication facilitator who does not generate any policy decisions and frequently makes use of the two-way symmetrical model. According to Cutlip *et al.* (1994), communication facilitators are regarded as boundary spanners who aim to enhance the standard of decisions associated with policies, processes, and the behaviour of both the organisation and its stakeholders. In an organisation with a dynamic environment where threats are absent, this role is recognised as the dominant role (Dozier 1992:344).

2.4.4 Communication technician

The fourth role is that of the communication technician. Communication practitioners taking on this role do not participate in strategic management decisions but rather focus on providing other necessary skills, for example communication and journalism skills (Steyn & Puth, 2000:15). In most communication departments, many of the staff members are skilled technicians and, because they do not form part of management decision-making, they are very often not aware of the issues and challenges that exist within the industry or organisation they work in (Burger, 1983:29).

Earlier research has focused more on the interrelatedness of the manager and technician roles (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984). The roles of the expert prescriber, problem-solving process facilitator, and communication facilitator evolved into the manager's role while the technician role remained as a separate role (Dozier & Broom, 1995). Later research indicated that the managerial role has once again developed into a strategic or reflective role (Steyn, 2009).

2.5 The European Body of Knowledge (EBOK) research on communication practitioner roles

The European Body of Knowledge (EBOK) similarly conducted research on communication practitioner roles, and they identified the reflective, managerial, operational, and educational roles

(Van Ruler *et al.*, 2002:173; Verçiç *et al.*, 2001:380). The managerial role involves sustaining relationships and communication processes with stakeholders to gain trust and mutual understanding. The reflective role entails discussing the organisation in society to encourage responsible behaviour. It considers the norms and values of the organisation as an evolving function of communication management that relate to socially responsible corporate behaviour. The educational role involves assisting the members of an organisation to become capable communicators and enabling them to respond to the demands of society. Lastly, the operational role pertains to the implementation of the subsequent action plans (Van Ruler *et al.*, 2002:173).

According to Verčič *et al.* (2001:381), EBOK's managerial, educational, and operational roles cannot contribute to attaining organisational goals strategically without the reflective role, which is regarded as holding strategic value.

In realising the strategic value of the contribution of a practitioner executing strategic duties within the South African communication context, the role of the strategist (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b) is of utmost importance. However, as mentioned in 1.1 and 1.3, practitioners are unable to fulfil a strategic role due to various reasons (see 2.7).

2.6 Steyn's communication practitioner roles

Steyn (2000a; 2000b) conceptualised and empirically verified the role of the strategist, who functions at the highest level within the organisation according to the expectations of the CEO. However, the manager and technician roles were also included in this study, given that the manager and technician roles overlap, as conceptualised in previous research (Broom & Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1984). The role of the strategist will be discussed next.

2.6.1 The strategist

The strategist serves at the macro or top management level of the organisation and conducts environmental scanning (see 2.6.1.1) to acquire strategic information on stakeholders and issues (Steyn, 2002a:44). The macro environment refers to the external environment, which includes politics, economics, and the technological climate. This is an environment that the organisation does not interact with directly, but which has the potential to influence its operations (Steyn & Puth, 2000b:168). In fact, Jansen van Vuuren (2002:194-197) argues that the macro level is regarded as the most important level for scanning. Although environmental scanning is the defining role of the strategist, there is a number of other tasks for which the strategist takes responsibility that relate to this task.

When examining the literature, it is evident that different titles or names are used to describe the strategist; however, the tasks explained all relate to the role of the strategist, where a common ground can be found regarding the characteristics of the strategist.

Wright (1995:185-186) uses the name corporate communication executives. He describes these executives as enthusiastic members of the organisation's dominant coalition that function at the highest management level of the organisation and emphasises two critical characteristics of the strategist that are necessary to perform their role. Brønn (2014:77) refers to communication managers and explains how the bridging function of communication managers is strategic, as it includes scanning the environment, engaging in two-way communication with stakeholders, and the ability to analyse data that can be implemented in the organisation's strategic decision-making. These functions represent the tasks and abilities of the strategist. Correspondingly, Wilson (2016:227) refers to these practitioners as communication managers but describes them as participating in organisational decision-making and strategic planning which also represent the duties of the practitioner in the role of the strategist.

Kanihan *et al.* (2013) uses the term manager; however, the tasks performed by this practitioner coincide with South African roles research of the strategist. In their research, Kanihan *et al.* (2013) focused on communication practitioners who worked for top corporations in the United States as members of the dominant coalition, a characteristic of the strategist. The study examined the power attributes and communication practices of these practitioners in particular. Since these practitioners were members of the dominant coalition of their organisation, they had a higher measure of informal power for various reasons. These characteristics and tasks as established by Kanihan *et al.* (2013:152-153), coincide with those of the strategist as established by Steyn (2000a; 2000b; Steyn *et al.*, 2001; Steyn, 2004) and Steyn and Puth (2000) as well as other literature about roles which will be discussed next.

2.6.1.1 Tasks and characteristics of the strategist

The task of environmental scanning is in line with the reflective paradigm¹, which describes the role of communication management as counselling management on methods for resolving problems that influence the manner in which management comprehends key concerns (Holmström, 1996; 1997). Communication management thus assists the organisation in initiating a 'bridging' strategy by which actions, policies, and behaviour are adapted within the organisation

¹ "Holmström (1996) developed a reflective paradigm for corporate communication with mutual reflection as its core concept and social responsibility at the core of its practice. In this approach, the organization sees itself in the larger societal context, the ultimate objective being to generate social trust" (De Beer *et al.*, 2013:311).

to adjust to external expectations. In doing so, the organisation's reputational risk is reduced (Steyn & Niemann, 2010:121). In other words, the task of environmental scanning is proactive in that it examines and interprets the environment strategically to assist the organisation in adapting to the environment.

The communication strategy ensures the significance of the communication function in the strategic management process. This is achieved by focusing on the communication that occurs with strategic stakeholders and using communication to solve organisational problems (Steyn, 2000b:419-420). Strategists are therefore regarded as the problem solvers by way of boundary spanning² and/or environmental scanning because they identify and propose ways of solving communication problems within their organisations. These practitioners are regarded as the "middleman" in the relationship between the organisation and its fundamental constituents (Kanihan *et al.*, 2013:152-153; Neill & Drumright, 2012:227; Steyn, 2000a:27; 2000b:428; Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2011:89). For these practitioners to be effective environmental scanners, they should act as the eyes, ears, face, and voice of the organisation at all times by endorsing the two-way communication function centred on honest and accountable representations (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:208; Grunig & White, 1992:43-44; Grunig, 1989:38-39; Neill & Drumright, 2012:225). They are thus responsible for linking the organisation's internal networks with external sources of information, thereby acting as a liaison between the organisation and its internal and external stakeholders (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b; Steyn & Puth, 2000:19).

The information that the strategist has gathered, examined, and interpreted from the environmental scanning process is transmitted to top management. This feedback is provided to encourage the organisation to adjust its conduct in accordance with the expectations of society (Steyn & Niemann, 2010:115, 120). Within this process, the strategist is also tasked with identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders and what must be communicated to them to manage their concerns by drawing up a stakeholder map to prioritise stakeholders. These practitioners thereby stay abreast of new stakeholder groups and social developments and

² Manev and Stevenson (2001:185, 189) define boundary spanning as the communication that takes place across the organisational boundary, linking with individuals and/or members of other organisations. Neill and Drumwright (2012:226-227) broaden this conceptualisation by adding that boundary spanners are seen as "being the middle person in the relationship between the organization and its key constituents" because they conduct research to comprehend the perspectives of the latter. The terms "environmental scanning" and "boundary spanning" are sometimes used interchangeably, since both actions are based on research about and interaction that takes place with stakeholders. The term "environmental scanning" will be used in this study, and it also includes boundary spanning.

recognise the stakeholders and advocates that begin to surface around important organisational issues (Steyn, 2000a:30, 39; Steyn, 2002a:45; Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2011:89).

In order to do environmental scanning, the strategist practises two-way communication and in so doing ensures stakeholder participation. Strategists that form part of the dominant coalition and function at the top-management level of their organisation are more likely to describe their companies as using two-way symmetrical communication than practitioners that do not function at top-management levels as strategists (Kanihan *et al.*, 2013:153) (see 1.2, 2.6.1 and 4.2.4). Two-way communication is practised by including the use of certain symbols, particularly language, to influence and share ideas or viewpoints while at the same time educating themselves (the strategist and organisation) about the ideas and standpoints of their stakeholders (Ihlen, 2012:3; Kanihan *et al.*, 2013:152-153; Steyn *et al.*, 2001:9, 18; Steyn, 2000a:39; 2000b:76, 413, 420). Examples of these include stakeholder meetings or consultation sessions, non-financial reports, advertising, written statements published on website homepages, blogs, and information on social media (particularly Facebook and Twitter) (Ihlen, 2012:5-6) (see 2.6.1.3 and 2.6.3).

Therefore, the work of the strategist is future-oriented and infers that stakeholder relations are critical in providing the organisation with future direction and managing communication strategically. Therefore, it can be argued that participation in management decision-making – a fundamental task of the strategist – is of utmost importance to a strategist, as these practitioners create meaning when engaging with stakeholders in order to build trust (Benecke *et al.*, 2017:32; Ihlen, 2012:3-4; Kanihan *et al.*, 2013:152-153; Steyn, 2000a:27; 2000b:413; Verwey *et al.*, 2017:71).

For the strategist, ensuring that the views and needs of stakeholders are included in organisational decision-making processes assists in the formulation of integrated processes like the enterprise³ strategy. Doing so allows the communication department to not only contribute at departmental level but more importantly also at an organisational (strategic) level (Jansen van Vuuren, 2002:40; Steyn & Puth, 2000:20). The strategist assists top management to include environmental, social, and economic issues into their strategies.

The strategist further assists the organisation with obtaining organisational legitimacy and answering the key question of how the organisation serves society. The strategist does so by advising top management on value-patterns in society, non-legislative actions (e.g., King III),

³Although the enterprise strategy is not always formally mentioned in organisations, it is manifested by means of the vision and mission statement of an organisation, codes of conduct and ethics, approach to stakeholders, symmetrical two-way communication, multi-stakeholder dialogue, corporate philanthropy, and what is regarded as ethical conduct (De Beer *et al.*, 2013:312-313).

reporting structures (e.g., Global Reporting Initiative [GRI]), and non-compulsory codes of conduct (Ihlen, 2012:3; Steyn & Niemann, 2010:121; Steyn, 2002a:57). The practitioner analyses judicial measures that address societal beliefs and changing values and standards (e.g., the Employment Equity Act and the Black Economic Empowerment Act) as well as trends in society, and they inform management when business values are in conflict with those of society (Steyn, 2000a:27; 2000b:59; 2002a:57). In this way, top management is able to adopt a philosophy of receptiveness by formulating goals which are regarded as socially acceptable and recognise both stakeholder and societal issues that relate to these responsibilities.

The social environment is the second environment that is given continual scanning consideration, the macro environment as being the first (see 2.6.1). The motivation for the social environment is that universities are social institutions that are obligated to serve their communities (see 1.1, 2.2 and 2.3). By conducting these social analyses, the strategist allows the organisation to reflect on their norms and values in decision-making processes and counsel management on how to either adapt, alter, or maintain their environment to achieve organisational goals successfully (Moss *et al.*, 2000:299-300; Steyn & Niemann, 2010:121).

Strategists thus act as the conscience of the organisation, informing top management of the outcome of corrupt and socially irresponsible actions on a continual basis (Holmström, 1996; Neill & Drumwright, 2012:221; Steyn & De Beer, 2012a:44; Steyn & Niemann, 2010:115; Verwey *et al.*, 2017:69). Benecke *et al.* (2017) in turn refer to strategists as “cultural intermediaries” who typically engage people and groups from different cultures, marginalised groups, or “others”, and should therefore have the ability to recognise any potential for conflict.

On a related note, Tindall and Holtzhausen (2011:79, 90) emphasise the role of the organisation’s cultural interpreter, which is regarded as a specialist role suited for countries dealing with diverse populations (see 1.1). This role is best suited for practitioners working in sectors such as government, mining, industrial and manufacturing, or in the volatile South African environment in general. This role may therefore prove to be relevant for senior communication practitioners at universities in South Africa, as the higher education sector has become increasingly unpredictable and diverse over the last five years and will become seemingly more so in the near future (see 1.1). The essence of the cultural interpreter role is expressed by Vardeman-Winter and Place (2015:349) as “understanding how meanings are produced, regulated, and consumed in various political, economic, and cultural environments...[to] gain...societal understanding of the issues and publics they represent”. This implies that the cultural interpreter also serves a strategic function. In highly politicised sectors such as government, these practitioners need to be aware of the prospects, thoughts, and requirements of grassroots organisations and local stakeholders with extremely diverse cultural traits (Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2011:90). These roles require two-

way symmetrical communication and strategic analysis of information to determine consequences and outcomes of actions for the organisation and its stakeholders, and as such they concur with a symmetrical organisational worldview, which is another fundamental characteristic of the strategist.

A symmetrical (organisational) worldview is characterised by interdependence, (an open system, a moving equilibrium, equity, autonomy, innovation, decentralised management, responsibility, conflict resolution, and interest-group liberalism), while an asymmetrical worldview is characterised by an internal orientation (a closed system, efficiency, elitism, conservatism, tradition, and a central authority). Another relevant feature of a symmetrical organisational worldview is interest-group liberalism. Interest-group liberalism is a formally organised association that strives to influence public policy. The primary desire of interest-group liberalism is to affect government policies, either to benefit themselves or the causes thereof. Their ultimate goal could refer to a policy that only benefits the members of this group or one segment of society or a policy that advances broader public resolve (Thomas, 2020).

An organisation with an asymmetrical worldview will view communication management as a mere technical function, and it will be more likely to practise an asymmetrical model (Grunig & White, 1992:43-44; Grunig, 1989:38-39). It is important to take cognisance of the fact that environmental scanning is not aimed at predicting the future but rather pinpointing current trends and issues that may have an influence on the organisation to enable the organisation to react accordingly (Jansen van Vuuren, 2002:210).

The principal notion of the European reflective paradigm, as referred to in the beginning of this section, is mutual reflection (Steyn, 2009:524). With reference to this paradigm, Holmström (1996), identified two particular tasks for corporate communication, one being the reflective task and the other being the expressive task. The strategic role of communication management within an organisation is strategic reflection. Thus, the strategist role was extended to also include a reflective dimension to form the reflective strategist (Steyn, 2009:528).

In doing so, a significant role for South African communication practice was brought to the fore, namely that of the reflective strategist, which focuses primarily on strategic reflection.

2.6.1.2 The reflective strategist

Before proceeding to discuss the role of the reflective strategist, it is necessary to explain the reflective role. Verčič *et al.* (2001:380) define the reflective role as the ability to examine varying standards, beliefs, and perspectives within society and converse on these with members of the organisation to amend those standards, beliefs, and perspectives of the organisation to be in line

with social responsibility and legitimacy. Consequently, the organisation is furthermore characterised as having a symmetrical worldview (see 0 and 2.2). Practitioners that pride themselves in being reflective practitioners are characterised as having the ability and willingness to query routine methods of thinking and behaviour, either once they have acted, after an event (reflection on action), or while in the process of acting (reflection in action) (Jordan, 2010:393; Schön, 1983). Reflection in action makes it possible to adjust one's current course of action by outlining the problem in a different manner or by devising new methods of solving the problem currently being faced (Jordan, 2010:393).

In a comparative analysis, Steyn and Bütschi (2003:22) found that the South African strategist role was very similar to the European reflective role for the following reasons: (a) Both of these roles are performed at the macro or top management level of the organisation, (b) both accumulate and analyse information from the environment and highlight the concerns for the organisation, and (c) both focus on influencing members of the organisation, specifically top management, to adapt according to the social intelligence obtained (Steyn & Bütschi, 2003:22; Steyn, 2009:528-529). The differences between the strategist and the reflective role are emphasised in the type of information gathered. The European reflective role collects information on beliefs and/or norms from society, which coincides with the discussion on socially responsible behaviour of organisations and highlights social responsibility and legitimacy (Steyn & Bütschi, 2003:22; Van Ruler *et al.*, 2002:173). The strategist, on the other hand, gathers information based on strategic, social, ethical, political, or other concerns or problems that may affect the organisation. The strategist furthermore focuses on gathering information about the feelings, expectations and perspectives of stakeholders, publics, and various interest groups in society (Jansen van Vuuren, 2002:214; Steyn & Bütschi, 2003:22).

As a result of the similarities but also the differences between these roles, Steyn (2009) proposed that the role of the reflexive strategist be reconceptualised for the South African communication practice.

In light of the reflective role, as discussed above, the reflective strategist can be described and understood as the regulator between the organisation and the environment that assists the organisation in reflecting on its position within the larger environment with the view on harmonising the goals of the organisation with the welfare of society (Steyn, 2009:528).

The reflective task performed by the reflective strategist focuses on inward communication. It involves the selection of information in terms of what is regarded as socially responsible within society and then transferring this information to the organisation. Members within the organisation are also encouraged to regulate their behaviour and their strategies in accordance with the

expectations of stakeholders (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:49). In contrast, the expressive task of the reflective strategist focuses on outward communication and the distribution of information about the organisation to the external environment. This task ensures that the image of the organisation reflects socially accountable behaviour of the organisation and informs strategies to fortify public trust in the organisation and achieve social acceptance (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:58). Moreover, the expressive task entails providing feedback to the organisational and societal stakeholders in terms of the organisation's performance according to the expectations that were made known during the engagement process (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:58-59) (see 2.6.1.3). Management is brought to the understanding that public trust is not earned by merely altering outward communication to inform on responsibility – an organisation must also act responsibly to reflect this mandate (for example practice sound management and stakeholder inclusiveness) (Steyn & De Beer, 2012a:36; Steyn, 2009:529) (see 2.6.1 and 2.6.1.3).

Within the expressive role, the reflective strategist supports the organisation's primary stakeholders by clarifying their perceptions to executive management. Moreover, these practitioners act as an early detection system of issues that may result in crises (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:59; Steyn, 2009:529). The reflective strategist encourages management to disclose its position and practice two-way symmetrical communication in order to build long-term trusting relationships with these stakeholders regarding matters of strategic importance and accommodates perspectives that are different than that of the organisation and their own (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:59; Steyn, 2009:528).

Given the characteristics and functions presented above, the Melbourne Mandate does well to encapsulate the essence of the reflective strategist's functioning.

2.6.1.3 Reflective strategy in action – the Melbourne mandate

The Melbourne Mandate initiated by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA) aims to build international consensus on a new mandate for how communication management professionals should display a better representation and promotion of their roles (GA, 2012:1; Gregory, 2015:598). This mandate, adopted by the 160 000 members representing 67 professional associations that were developed by the GA, presented a new set of roles, responsibilities and principles endorsed by the delegates to the 2012 World Public Relations Forum in Melbourne, Australia (GA, 2012:1; Gregory, 2015:598) in a document. This document underlines the significance of practitioner's personal values in practice (Verwey *et al.*,

2017:70). In this mandate, communication professionals⁴ have a mandate to: (1) define and uphold an organisation's character and values, (2) build a culture of listening and engagement, and (3) inculcate responsible behaviour by individuals and organisations (GA, 2012:1). Evidently, these mandates concur with the main functions of the reflective strategist, as identified by Steyn (2009) (see 2.6.1.1).

Regarding the *principles* in defining the organisation's character and value, the first mandate affirms that the communicative organisation has a clear understanding of its core or 'DNA', which consists of three strands (GA, 2012:2):

- Values: refers to the set of values the organisation lives by and which guides its decisions and behaviour. As explained by Verwey *et al.* (2017:68) in defining organisational purpose, the organisation should not only outline who they are but also what their core values and viewpoints are outside of the products and services they provide;
- Leadership: refers to the responsibility of leaders to model the character, values, and beliefs of the organisation on how it should operate through decisions made and the direction they set; and
- Culture: refers to the processes, structures, collective behaviour, and ways of working that are a part of organisational life. These elements affect the way people and groups interact with each other internally as well as with external stakeholders. These interactions may include risk, issues, and crises management processes, enterprise strategy development, and environmental assessment processes (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:54-69) (see 2.6.1.1).

The second mandate is building a culture of listening and engagement to be a communicative organisation (Gregory, 2015:601). The mandate intends to achieve the following outcomes:

- Build trust through respectful and enduring relationships with both internal and external stakeholders as well as the wider community. As noted by Steyn (2002a:60), if organisations aim to gain validity and social acceptance, they need to be responsive to both individuals and groups they regarded as previously defenceless with respect to their interests, expectations, and demands;
- Pursue policies and practices based on internationally recognised standards for corporate responsibility, sustainability, reporting, and transparency. The reflective strategist focuses on

⁴ A professional is defined as someone who is engaged in a particular activity as one's paid occupation rather than as an amateur, relating to or belonging to a profession. A practitioner is defined as a person who is actively engaged in an art, discipline, or profession (Oxford Dictionaries, 2019).

stakeholder as well as inclusive processes which include international standards and procedures for stakeholder engagement and integrated reporting processes (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:66). The practitioner also encourages top management to participate in social activities not necessarily mandated but expected of the organisation in terms of business ethics regarding good corporate citizenship (Steyn, 2002a:57) (see 2.3.5 on the mixed-motive model for a discussion of organisational worldviews);

- View listening and engagement as a research-based process to identify both risks and opportunities (see 2.6.1.1), in which all internal and external stakeholders can play a role. The reflective strategist develops stakeholder engagement platforms to achieve certain results and coordinate this engagement with external stakeholders in particular. They provide clarity regarding which employees communicate with which stakeholders and prepare content based on stakeholder engagement for integrated reporting (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:65-66) (see 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.2). The strategist urges all members of the organisation, especially management, to be aware of information flowing into the organisation (from the external environment) and is available to answer to and discuss current or emerging issues with stakeholders (Steyn, 2002a:58).

The third mandate is to instil societal, organisational, individual, and professional responsibility in a communicative organisation and ensuring that it understands its responsibility, which flows from two core principles (Gregory, 2015:601-602):

- The organisation derives its licence to operate from the value it creates for all its stakeholders, which benefits society at large. The feedback loop manifested during stakeholder-engagement processes, whereby stakeholders express their concerns and norms, are taken into account in adapting organisational behaviour and strategies which maintain the organisation's licence to operate (Steyn & De Beer, 2012b:69) (see 2.6.1.2). Steyn and Niemann (2010:120) explain that the strategic contribution of corporate communication is based on the corporate social performance⁵ (CSP) approach to the role of business in society. This approach holds that organisations must promote the public interest and diminish adverse effects on society and the environment when it comes to their strategies and policies or face having their licence to operate removed;

⁵ Corporate Social Performance (CSP) can be defined as “a business organization's configuration of principles of social responsibility, processes of social responsiveness, and policies, programs, and observable outcomes as they relate to the firm's societal relationships” (Wood, 1991:693). Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is seen as the best practice to create and uphold the organisations relationships with its stakeholders (Dlamini, 2016:127).

- The value of an organisation is linked directly to its reputation, which in turn is sustained through building trust, acting with integrity, and being transparent about the organisation's strategy, operations, use of capital, and performance (see 2.6.1.2). Ultimately, for the practitioner it is a matter of individual integrity which will influence their obligation to act in accordance with their values (Verwey *et al.*, 2017:75). This includes the values and the moral compass developed during their years of studying (by way of a values-based approach to communication management education (public relations in study) and whilst working in practice (Verwey *et al.*, 2017:69:74-75).

The discussion on the strategist above leads to the following theoretical statement:

2.6.1.4 Theoretical statement 1

The communication practitioner in the role of the strategist should be well-trained, operate within a symmetrical worldview, function at top-management level, and be able to practise two-way communication as part of environmental scanning as well as build stakeholder relationships to attain organisational goals.

According to Steyn and Puth's (2000) definition, as well as Steyn's (2009) redefinition of the role, the most important tasks of the strategist include:

- conducting environmental scanning, which refers to:
 - the early discovery of emerging problems, evaluating existing problems and opportunities within the environment, and acknowledging current trends that may affect organisational strategies and thereby react accordingly;
 - identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders and their issues; and
 - analysing strategic intelligence pertaining to stakeholders, their issues, views and needs, as well as reputational threats.

The task of environmental scanning is performed so that the strategist can execute the following tasks:

- Engage in two-way communication with stakeholders to create new meaning and understanding that will result in strong, mutually beneficial organisation-stakeholder relationships;

- Participate in management decision-making, represent and include the needs and views of stakeholders into organisational decision-making processes, and as such, ensure unity between business and society;
- Express concern and sensitivity as well as offer guidance on achieving social responsibility and good governance and, as such, reinforce stakeholder trust in the organisation;
- Manage the organisation's communication strategy development process, make a strategic contribution with a primary focusing on the enterprise strategy.

The most important contribution of communication management within the organisation lies on a strategic level, but this does not mean that the manager and technician roles are of no value (Le Roux, 2010:23) – both roles support the strategist by alleviating the practitioner of technical and managerial duties so that the strategist can focus on strategic tasks (Le Roux, 2010:23). The role of manager will be discussed next.

2.6.2 The manager

Communication managers function at the functional, departmental, or meso level of the organisation and have the responsibility of developing the corporate communication strategy and policy. This provides the strategic approach that the organisation should follow to recognise stakeholders and manage communication with them. They are involved in corporate communication decision-making, often making use of research to plan and evaluate their work and advise management (Steyn *et al.*, 2001:1; Steyn & Puth, 2000:20; Steyn, 2011:523; 2000b:176). These practitioners are responsible for performing a range of tasks alongside managing their department on a daily basis. Both the levels at which communication managers operate as well as their primary tasks differ from those of the strategist in that the tasks of the communication manager focus specifically on communication. These tasks are not centred on organisational or societal responsibility when it comes to, for example, the decision-making they participate in, the strategies they plan and manage, and the goals they set (see 2.6.2.1).

The managerial role can be split into two distinct positions, namely administrative manager expertise and communication manager expertise (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:228-229). In the study conducted by Grunig *et al.* (2002), a questionnaire was completed by top communicators. The questionnaire included a set of 16 tasks, and respondents were asked to indicate on a fractionation scale the degree to which their own department or an individual in their department had the skill or ability to perform the task. The manager item represented the two distinct aspects of manager expertise. The first aspect is administrative manager expertise, which refers to the

daily operations of an efficient department, and the second aspect is communication manager expertise, which refers to the tools needed by a communication department to practise two-way symmetrical models (see 2.2) and contribute strategically to the organisation's planning process. Administrative manager expertise included preparing the departmental budget and managing staff members. Communication manager expertise included conducting evaluation research and using research to divide stakeholders and perform environmental scanning.

Moss *et al.* (2000:288-300) focused their research on the communication management function and the level of practitioners involved in the formulation and implementation of corporate and business strategies at some of the leading companies in the United Kingdom. Practitioner interviews revealed that even though they occupied fairly senior positions, their roles involved more technical communication activities such as handling media relations and communication management. Their roles also included the more obvious managerial tasks such as organising and motivating staff, budgeting, and networking with managers from other departments to determine how their department could assist – functions that relate to the administrative manager discussed above. This study revealed that most practitioners combined the roles of performing standard communication duties and the daily management of their department with more complex tasks of a strategic nature, such as formulating communication strategies, counselling senior management – particularly during times of crisis – and teaming up with senior management to develop solutions for a range of organisational problems (Moss *et al.*, 2000:293, 300). Consequently, their positions in terms of administrative and communication managerial expertise were combined.

The above discussion leads to the tasks of the communication manager, which will be discussed next.

2.6.2.1 Tasks of a manager

Several studies elaborate on the tasks of a practitioner in the managerial role and how they differ from that of the strategist. Communication managers are responsible for the following (Aldrich & Herker, 1977; Grunig *et al.*, 2002; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992; Moss *et al.*, 2000; Moss *et al.*, 2005; Steyn & Puth, 2000; Steyn, 2000a; 2002b; 2007; 2009; 2011; Tindall & Holtzhausen, 2011):

- Frequently use research to either plan or evaluate their work and counsel management;
- Make *communication* policy decisions and form part of all *communication*-related decisions;
- Plan and manage *communication* programmes and strategies on behalf of the organisation;

- Set goals, provide leadership, and motivate their department;
- Work with budgets and network with other departmental managers to determine where their department can offer assistance;
- Guide management during problem solving processes including a range of internal and external challenges, threats, or crises that confront the organisation;
- Held accountable (by themselves and others) for the success or failure of *communication* programme results and steering these programmes;
- Apply the inside-out approach to strategic management by thinking and planning strategically and detecting fundamental messages to be communicated to stakeholders and the social environment;
- Perform part of the window function in terms of the preparation and execution of the *corporate communication* strategy and policy, which also includes devising and implementing consistent messages that reflect all aspects of the organisation;
- Conceptualise and develop *communication* plans and relationship building in order to gain public trust; and
- Complete a boundary-spanning role to a lesser extent than the strategist, but more for external representation (organisation's response to the environment's influence) and information disposal (for example: marketing and sales representatives, employment recruiter, and shipping and receiving agents).

Elaborating on the above, Nothhaft (2010:127) refers to communication management as a second-order management function within the organisation. This implies that communication management does not only coordinate organisational performance by way of preparation, organisation, and control but it also plays a key role in institutionalising certain concerns within the organisation. Subsequently, Nothhaft (2010:127) identifies three roles that he advises managers should adopt in managing the management of others within the organisation. These three roles are identified as follows (Nothhaft, 2010:134-135):

- The missionary: This is the most easily recognised role in second-order management. However, this role is not stage managed within a prestigious position (like guru or mastermind, for example) relative to a particular idea or concept, in that if the idea or concept achieve great success the individual is seen as winning. Contrary to this, the missionary is an ordinary human being who is enthused by an idea, while other labels regard the individual as special;

- Agent of common sense: When one refers to the nature of communication managers, these individuals are logical and level-headed. They enjoy engaging in conversation and reaching a general agreement. As such they are diplomatic, have a likable personality and the ability to speak at public meetings (Alkhouli, 2012:285). These persons are well-versed at presenting new and unusual arguments and always consider the organisation's reputation first in doing so; and
- The buck's stop: This role is described as more of a passive role and in most cases is imposed on communication managers rather than this individual actively enacting it by themselves. The essence of this role is that communication managers must take responsibility for complicated and unanticipated communication issues. As such, in being trusted communication advisers, communication managers must, ultimately, rely on their personal priorities, values and thorough understanding and experience of the business, stakeholders and communication capabilities to demonstrate resilience in critical situations the organisation may face (Grevengaard *et al.*, 2019).

Therefore, the main aim of the communication manager should not be to seek power (dictating and controlling) but rather to influence (advising, guiding, and encouraging). Should the communication manager be set on seeking power, they may feel empowered while communication management within the organisation is weakened (Nothhaft, 2010:136). For this reason, the communication manager should rather focus on influence within their department as opposed to power.

Steyn (2009:522) compares the South African manager role to the managerial role as identified by EBOK (see 2.5). Within the EBOK managerial role, the importance of internal and external stakeholders is noted, and the tasks assigned to this role are explained by Van Ruler *et al.* (2002:173) as maintaining relationships and managing communication processes with stakeholders to gain stakeholder trust or to reach a mutual understanding, which is centred on organisational strategies. Yet, there is a real need for 'external' or stakeholder managers who focus specifically on strategy formulation and establishing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders, problems, and the publics that come about as a result of these problems originating from a growingly convoluted socio-political environment (Steyn, 2002b:15). Johansson and Larsson (2015:133,136) maintain this in their study concerning the complexity of communication management work done by managers in the public and private sector in Sweden. According to them (Johansson & Larsson, 2015), the stakeholder expert role entails managing stakeholder concerns, advising top management about these stakeholder problems, and planning activities in terms of external stakeholders.

For the purposes of the current study, it is necessary to understand the characteristics and main tasks of communication practitioners in the higher education environment.

2.6.2.1.1 The attributes and primary tasks of communication managers at universities

McClanaghan (2006) focused on communication practitioners at public and private universities in America to examine their levels of education, salaries, and work experience before being employed at their current universities. The findings indicated that these practitioners are characterised as having higher education and communication management experience of some sort. Their experience ranged from marketing and advertising to journalism, including editing, communication management (public relations in study), and radio broadcasting. This relates to the findings by Toth *et al.* (1998:161), where it was likewise argued that enacting the manager role should not be based merely on years of experience but rather the kind of experience acquired in different jobs.

Some of these practitioners possessed qualifications in various disciplines, including education, communication, English, and political sciences. Others practitioners held a bachelor's degree in journalism and mass communication. Few obtained their master's and even fewer their doctorate degrees (Alkhouli, 2012:285; McClanaghan, 2006:41). Thus, a formal academic qualification in the field of communication appears to be a prerequisite for practitioners employed at universities. However, many appear to have qualifications related to other fields of study (Alkhouli, 2012:285; McClanaghan, 2006:41). Other requirements such as practical experience, flexibility, and the ability to work with a diversity of people and different problems are essential for practitioners operating in this role within the university sector (Alkhouli, 2012:295).

A considerable amount of the research conducted at university level has established that practitioners in this role do not operate as members of the top management team within their organisations. However, they do have a direct reporting line to the CEO and most senior levels of management, which assists these practitioners in both decision-making and strengthening of relationships (Luo, 2005:10; Moss *et al.*, 2000:299-300; Narteh *et al.*, 2011:181). The exclusion of practitioners from top-level decision-making bodies such as those discussed above prevents communication managers from circulating management's decisions to various stakeholders of the university. There are also very few practitioners that appear to play an active role in solving broader operational problems at the corporate or business level. This is based mainly on their lack of understanding, knowledge and experience of these business-related matters, specifically financial management issues and strategic communication management (Harris & Bryant, 1986:21; Luo, 2005:11; Moss *et al.*, 2000:299-300; Steyn, 2001:8; 2000a:39-41).

Although literature does indicate the presence and significance of communication managers within the tertiary education sector (Alkhouli, 2012:284; Narteh *et al.*, 2011:181), it is apparent that the majority of these practitioners execute more routine technician duties both at corporate and university level (Alkhouli, 2012:275; Dornyo & Adiku, 2015:38; Johansson & Larsson, 2015:136; Luo, 2005:13-19; Moss *et al.*, 2005:884). At universities within these communication departments, these technical-related duties involve managers being preoccupied and spending the majority of their time writing and editing news articles and press releases and distributing these to the applicable news channels. Often, middle managers, like directors of the communication department, have the primary task of preparing news articles and news clippings which clearly concur with the tasks of the communication technician (2.6.3.1). These instances indicate that there is often a lack of skill and expertise required to progress to a strategic level within their institution.

Moreover, research indicates that, at university level, these individuals play a key role in the formulation of consistent messages through the careful analysis and understanding the needs of the audience, thus indicating their significant role in disseminating information to stakeholders. Consistent messages create a favourable image and worthy rapport for the university (Dornyo & Adiku, 2015:38; Luo, 2005:13-15; Narteh *et al.*, 2011:181; Szymańska, 2003:483-484). This function may, however, also lean more towards the role of the technician in that their role involves implementing, producing, and distributing information in different forms. Additionally, engaging in storytelling is described as a key responsibility of the technician that entails wrapping accurate oral and written messages into a story and ensuring it reaches the correct audience at the right time to ensure maximum positive impact (Gullan, 2019; Hjelmgren, 2016:215) not only for managers but communication also for departments as a whole. The university story is told to external stakeholders by making use of mass media to convey these messages (Luo, 2005:14). Given the state of the news media today with all the fake news that audiences are bombarded with, colleges and universities really do not have much of an option but to take storytelling into their own hands, especially considering the decline in traditional media outlets covering institutions and journalists covering higher education are scarce (Careaga, 2011; Gullan, 2019).

In the case of South Africa, where organisations find themselves struggling under the current state of the economy, companies may decide to employ fewer senior employees and focus on outsourcing their research and counselling needs. For universities in South Africa, the Covid-19 crisis forced universities to shift to e-learning (see 1.1). This had major implications for funding, as this incurred unbudgeted expenses for universities, including laptops, sanitisers, and personal protective equipment (PPE) among several others, not to mention the budgets cuts of universities or the higher education sector announced by Minister Mboweni (Siziba, 2020). This development

proves to be highly relevant given the current state of the South African economy and the unemployment rate increase in recent years (Plecher, 2020) (see 1.1).

The size of the institution and the number of individuals occupying particular roles within their position of employment may require of communication practitioners from non-academic as well as academic departments (see 1.1) to perform the tasks of two roles (Le Roux & Naudé, 2011:313; Mahlakoana, 2018; Moodley, 2015; Toth *et al.*, 1998:161). As established by Alkhouli (2012:288), the number of communication management employees at universities depends on various factors which include the size of the university, its role in the particular society in which it exists, top management's understanding of the role of the communication management department in the university, and available funds in the form of salaries. It is, therefore, possible for a practitioner at a smaller university or communication department to be responsible for both the managerial and the technical roles (Dozier, 1992:344; McCleneghan, 2006:40; Steyn, 2002b:19). These roles may include several functional activities related to the role of the technician or the permanent management of the duties of the technician as well as the manager roles, depending on the scope and complexity of the institution.

In comparison to earlier findings already discussed at the beginning of this section, Alkhouli (2012:303) found shortcomings in the range of experience amongst communication practitioners at universities. Many of the practitioners in the study had only worked at one organisation and had therefore not experienced much diversity that was needed in their careers to gain practical experience and develop a sense of flexibility within their role (Alkhouli, 2012:303). What's more, for managers, learning more about issues management, environmental scanning and stakeholder analysis – on which there is extensive literature – and the tools to conduct them may also assist them in carrying out strategic duties within their universities, given that their universities do not decide to outsource this task (Brønn, 2001:323).

The above discussion leads to the following theoretical statement:

2.6.2.2 Theoretical statement 2

The communication practitioner in the manager role should be a stakeholder expert and focus on developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders. The communication manager should function at the departmental level of the organisation, acting and serving their department and organisation as a trusted advisor.

According to Steyn and Puth's (2000) definition, Steyn's (2009) redefinition of the role and Grunig *et al.* (2002) and Luo (2005) the most important tasks of the communication manager include the following:

- Developing the communication strategy and policy (with the assistance of the strategist) and participating in communication decision-making;
- Planning and managing communication programmes and a communication plan for their department;
- Formulating key messages that embody all facets of the organisation and communication that stakeholders should receive;
- Managing day-to-day managerial related duties such as the budget and managing staff.

For these practitioners at university level, not one day is the same, and the rapid growth in their workload is very evident, especially in terms of web-based content, which is primarily the domain of the technician (McCleneghan, 2006:40).

In the next section, the technician role will be discussed in greater detail.

2.6.3 The technician

In terms of the role of the technician, prior research (Broom, 1982; Dozier, 1984) focused on the interdependence of the roles of manager and technician which is sometimes still prevalent in practice (see 2.4.4). However, Neil and Lee (2016) indicate that the role of the communication technician is evolving due to technological advances and the rate at which they are developing, including the emergence of the vast number of social media platforms that organisations are using (Neil & Lee, 2016:16). In their study on communication practitioners (public relations in study) enlisted through the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) chapter emails and social media platforms, Neil and Lee (2016) found that a new role emerged in terms of these responsibilities, which is that of the social media technician.

Accordingly, in considering the role of these practitioners in a contemporary age, what Toth *et al.* (1998:161) stated more than 20 years ago is still applicable today. Communication practitioners are constantly having to reinvent themselves to keep abreast of all the changes and demands that occur within their organisations. Gupta's (2011:121) research supports this notion, where 70% of the participants in his study believed that, due to the immense changes and developments

in the environment and technology, communication practitioners need to focus on keeping themselves informed and updated on a continual basis.

In terms of understanding their duties and the level at which technicians operate, earlier research (Dozier, 1992:333) has indicated that communication technicians are responsible for the “low-level mechanics” within their department. The technician role is carried out at the implementation, programme, or micro level within the organisation (Steyn & Puth, 2000:21; Steyn, 2000b:181; 2007:11). These practitioners do not assist with strategic planning nor do they contribute to organisational effectiveness or focus on the aftereffects of certain decisions made in the organisation (Cornelissen, 2004:161; Dozier & Broom, 1995:8; Dozier *et al.*, 1995:54-55; Steyn, 2000a:21; 2000b:59). Although technicians do not participate in management decision-making, they do make programme decisions related to the internal functioning of their department (Burger, 2016:55). The technician should therefore have an understanding of the communication strategy (Steyn & Puth, 2000; Van Ruler & Verčič, 2004). These practitioners are usually employed for their writing and media expertise, as the majority of their tasks incorporate aspects related to this expertise (Dozier, 1992:333; Kelleher, 2001:318).

In the Excellence study, Grunig *et al.* (2002:228) found that the technician’s role can be split into two different kinds of technician expertise, namely internal and media relations expertise. Firstly, internal technician expertise may include writing an advertisement, taking photographs, and producing publications. Therefore, these practitioners need to have strong writing skills, as they spend the majority of their time writing and reading traditional word-based material far more than managers do (Kelleher, 2001:318; Vieira & Grantham, 2015:545). Additional tasks that relate to internal technician expertise include editing the spelling and grammar of the writing produced by others within their department and organisation as well as the design and management of the university’s website. These design duties also include the design of emails and brochures (Cornelissen, 2004:161; Dornyo & Adiku, 2015:38; Dozier *et al.*, 1995:11; Narteh *et al.*, 2011:176 Porter *et al.*, 2009:259). In contrast, media relations expertise may involve writing press releases, feature articles, coordinating press conferences or arranging for media to cover events (Grunig *et al.*, 2002:228; Meintjies, 2011:48).

The technician expertise discussed above relate to the different methods of communication used in communication departments at universities. To communicate with internal stakeholders, practitioners may make use of emails, the university website and notice boards while externally, they may use press releases, print media, billboards, television, radio, and their website as well as social media (Narteh *et al.*, 2011:176; Vieira & Grantham, 2015:545). Today, social media platforms such as Facebook provide universities with a new means to communicate with their various stakeholders (see 2.6.1.1). Universities use social media platforms to build their brand

and community, improve engagement, and develop relationships with students, staff, and other stakeholders. Communication technicians are most likely the ones handling these social media platforms in terms of preparing content to be uploaded and monitoring comments as part of their range of duties (Eger *et al.*, 2019:28; Shields & Peruta, 2017:140). Although technicians may take care of the writing, scheduling, or posting of social media content, these should still be managed at a higher strategic level – the content should not just be posted without strategic intent.

With that said, within the social media technician role mentioned earlier, the practitioner does more than just write and post social media content – this role also includes planning and selecting social media tools (Neil & Lee, 2016:10-14). This would suggest that those executing social media tasks are not separated from the decision-making process, which is explained by the fact that the role of the communication technician involves three social media roles, namely, social media technician, policing, and policy maker. The younger generation of communication practitioners are discerned as social media experts and this may be the reason why organisations feel the need to consult them when developing and revising their social media policies (Neil & Lee, 2016:14). Furthermore, a few of the tasks associated with these social media roles were found to be management-oriented duties, which include internal and external environmental scanning and making recommendations on what new technological tools should be approved. The duties that were consistent with environmental scanning in terms of the social media technician included monitoring client(s)/organisation conversations on social media channels and monitoring employees' representation of an organisation's brand.

For the communication technician, the information they acquire from making use of these different social media platforms can be used as a strategic tool that enables them to progress in their organisation (Diga & Kelleher, 2009:442) (see 1.3). This information should therefore be fed to the communication manager and the strategist to guide further decisions and strategies. These platforms may also be used as a media relations resource, as they provide news and other information which can increase the technicians' perceived expertise and contribute to their growth within the organisation (Diga & Kelleher, 2009:442). Neil and Lee (2016:15) established that practitioners' experience is not associated with social media management roles. Therefore, social media may provide the opportunity for technicians to perform managerial tasks and improve their strategic thinking earlier on in their career, which is exactly what practitioners are being sought to do at this stage (also see 2.7).

Excellent communication departments tend to have better technical expertise and the capabilities of these technicians are stronger in communication departments that know how to practice two-way symmetrical models (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:55) (see 2.2 and 2.3). This may be attributed to the fact that they use research, listening, and dialogue to deal with conflict and encourage

relationships with both internal and external strategic stakeholders (Grunig, 2009:2). As noted by Diga and Kelleher (2009:442), the benefit of using social media is that technicians are able to determine exactly what information is relevant to their organisation and how these social networks can be used to listen and engage with stakeholders, as in the case of Facebook, discussed earlier on. In terms of EBOK's four roles, the technician is linked to the operational role (Steyn, 2009:523). The tasks of the technician will be discussed next.

2.6.3.1 Tasks of a technician

The communication technician is responsible for the following tasks within their organisation (Burger, 2016:55; Cornelissen, 2004:19, 161; Grunig *et al.*, 2002:28; Steyn & Puth, 2000:21; Steyn, 2000a:31, 36; 2000b; 2003a:23-24; 2007:11, 147; 2009:523):

- Implementing the corporate communication strategy (devised by the communication manager) by means of developing and implementing communication plans and considering how communication with stakeholders should take place (thereby performing part of the window function);
- Taking ownership of internal technician expertise (such as writing an advertisement, taking photographs and producing publications) and media relations expertise (which may include writing press releases, feature articles, coordinating a press conference and arranging for media);
- Developing and executing exclusive activities across the organisation that personify the organisation's identity and value to stakeholders and the social environment;
- Focusing on outward communication (circulating the communication developed) and fulfilling an external representation role when it comes to boundary spanning.
- In an organisation where the environment is seen as both constant and non-threatening, practitioners are far more likely to execute the technician's role. However, within the South African higher education environment, which is regarded as unpredictable or hostile or both (see 1.1), it is far more likely for the manager role to be enacted (Dozier, 1992:344).

The above discussion leads to the following theoretical statement:

2.6.3.2 Theoretical statement 3

The communication practitioner in the technician role should be able to display a multitude of technical skills and expertise, including, in particular, writing and media expertise and function at the implementation/programme level of the organisation.

According to Alkhouli (2012), Dornyo and Adiku (2015), Grunig *et al.* (2002), Narteh *et al.* (2011), Steyn and Puth (2000), Steyn (2000b), definition of the role, the most important tasks of the communication technician include the following:

- Internal technician expertise, which may include: writing, website management, editing, proofreading, design, video, publications; and
- Media relations expertise, which may include sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles or arranging for media to cover an event.

2.7 Steyn's (2000a; 2000b) roles and the importance of the strategist role

To realise the importance of the practitioner assuming the role of the strategist, it is necessary to understand the significance of strategy. Lukaszewski (2012:28) recognises the importance of strategy in saying that strategy is the driving force in any organisation. Strategy provides direction within the organisation and serves as a blueprint which centres all individuals within the entity on a common purpose. Strategy drives organisational goals and is introduced to the organisation by way of communication. This communication should align with organisational goals, and through strategic communication, contribute to these goals (Steyn & Puth, 2000:48, 52; Steyn, 2000b:419-420).

The empirical study conducted by Steyn (2000a) found that CEOs exhibited dissatisfaction regarding the performance and abilities of corporate communication practitioners that did not perform a strategic role to contribute to organisational goals (Steyn, 2000a:21, 39). Steyn (2000a:20-41) investigated the role expectations of 103 CEOs in public and private companies and tertiary educational institutions of the most senior communication practitioners, namely the strategist, the manager, and the technician. From the results, the study found that to be excellent, an organisation should have a practitioner that fulfils the role of the strategist. The study also provided further insight into the functional activities performed by the strategist that is responsible for the corporate communication function within the organisation in fulfilling CEO expectations.

Steyn and Puth (2000:48) established that a large number of CEOs within South Africa are of the opinion that the sole responsibility of the corporate communication function is obtaining communication goals and objectives with no direct connection to accomplishing organisational goals as such. CEOs do not consider communication practitioners as contributing to the bottom line of the organisation and regard their activities as being mainly technical in nature. Therefore, the actual strategic contributions of these practitioners seem non-existent (Cornelissen, 2004:98; Steyn *et al.*, 2001:1; Steyn, 2000a:21). One explanation for this disposition is that the communication management industry still lacks senior professionals who fully understand major organisational changes and/or goals that the organisation must reach (Bankston, 2015). CEOs are also discontented with the lack of strategic direction displayed by the communication function and would prefer practitioners to think more strategically and adopt a more professional business approach (Steyn & Puth, 2000:48; Steyn, 2000a:22). As noted by Bankston (2015), organisational management has to be convinced constantly of the actual value of communication management.

For the most part, practitioners do not function at a strategic level for various reasons (Wiggill, 2009), which may include a lack of formal training, experience, and mentorship in carrying out a certain role. These aspects are necessary to ensure that communication practitioners, especially those functioning in top management, understand the requirements of their roles in the strategic management process (Cornelissen, 2004:98; Le Roux & Naudé, 2011:314; Steyn & Puth, 2000:48; Steyn, 2000a:39-41; Wilson, 2016:227).

The complex environment in which communication practitioners function should also be kept in mind (see 1.1). Generally, human resource practitioners operate within the human resource department and financial officers within the finance department of an organisation. Communication practitioners, however, are employed in a range of differently named departments, which makes them somewhat obscure compared to their more precisely and consistently named counterparts. While the department name does nothing in particular to guarantee functional excellence, it does assist in identifying the functional activities performed in these departments which, in turn, may assist practitioners in gaining clarity in terms of their roles (see 1.1). Furthermore, the educational qualifications in communication management and communication that practitioners should hold to understand their strategic contribution and the nature of their jobs are held by few, as practitioners are sometimes qualified in other disciplines such as English and political sciences (see 2.6.2.1.1). Another complication is that communication practitioners not belonging to a professional body adds to the uncertainty that these practitioners experience regarding the knowledge and skills that are required for them to perform their roles. These bodies help practitioners to understand their function (Le Roux & Naudé, 2011:313-314; Venter, 2004:156-157).

Steyn's (2000a) differentiation of communication practitioner roles together with the new research on roles theory mentioned gave insight into why educational qualifications, guidance, and applicable experience are required for the strategist to perform their strategic duties and elucidated on the importance of the strategic role (see 2.6.1).

2.8 Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to answer the research question regarding the importance of the strategic role of the communication manager in attaining organisational goals. The underlying point of departure is that, in a challenging context, the communication function must support management (see 1.1). The argument was put forward that, for the communication manager to be able to attain more than just communication departmental goals and objectives but contribute to organisational goals (see 2.7), the manager must have a strategic role.

The practitioner is able to do so by having been trained within the relevant field of study in order to understand their function and strategic contribution. In achieving more than just departmental goals, practitioners make a strategic contribution by practising two-way symmetrical communication within the organisation and with strategic stakeholders, operating according to a symmetrical worldview (see 2.2 and 2.3). The practitioner conducts research or environmental scanning (which forms part of two-way communication), giving way to the other strategic tasks discussed above, which enables these practitioners to understand and identify the organisation's key stakeholders by mapping stakeholders and their issues, as well as threats and opportunities from the environment in which the organisation functions to prioritise them accordingly, thereby gearing their organisation for the future and the successful achievement of organisational goals (see 2.6.1.1). In this way, the practitioner is able to understand major organisational changes and goals the organisation must reach and adopt a more professional business approach (see 2.7). The practitioner within a strategic role, functions at the top management level of their organisation and as a result they participate in management decision-making. By conducting social analyses, the strategic practitioner allows the organisation to reflect on norms and values in these decision-making processes and counsels management on how to either adapt, alter, or maintain their environment so as to achieve organisational goals (see 2.6.1.1). The practitioner assists the organisation in reflecting on its own position within the larger environment and harmonises organisational goals in relation to the welfare of society at large (see 2.6.1.2) by ensuring the inclusion of stakeholders' views in the formulation of integrated processes like the enterprise strategy (see 2.6.1.1).

This practitioner assists the organisation in achieving organisational legitimacy in the role the organisation serves within the greater society. This includes advising management on their

strategic and non-statutory actions, reporting structures, and possible codes of conduct. The practitioner analyses jurisdictional actions and altering values, standards, and trends in society, informing management when their organisational values are conflicting in relation to those of society. In doing so, management is given the opportunity to embrace a responsive philosophy and formulate socially acceptable goals that take both stakeholder and societal issues into account (see 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.2) in attaining organisational goals.

The normative description of the requirements for a strategist, manager, and technician were set out in the theoretical statements in this chapter. However, senior managers do not always have a strategic role only but also adhere to functions and/or execute tasks associated with the role of the manager and technician. Furthermore, as explained in this chapter, research indicates the role of the technician and or technical-related duties prevail and therefore strategic duties such as environmental scanning or research are not made a priority by senior practitioners. This necessitated a comparison of the reality of university communication practitioners' roles with the normative guidelines. Subsequently, the population and sampling method for this study will be discussed in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

3.1 Introduction

It was argued in Chapter 2 that communication managers at universities are required to do a multitude of tasks, implying that they often have to fulfil the role of managers, strategist, and technician. However, this is not the ideal situation, and the majority of their tasks should therefore form part of the role of the strategist. However, Chapter 2 also explained that the role of the technician and or technical-related duties prevail. It is against this background that this study set out to determine to what extent the strategist role is prevalent amongst senior communication managers in the South African university environment. This chapter will outline the research methods followed to investigate the research question. It will begin with a discussion and motivation of the qualitative research approach, followed by a discussion of the semi-structured interviews that were used as the research method and data collection tool in the qualitative approach.

3.2 The qualitative research approach

Aspers and Corte (2019:155) define qualitative research as “an iterative process in which improved understanding to the scientific community is achieved by making new significant distinctions resulting from getting closer to the phenomenon studied”. Qualitative research is focused on analysing and understanding the individual meaning or the social yield of problems, happenings, or practices by gathering non-standardised information, most often from the perspective of the participant, highlighting the human side of the story (Flick, 2014:542; Hammarberg *et al.*, 2016:499; Lindlof, 1995:56; Newsom *et al.*, 2004:75).

In understanding qualitative research, Berger (2014:26) explains that the word *quality* comes from the Latin term *qualitas*, which means “of what kind?” A component of assessment associated with the term quality is the conversation that emerges between the researcher and the participants, which allows for a far greater understanding of complex issues “of power, privilege, positionality, ownership, and interpretive authority in human scientific research” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016:55). This in turn leads to rich, comprehensive descriptions that enable the researcher to draw conclusions about the phenomena (Lindlof, 1995:228).

Qualitative research does not seek to make any inferences about the relationships that exist between an independent and a dependent variable as do quantitative studies. The research questions within qualitative studies are what ascertained the occurrence to be studied (Strauss &

Corbin, 1998:41). Unlike quantitative methods, qualitative research methods regard the communication that occurs with the field and its members as a distinct measure of knowledge instead of regarding it as an interview variable (Flick, 2014:16). The subjectivity of both the researcher and the participants being studied becomes an imperative part of the research process, as the researcher is the principal instrument for both data collection and data analysis, which are interlinked (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016:41; Flick, 2014:142; Strauss & Corbin, 1998:53).

Although many different forms have been assigned to the term qualitative research, such as interpretive analysis or exploration, naturalism, ethnography, an alternate method, and constructivism, all these terms do indeed have one thing in common: the aim to understand and establish the qualitative characteristics of communication experiences (Du Plooy, 2009:30). As in the case of this study, the second research question will be answered by exploring the current views held by senior communication practitioners regarding their roles.

Qualitative research makes use of investigative techniques such as interviews, case studies, surveys and other reasonably personal methods (Salkind, 2009:209). By conducting interviews, the researcher is able to ask a series of different questions which in turn provide a range of answers to enhance the researcher's understanding of the topic at hand as well as provide "thick" data (Lindloff, 1995:228; Salkind, 2012:199).

3.3 Research design

In establishing the research design, emphasis was placed on gaining insight and understanding regarding the prevalence of the strategist role in senior communication practitioner roles at South African universities. The research questions and methods will be discussed in the next section.

3.3.1 Research questions, research methods, and theoretical statements

Each specific research aim was derived from the research questions, which implies that answering the research questions leads to the accomplishment of the research aims set out for this study (see 1.7). The first research question was answered by means of the literature study conducted in Chapter 2. Research question two was addressed by means of semi-structured interviews with senior communication practitioners employed at the participating universities.

Table 3-1: Research questions and research method

Research questions	Research method
1) What is the importance of the strategic role of communication management in attaining organisational goals, according to literature?	A literature study was conducted (the roles of communication practitioners, see Chapter 2).
2) What are the current views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles?	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with senior communication practitioners at South African universities (perceptions of senior communication managers, see Chapter 4).

Table 3-2: Specific theoretical statements**Theoretical statement 1**

Concepts of the strategist	Sub-concepts	Constructs
The communication practitioner in the role of the strategist should be well-trained, operate within a symmetrical worldview, function at top-management level, and be able to practise two-way communication as part of environmental scanning as well as build stakeholder relationships to attain organisational goals.	Well-trained	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary level education • Higher education employment experience • Accreditation and/or professional membership
	Symmetrical worldview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependence • Autonomy • Innovation • Conflict resolution • Responsibility • Equity • Interest-group liberalism

Concepts of the strategist	Sub-concepts	Constructs
	Top management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in management decision-making • Functioning at the macro level • Membership to dominant coalition • Stakeholder expectations/organisational view
<p>The most important tasks of the strategist include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental scanning, which refers to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ the early discovery of emerging problems, evaluating existing problems and opportunities within the environment and acknowledging current trends that may affect organisational strategies and thereby reacting accordingly; ○ analysing strategic intelligence pertaining to stakeholders, their issues, views and needs, as well as reputational threats; ○ stakeholder relationships - identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders and their issues; 	Environmental scanning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging) • The analysis and interpretation of strategic intelligence gathered • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders
<p>Environmental scanning is performed in order for the following tasks to be carried out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • engages in two-way communication with stakeholders to create new meaning and understanding, resulting in strong, mutually beneficial organisation-stakeholder relationships; 	Two-way communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging

Concepts of the strategist	Sub-concepts	Constructs
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> participates in management decision-making, representing and including the needs and views of stakeholders into organisational decision-making processes and as such ensuring unity between business and society; 	Participation in management decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> (see top management)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> expresses concern and sensitivity as well as guidance in achieving social responsibility and good governance and as such reinforces stakeholder trust in the organisation; 	Achieve social responsibility and good governance within organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Respect for stakeholder interests/values Community involvement and development Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> manages the organisation's communication strategy development process, makes a strategic contribution and focuses mainly on the enterprise strategy. 	Organisational communication strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategic contribution (enterprise strategy) Vision Mission Code of conduct/ethics Integrated processes Stakeholder approach

Theoretical statement 2

Concepts of the manager	Sub-concepts	Constructs
The communication practitioner in the manager role should be a stakeholder expert and focus on developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders. The communication manager should function at the departmental level of the organisation, acting and	Stakeholder expert	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector

Concepts of the manager	Sub-concepts	Constructs
serving their department and organisation as a trusted advisor.	Trusted advisor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Functioning at the departmental/meso level Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns Serving their department & university with honour and integrity for a number of years
<p>The most important tasks of the manager include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> developing the communication strategy and policy (with the assistance of the strategist) and participating in communication decision-making; planning and managing communication programmes and a communication plan for their department; formulating key messages that embody all facets of the organisation and communication that stakeholders should receive; managing day-to-day managerial related duties such as the budget and managing staff. 	Participation in communication decision-making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication strategy and the communication policy
	Communication programmes and plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Planning and managing Communication goals
	Formulating key messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive
	Managerial related duties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Budget Managing staff

Theoretical statement 3

Concepts of the technician	Sub-concepts	Constructs
The communication practitioner in the technician role should be able to display a multitude of technical skills and expertise, including, in particular, writing and media expertise and function at the implementation/programme level of the organisation.	Technical skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing and media expertise • Producing and distributing information in various forms • Functioning at the implementation/programme/micro level
<p>The most important tasks of the technician include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • internal technician expertise, which may include: writing, website management, editing, proofreading, design, video, publications; and • media relations expertise, which may include sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles or arranging for media to cover an event. 	Internal technician expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Writing • Website management • Editing • Proofreading • Design • Video • Publications
	Media relations expertise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles • Arrange media coverage

3.3.2 Population and sampling

The target population of this study consists of senior communication practitioners at universities in South Africa (see 1.10.2.2). These universities range from traditional to technological universities.

Most qualitative studies are guided by purposeful sampling (Leedy & Ormrod, 2016; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002:122). Within this study, a typical case sampling method was followed, namely that of purposive sampling, to select senior communication practitioners to participate in the research. This means that the sample was descriptive, not conclusive. As explained by Patton (1990:169),

this kind of sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases and studying these participants to shed light on the questions being asked within the study. The aim is not to make generalised statements about the experiences of all participants involved but rather to describe and illustrate what is typical to those who are not familiar with the setting (Patton, 2015:284).

The criteria for this sample were participants that were: (1) practitioners employed in a senior and/or managerial position in the communication department at their respective universities and (2) their willingness to participate in this study.

Senior communication practitioners at the following universities were contacted telephonically and via email to arrange a one-on-one interview with the researcher: The North-West University (NWU), University of Pretoria (UP), University of the Free State (UFS), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), University of South Africa (UNISA), University of Johannesburg (UJ), University of Witwatersrand (Wits), Cape Peninsula University of Technology (CPUT), Nelson Mandela University (NMU), University of the Western Cape (UWC), Stellenbosch University (SU), University of Cape Town (UCT), University of Fort Hare (UFH), Durban University of Technology (DUT), Walter Sisulu University (WSU), University of Zululand (UniZulu), and the Central University of Technology (CUT).

After contact had been established with these individuals, senior communication practitioners from the following universities across five provinces agreed to participate in the study: The North-West University (NWU), Vaal University of Technology (VUT), University of Pretoria (UP), University of Witwatersrand (WITS), Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), University of the Free State (UFS), Nelson Mandela University (NMU), University of the Western Cape (UWC) and Stellenbosch University (SU).

3.3.2.1 The nature of departments housing communication practitioners at participating universities

Communication departments vary in structure between institutions and consist of different units and diverse roles occupied by participating communication practitioners. These roles taken on by communication practitioners are further distinguished by the functional activities that exist within each role (see 1.1). These departments are not only responsible for providing communication support to top management but also to faculties and support services across their universities.

The number of practitioners employed within the nine departments used in this study ranged from smaller departments of 13 to larger departments of approximately 30 practitioners in total. Elken *et al.* (2018:1115) found that communication departments at universities have reached a substantial size in terms of the number of employees, ranging in size from 18 to 30. Furthermore,

the decentralisation of communication officers within faculties and schools at some universities may explain that the real number of people working with communication matters at certain universities may be considerably more. These departments are responsible for various tasks which include technical communication such as the writing, translating, and editing of all corporate, print, and online publications. These include both academic and administrative information and marketing or promotional material. They are also responsible for photography, videography, key messages, and institutional messaging. These departments are further tasked with digital communication services which focus on managing and monitoring all social media platforms of their university, website maintenance, support and development, and mass mailing. Communication and stakeholder relations, which includes key messages to relevant internal and external stakeholders, events and protocol and updates in terms of their stakeholder database, as well as brand and corporate identity, which refer to corporate identity management and marketing across their university also fall under these departments (NWU, 2020a; SU, 2013a; SU, 2013b; UFS, 2020; Wits, 2019).

In terms of these participating universities and their differently named departments that house communication practitioners (see 1.1), the most common terms included in their departmental names are: corporate, communication, advancement, and relations. Three of the participating universities' department names contain the term corporate. The NWU is a multilingual institution with three different campuses (Potchefstroom, Mahikeng, and Vanderbijlpark). The largest campus is situated in Potchefstroom in the North-West province. The communication division is referred to as Corporate Relations and Marketing (CRM). The three departments represented within the CRM division are Corporate Communication, Marketing and Student Recruitment, and Stakeholder Relations (NWU, 2017). TUT, situated in Pretoria, Gauteng, is the largest contact university in South Africa, with a total of nine campuses. Their communication department is referred to as Corporate Affairs and Marketing and consists of divisions such as Corporate Communication, Branding and Advertising, and the Promotions and TUT Contact Centre (TUT, 2020). VUT is situated in Vanderbijlpark, Gauteng, and has four campuses. The main campus situated in Vanderbijlpark, and they refer to their communication department as Corporate Affairs (VUT, 2019).

Moreover, there are four departments from the participating universities which refer to the term communication in their departmental names. SU, situated in the Western Cape, has a total of five campuses, and they refer to their department as the Corporate Communication Division. UFS, situated in Bloemfontein in the Free State province, has a total of three campuses, with the main campus situated in Bloemfontein. They refer to the Communication and Marketing Department (UFS, 2020). The NMU, situated in Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape, has a total of seven campuses,

six of which are situated in Port Elizabeth and one in George. The department housing communication practitioners is the Communication and Stakeholder Liaison department (CSL). Wits situated in Johannesburg, Gauteng, has five campuses located in Braamfontein, and they refer to their department as Wits Communications, which falls under the Advancement Division (Wits, 2019).

Based on the final two terms, namely advancement and relations, there are two universities that contain these terms with regards to the name of their department housing communication practitioners. UWC, situated in Bellville, has a total of three campuses, and they term their department Institutional Advancement (IA) (UWC, 2013). At UP, Gauteng, there are seven campuses all across the city with the main campus situated in Hatfield. The core department housing communication practitioners is the Department of University Relations (DUR) (UP, 2020). The interview schedule used during interviews with the participants discussed above will be discussed next. The essence of semi-structured interviews used in the data collection process will be discussed next, followed by the interview schedule used during interviews with the participants.

3.4 Data collection

3.4.1 Semi-structured interviews

In qualitative research, the researcher often makes use of either unstructured, structured, or semi-structured interviews (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:184). Unstructured interviews allow the participants to answer questions and elaborate in their own words. The researcher does not have a predetermined set of interview questions but rather a broad guideline. This type of interview provides rich, descriptive information, although the process of obtaining and analysing the information may prove to be very tedious (Du Plooy, 2009:199; Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009:2). Structured interviews, on the other hand, focus on asking closed-ended questions. The interview schedule used contains a set of predetermined questions, and nothing more will be added to that with very little interaction between the interviewer and the participant (Du Plooy, 2009:197; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:184).

Semi-structured interviews are a combination of structured and open-ended interviews. An interview guide is used to steer the interview in the right direction. However, the interviewer has the freedom to digress from this and ask follow-up questions aimed specifically at attaining clarity on incomplete or ambiguous answers or probing the other person's reasoning. Semi-structured interviews are used to gain insight into a particular topic, and questions are based on scientific theories of the topic. The researcher speaks to key experts to obtain background information or

an institutional outlook and, in doing so, elicit rich descriptions by gaining access to participants' individual views. Semi-structured interviews thus allow interviewees to respond as freely and extensively as possible, based on the interaction and exchange of information between the interviewer and interviewee (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016:155; Du Plooy, 2009:198; Flick, 2014:219; Hammarberg *et al.*, 2016:499; Howitt, 2016:61; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:184-185).

As explained by Howitt (2010:61), the following key elements should be considered regarding qualitative interviews:

- It is essential to use some form of tape or digital recording device during the interview for the researcher to play back the interviews when doing the analysis;
- The interviewer is required to be an active listener during the interview process;
- The interview is steered by the answers provided by the interviewee;
- The whole interview process is very flexible;
- It is ideal that the interview be conducted by the researcher him/herself; and
- Additional or repeat interviews are appropriate for providing the researcher with an opportunity to reformulate ideas.

Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions were used to acquire information from various senior communication practitioners employed at participating universities in South Africa. This allowed the researcher to clearly express the participants' voices and by way of meaningful conversation reveal the many truths that each participant had to offer.

3.4.1.1 The interview schedule

An interview schedule, which contained open-ended questions aimed at exploring the views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles, was used to guide the interviews (Du Plooy, 2009:198). The same interview schedule was used for all interviewees and any anomalies were clearly and carefully noted with an explanation.

These questions sought to determine senior communication practitioners' roles at their universities to determine the prevalence of the strategist role as defined by Steyn (2000a).

As indicated in Table 3-2, concepts, sub-concepts, and constructs were identified for theoretical statements from Chapter 2, that is, for the strategist, communication manager, and communication technician together with their tasks (see 2.6.1.4, 2.6.2.2 and 2.6.3.2). As can

further be noted, there is more than one construct related to each of these sub-concepts, and these constructs were included in the interview schedule as seen in Table 3-3.

In terms of the interview schedule in Table 3-3 below, each of the questions asked from 1.1 to 1.14 relate to the constructs identified in Table 3-2.

Questions 1.1 to 1.4 of the interview focused on each of the senior communication practitioners' positions to determine the level at which they operate and the role which they enact based on their functional activities carried out on a daily basis as well as their mandate. This would also aid in confirming whether they enacted the role of the strategist, manager, technician or a combination of these roles (see 2.6.1.4, 2.6.2.2 and 2.6.3.2). Furthermore, practitioners were asked about their qualifications, as research has indicated, in terms of the Excellence study, that formal qualifications within the field of communication are necessary in order to perform excellent two-way symmetrical communication within the organisation.

The purpose of questions 1.5 to 1.8 was to determine the challenges that each of these senior practitioners experienced in terms of the environment in which they operate, the higher education sector, and the effect that these challenges had on their role, department, and university as such.

With questions 1.9 to 1.13 the researcher aimed to determine whether these practitioners made use of environmental scanning, research, or both to identify the issues concerning their university and their stakeholders.

Questions 1.11 – 1.13 were asked to establish what processes were used by these practitioners to manage their stakeholders and how they engaged with their stakeholders in terms of practising two-way symmetrical communication.

Table 3-3: Semi-structured interview schedule

Interview questions	Constructs
1.1. Could you please state your position and department for the sake of the interview?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functioning at the macro level • Functioning at the departmental/meso level • Functioning at the implementation/programme/micro level
1.2. What is your role(s) and the functional activities you perform as a communications practitioner in your department?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependence • Autonomy • Innovation

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution • Responsibility • Equity • Interest-group liberalism • Participation in management decision-making • Membership to dominant coalition • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging) • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Community involvement and development • Strategic contribution (enterprise strategy) • Vision • Mission • Code of conduct/ethics • Integrated processes • Stakeholder approach • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis, and stakeholder concerns • Serving their department and university with honour and integrity for a number of years • Communication strategy and communication policy • Planning and managing • Communication goals • Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive • Budget • Managing staff • Writing and media expertise • Producing and distributing information in various forms • Writing • Website management • Editing • Proofreading • Design • Video • Publications • Sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles • Arrange media coverage

Interview questions	Constructs
<p>1.3. What do you believe to be your mandate as a communications professional and what qualifications do you possess?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tertiary level education • Higher education employment experience • Accreditation and/or professional membership • Interdependence • Autonomy • Innovation • Conflict resolution • Responsibility • Equity • Interest-group liberalism • Strategic contribution (enterprise strategy) • Vision • Mission • Code of conduct/ethics • Integrated processes • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Community involvement and development • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • Create spaces for engagement • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Serving their department and university with honour and integrity for a number of years • Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive

Interview questions	Constructs
<p>1.4. What term would you say best describes your role as a communication practitioner - *strategist, *manager or *technician and why?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functioning at the macro level • Functioning at the departmental/meso level • Functioning at the implementation/programme/micro level • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis, and stakeholder concerns • Participation in management decision-making • Membership to dominant coalition
<p>1.5. When we look at issues such as the fees must fall campaign that came about in 2015, what in your opinion are the current issues/challenges within higher education today, specifically for South Africa, and how do these affect practitioners?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging) • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Community involvement and development • Participation in management decision-making • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • Interdependence • Autonomy • Innovation • Conflict resolution • Responsibility • Equity • Interest-group liberalism • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns • Serving their department and university with honour and integrity for a number of years • Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive • Budget • Managing staff • Producing and distributing information in various forms • Writing • Website management • Editing • Proofreading • Video • Sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles
1.6. What do you believe to be a university's role in society and the effect on communication practitioners as such?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interdependence • Autonomy • Innovation

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict resolution • Responsibility • Equity • Interest-group liberalism • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Community involvement and development • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive
<p>1.7. How does your department or you as practitioner go about preparing for a possible crisis?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging) • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • Stakeholder approach • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector • Planning and managing • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during

Interview questions	Constructs
	<p>problem-solving processes, times of crisis, and stakeholder concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Serving their department and university with honour and integrity for a number of years • Communication strategy and the communication policy • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive • Writing and media expertise • Managing staff • Communication goals
<p>1.8. How do you and your department go about handling an actual crisis when it occurs?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging) • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • Integrated processes • Stakeholder approach • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during

Interview questions	Constructs
	<p>problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication strategy and the communication policy • Planning and managing • Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive • Producing and distributing information in various forms • Writing • Website management • Editing • Proofreading • Design • Video • Publications • Sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles • Arrange media coverage • Budget • Managing staff • Membership to dominant coalition • Participation in management decision-making • Serving their department & university with honour and integrity for a number of years
<p>1.9. Do you conduct research to prepare your university for future crises, either before/after a crisis occurs or throughout the</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging)

Interview questions	Constructs
<p>year regardless of whether there is a crisis or not? If so, what does this research entail?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-on-one engagement sessions • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • Create spaces for engaging • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • Stakeholder approach • Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns • Communication strategy and the communication policy • Budget • Planning and managing • Communication goals • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns
<p>1.10. What is done with the research you accrue?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic contribution (enterprise strategy) • Vision

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mission • Code of conduct/ethics • Integrated processes • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns • Communication strategy and the communication policy • Planning and managing
1.11. How do you manage your stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Knowledge and experience about internal and external stakeholders, specifically in the higher education sector • Integrated processes • Stakeholder approach
1.12. How and when do you engage with your stakeholders?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Status related to their position based on their guidance provided to top management during problem-solving processes, times of crisis and stakeholder concerns • Serving their department & university with honour and integrity for a number of years • Developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders and their needs • Include the required details in the communication produced that stakeholders should receive • Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced • Stakeholder approach

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embodying all facets of the organisation in the communication produced • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Community involvement and development • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • Managing staff • Communication goals
<p>1.13. In what manner do you as a practitioner and your department as such, consider stakeholders when making decisions?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues • Evaluating problems (current and emerging) • Respect for stakeholder interests/values • Community involvement and development • Transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making • One-on-one engagement sessions • Open, honest communication with stakeholders • Feedback is encouraged • Consultation processes • Create spaces for engaging • Stakeholder map • Prioritising stakeholders • Interdependence

Interview questions	Constructs
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy • Innovation • Conflict resolution • Responsibility • Equity • Interest-group liberalism • Serving their department and university with honour and integrity for a number of years • Participation in management decision-making • Communication strategy and the communication policy
1.14. Do you have anything else that you would like to add?	

3.4.1.2 Process followed during the interviews

Participants from various universities like the NWU, UP, and UFS were contacted to arrange face-to-face interviews, as the researcher was able to travel a short distance to meet with these participants. These face-to-face interviews were conducted at their respective universities within the office of each of the practitioners.

Due to time and financial constraints and the demanding schedule of some of these practitioners, telephonic interviews had to be conducted with a number of these practitioners, particularly in the late afternoons. These telephonic interviews were conducted with participants from TUT, VUT and WITS. In terms of the participants in the Western Cape and Eastern Cape province, telephonic interviews were also arranged with these participants due to the vast distance between where the researcher lived and the participants' locations. These universities were NMU, SU and UWC.

For the telephonic interviews, a mobile recording app was installed on the researcher's mobile device to record the interviews, and the participants were made aware of this prior to the interview. The mobile device was also used to record the face-to-face interviews for the purpose of producing transcripts for each of the 12 interviews conducted. The dates indicated in Table 3-4

are the actual dates on which the interviews took place; however, many of these interviews' initial dates had to be rescheduled due to practitioners' pressing schedules and their unavailability due to overseas travel. These rescheduled interviews included practitioners from WITS, TUT, and SU. Therefore, these interviews were conducted over a four-month period.

The time and date of each of the interviews were decided on by the researcher and each of the participants prior to the time via email and telephonic conversations. All the interviews were conducted in English. The researcher wished to engage in friendly conversation with the participants and therefore the setting was informal but private (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:143). Each of the interviews took between 60 and 90 minutes to complete, and the interviewees demonstrated a willingness to answer the questions.

Table 3-4 below refers to all the participants that formed part of this study together with their job title, institution, and the date of the interview.

Table 3-4: Interviewees

Name	Date of interview	University
Director: Corporate Communication (MACE: Executive Committee: Chairperson)	Friday, 17 March 2017	North-West University (NWU)
Internal Communication Specialist	Friday, 21 April 2017	University of Pretoria (UP)
Communication manager	Friday, 21 April 2017	University of Pretoria (UP)
Director: Communication and Marketing (MACE: Co-opted Member, Excellence Awards Coordinator)	Thursday, 6 April 2017	University of the Free State (UFS)
Deputy Director: Integrated Communication and Call Centre (Past MACE Chair: Free State)	Thursday, 6 April 2017	University of the Free State (UFS)
Assistant Director: Communication and Marketing	Thursday, 6 April 2017	University of the Free State (UFS)
Senior Director: Corporate Communication	Thursday, 15 June 2017	Stellenbosch University (SU)
Deputy-director: Communication	Wednesday, 10 May 2017	Nelson Mandela University (NMU)
Head: Communication	Friday, 9 June 2017	University of Witwatersrand (WITS)

Head: Corporate Communication	Thursday, 29 June 2017	Vaal University of Technology (VUT)
Deputy-director: Corporate Communication	Tuesday, 13 June 2017	Tshwane University of Technology (TUT)
Manager: Communication and Media Relations	Wednesday, 17 May 2017	University of the Western Cape (UWC)

3.5 Data analysis

Thematic analysis is a method in which the researcher pinpoints, analyses, and reports different patterns or themes which are prevalent within the data. This method does well to organise and describe the data set in rich detail (Braun & Clarke, 2006:6). The researcher was immersed in the transcription of the interviews and chose to analyse the interviews manually to identify various topics and themes that were not necessarily part of the original theoretical constructs. According to Braun and Clarke (2006:83), this method of analysis provides the researcher with a rich description and understanding of the data set at hand from which to write a comprehensive report. This procedure was followed in this study to analyse the qualitative data gathered by means of the semi-structured interviews.

The concepts relating to the objectives of this study were identified in the theoretical statements from Chapter 2 (Table 3-2) and were used to identify patterns in the data that were interpreted in terms of their meaning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016:55; Neuman, 2014:487). The researcher focused on reading through the transcripts of each of the 12 interviews and highlighted matching information pertaining the theoretical constructs, grouping information together and then reanalysing this information to recognise relevant information to answer the specific research question. The researcher interpreted the data, discussed the overall findings of the study, and drew conclusions. As noted by Bloomberg and Volpe (2016:55), data collection and data analysis usually occur simultaneously in qualitative research.

3.6 Validity

Validity refers to the degree to which the measuring instrument that was designed actually measures what it is supposed to measure.

There are two kinds validity in qualitative research, namely internal validity, and external validity. Internal validity of a research study is the degree to which the design and the results of the of the data allow the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about the research phenomena (Leedy & Ormrod, 2002:97).

External validity refers to the extent to which the results of the study apply to other contexts outside the actual study itself (Leedy & Ormrod, 2002:97). One of the strategies used to enhance the external validity of a study was to include a diverse group of universities (see 3.3.2.1) – nine universities across South Africa ranging from traditional to technological universities (see Table 3-4). Seven of these universities are also ranked as the top universities in South Africa according to the QS Brics University Rankings for 2019 (QS Top Universities, 2020). However, the findings cannot be generalised for those with a very different set of characteristics (Leedy & Ormrod, 2002:100). The purpose of this study was to achieve a deeper understanding of the roles of senior communication practitioners at participating universities and in doing so establish the prevalence of the strategist role within these roles. Therefore, as noted in 3.3.2, the aim of this study is not to generalise. However, as indicated in Chapter 5, the results of this study may be tested against the results of a larger sample in future. The process followed by the researcher in order to ensure reliability of this study will be discussed next.

3.7 Reliability

Reliability refers to the consistency with which the research measuring instrument produces the same results when the unit being measured has not yet been altered (Leedy & Ormrod, 2002:28-29). Morse *et al.* (2002:17) explain that verification is the process of confirmation, making completely sure and being certain of all the facts and the processes followed in the study. It entails going through the study numerous times and moving to and fro between the research design and the implementation of the research to ensure that the research questions, literature study, recruitment of participants, data collection strategies, and the analysis of the data correlate. Verification strategies help the researcher to decide when to carry on, halt or adapt the research process to ensure reliability, validity, and thoroughness (Morse *et al.*, 2002:17). To ensure reliability within this study, the verification strategies of Morse *et al.* (2002:12-13) were used to assist in ensuring the reliability and of this study.

The first strategy is the aim of *methodological coherence*, which guarantees congruence between the research question and the components of the method chosen to answer the question. This means that the research method chosen must match the research question, including the data and the analysis thereof (Morse *et al.*, 2002:12). In this study, semi-structured interviews were used to gain information about the roles of senior communication practitioners, and, specifically, the prevalence of the strategist role within these roles at the participating universities in South Africa. Since open-ended interview questions were used, follow-up questions could be asked which enabled the researcher to probe for more information.

The second verification strategy explains that the *sample must be appropriate* (Morse *et al.*, 2002:12). This means that the chosen sample must consist of participants who best represent and/or have expert knowledge of the research topic at hand. In this study, senior communication practitioners within the participating universities communication departments were interviewed. All the interviewees performed communication functions and had an extensive knowledge of communication management at university level.

The third verification strategy according to Morse *et al.* (2002:13) is the *immediate collection and analysis of the data* once the interviews have been completed. This allows the researcher to determine what information was already prevalent and what ancillary information was still required (Morse *et al.*, 2002:12-13).

The fourth verification strategy refers to *thinking theoretically* relating the ideas that transpire from the data generated and reconfirmed in new data, which leads to new ideas that in turn must be verified in the data already collected (Morse *et al.*, 2002:13). For this particular study, some of the new information obtained did in fact deviate from existing literature, particularly in terms of the tasks of the strategist, manager and technician; however, much of the literature was reconfirmed and/or verified.

The fifth and final verification strategy identified by Morse *et al.* (2002:13) is that of *theory development*. According to Morse *et al.* (2002:13), theory is developed through two mechanisms, namely as an outcome of the research process – rather than being adopted as a framework to move the analysis along – and as a template for comparison and further development of the theory. However, in this study, existing theory was used as a framework to investigate a new context, since there is very little research about the extent to which the strategist role is prevalent amongst senior communication practitioner roles at South African universities. As such, this study is an explorative study. All the data for this study was gathered and interpreted to add to the roles theory of communication management within South Africa.

3.8 Ethical issues

With regards to the informed consent obtained from all the participants, a record of emails was kept by the researcher where each participant formally agreed to participate in this study. This was of particular importance for the majority of participants that engaged in telephonic interviews with the researcher. With that said, the researcher also confirmed their informed consent before the telephonic interviews commenced at the beginning of each telephonic conversation. All these recordings were also stored by the researcher. Each participant was informed (via email) of the

study's title, population and sampling method, research design, data collection and analysis method, as well as the complete contact details of the researcher.

All the participants in the semi-structured interviews were informed of the following before each of their interviews commenced:

- Their participation in this study was voluntary;
- How the information provided would be used;
- If at any time the participants did not wish to continue with the interview, they could stop;
- They would not receive any financial contribution for their participation in this study; and
- All the information provided would remain confidential.

3.9 Conclusion

In this chapter, the research methodology that was used in the study was discussed in greater detail. It was explained that, in order to reach the desired outcome of this study, a qualitative research approach would be used.

Semi-structured interviews provided the researcher with rich data in terms of detailed answers relating to the perceptions and opinions of each participant. These interviews were conducted with senior communication practitioners from participating universities within South Africa to explore their individual roles within their institutions. The data provided by these individuals were then analysed by means of a thematic content analysis. The data analysis will be presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: PERCEPTIONS OF SENIOR COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS REGARDING THEIR ROLES

4.1 Introduction

As indicated in Chapter 1, senior communication practitioners at South African universities function in unpredictable environments. Yet, the technical related duties of their profession often dominate their primary tasks (see 1.1 and 1.3). There is an imperative need for practitioners to gain strategic exposure and ultimately enact a strategic role to allow practitioners to survive within the volatile environment in which they function and the state of the country's economy. Against this background, the roles of the technician, manager, and strategist were discussed in Chapter 2 with the view on determining the importance of the strategist role in contributing to the achievement of organisational goals. In this discussion, a differentiation was made between the roles of the strategist, manager, and technician and especially the different tasks they perform. This led to a conclusion of theoretical statements regarding the tasks of the different roles. Concepts, sub-concepts, and constructs were derived from these theoretical statements which informed the empirical part of the study (see 3.4.1).

In this chapter, the second specific research question will be answered: *What are the current views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles?*

This will be done by discussing the findings of the semi-structured interviews conducted with senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles. The discussion will commence with the strategist, followed by the manager and lastly the technician. In terms of each of these roles, the tasks and the constructs describing them will be discussed, as delineated in Chapter 3 (see Table 3-2).

4.2 The strategist role analysis

In Chapter 2 it was argued in theoretical statement 1 (see 2.6.1.4) that the communication practitioner in the strategist role should be well-trained, operate within a symmetrical worldview, function at top management level, be able to practise two-way communication as part of environmental scanning, as well as build stakeholder relationships to attain organisational goals.

4.2.1 Training

As explained in 2.2, a trained communication professional implies that the practitioner has gained the knowledge needed to carry out the manager role through university education or continuing education.

This training would not only include formal education such as undergraduate and post-graduate qualifications or a higher degree(s) obtained within the field of communication studies or any other relevant field but also diplomas and any other professional certificate completed within a relevant or related field of study. Their range of relevant experience in different fields and their number of years of experience gained within the higher education sector will also contribute to this definition. Practitioners' affiliation to various professional organisations and bodies representing communication professionals and their accreditation would also add to their classification of being well trained. Training was thus analysed by focusing on the following constructs: tertiary level education, higher education employment experience, and accreditation and/or professional membership (see Table 3-2).

Based on the answers provided by participants in the semi-structured interviews regarding the academic qualifications they have obtained, all practitioners had completed a range of academic qualifications, the most common of which was a bachelor's degree, while some participants held two degrees including a Bachelor of Commerce and a Bachelor of Technology. The most widely held qualification among the participants was found to be a three-year degree in communications, which they either referred to as communication studies, communication science, or corporate communication.

A few practitioners went on to describe their postgraduate qualifications, which included post-graduate diplomas in management and marketing and future studies as well as strategic foresight and honours degrees in journalism and media studies, language studies, and communication studies. Five of these practitioners had also attained a higher degree, the majority of which had completed a master's degree, and two practitioners had a doctoral degree. This indicated the practitioner's commitment to further education, years after their initial degree had been obtained so as to increase their qualification levels.

Of these practitioners, one in particular had obtained a bachelor's degree in psychology, a diploma in policing and a higher diploma in policing with a major in communications. His qualifications explained his years of experience throughout his career journey. He had been employed at the South African Police Service (SAPS) for 21 years before moving to the higher education sector. During his time at the SAPS, he managed and was in charge of all

communications, also taking responsibility as media liaison and was the official media spokesperson for the SAPS. After leaving in 2008, he moved to the higher education sector where he has been employed for the last 11 years. Here he manages corporate communication and is also the official media spokesperson for the university.

With regards to practitioners who possess similar qualifications, two of the practitioners held a bachelor of technology – the first in journalism and the second in in public relations management. Besides the qualifications listed above, one of those participants had also obtained a bachelor of commerce in industrial psychology and marketing and management.

Three of the practitioners respectively had also obtained an additional qualification in management. These participants had all described their years of experience in different sectors as contributing greatly to the higher education sector. Their employment experience included government, diplomatic corps, and the banking sector.

One practitioner had not only obtained an honours degree in journalism and media, which matched her employment experience as radio presenter for eight years before joining her present, but she had also completed a higher diploma in media studies. Furthermore, her years of experience within her current position were astounding, spanning a total of more than 17 years within her position at her university.

With regards to higher degrees obtained, there were only a handful of participants that had completed a master's degree. One of the directors had also completed a master's degree in higher education studies related to her sector and position of employment, where she has been employed since 2003, with nearly 17 years' experience in the higher education sector. The other practitioner had a journalism background and a master's degree in media studies.

One other practitioner had attained a master's degree and two others a PhD in communication studies. One of these practitioners had more than 17 years' experience within the higher education sector. Throughout her professional journey, she occupied different positions, the majority of which were senior positions where she served as an executive director and senior director at two different institutions. The practitioner occupied the position of editor for corporate publications and manager for corporate media at UNISA; she was also a published author who began her career as a journalist. The positions she occupied may explain her level of education obtained. The other one of the three practitioners had 12 years' experience at his university within his current position; however, despite his experience and level of qualification, he had not yet climbed the ranks considerably in terms of acquiring a more senior position such as director.

Many of the practitioners also confirmed their affiliation and accreditation with various bodies representing communication professionals across the country. Most of the participants had over ten years' experience in the higher education sector.

In terms of the wide range of experience certain practitioners held, not only in the field of communication but across different industries, one communication manager had over 20 years' experience in numerous facets within the field of communication. Her previous employment included working for Microsoft South Africa and BANKSETA before moving to her university where she has spent the past nine and a half years. The practitioner had obtained a bachelor of commerce in strategic communication management 20 years after her initial degree (see 2.7).

In examining practitioners' affiliation to different organisations, the organisation mentioned most by the majority of the participants was Marketing, Advancement and Communication in Higher Education (MACE) of which most individuals were members. This organisation represents communication practitioners within the higher education sector. Several of the practitioners served on the MACE national board and some had been or were current members of the board and were responsible for the governance and management of MACE. Other memberships included the IABC and the Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE). In explaining their membership statuses, practitioners also went on to describe their accreditation as public relations practitioner (CPRP) and the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (GA).

Certain practitioners were called upon to be adjudicators for various associations for their skills, years of experience their areas of expertise in the field of communication. The adjudicator duties of these practitioners were based on awards presented to communication practitioners. These associations included the (IABC) and the MACE Excellence Awards. Awards from these organisations included The International Web Awards, the IABC Silver Quill Awards, and the International Business Awards. Furthermore, practitioners' levels of expertise and qualifications meant they were also approached to be mentors for young communication management students or colleagues and immediate team members that worked in their department, communication professionals, and post-graduate students.

All 12 of the practitioners were trained and experienced on different levels. Each of the practitioners held qualifications related to their field of work and experience within the higher education sector. Most practitioners were members of various bodies representing communication professionals. This indicates a significant improvement within the field in terms of practitioners' affiliation to these bodies compared to earlier research (see 2.7). Nine of the practitioners held a minimum of two to three qualifications and in the minority of cases more than

three qualifications, with only two practitioners completing a PhD. Three practitioners held a master's degree. These three practitioners had also worked within the higher education sector for the greatest number of years, each accounting for more than 17 years' experience and occupying mainly senior positions and in one case a range of different positions. Therefore, although a higher degree is a definite requirement for those functioning at strategic level, it seems that extensive experience within higher education employed in a senior role(s) was an even greater requirement.

Besides the qualifications and experience mentioned, practitioners executing these roles need to function according to symmetrical worldview to achieve organisational goals and act in the best interest of all stakeholders (see 2.6.1.4).

4.2.2 Symmetrical worldview

A symmetrical worldview is characterised by interdependence, (an open system, a moving equilibrium, equity, autonomy, innovation, decentralised management, responsibility, conflict resolution, and interest-group liberalism) (see 2.6.1.1).

In terms of adopting a symmetrical worldview and adhering to the characteristics mentioned above, only four practitioners explained that they did or could embody the characteristics associated with a symmetrical worldview through their actions. The responses of the other five practitioners were more in accordance with two-way symmetrical communication (see 4.2.6) than a symmetrical worldview. Although their answers supported the idea of a symmetrical worldview, they did not necessarily practice as such.

Of those practitioners that did exhibit a symmetrical worldview, one described the many issues that lead up to the protest action which began in 2015 and resulted in the continuation of this unrest (see 2.6.1.1).

In her answers, the practitioner expressed what her university and, even more so, her team could have done differently to engage with students to prevent the protests that erupted at Wits. In terms of her answer, she did not only clarify what was done in the past to ensure that responsibility was taken to resolve disputes such as these but also identified what the protest action prevented the university from doing. Although she indicated that she supported the idea of a symmetrical worldview, the nature of the protest action that unfolded in 2015, which was unlike any other they had dealt with before, prevented her and her team from performing the intended measures. She explained:

Could we have handled it in different way? I think that the protests were so different, that...previously you could engage with a small group or with a select group of

representatives of students, staff, et cetera... in this case, the...structures that were in place were not recognised, like the SRC. So you couldn't negotiate with the SRC... there.

The explanation she provided of how they (herself and executive management) engaged with smaller or select groups of representatives of the university in the past did indicate that she practised from a symmetrical worldview (see 2.6.1.1). In this particular case, however, there were no structures to operationalise the symmetrical world view. In terms of the characteristics associated with a symmetrical worldview, the practitioner exemplified conflict resolution in terms of negotiation and responsibility. These were based on the methods and manners used to communicate to resolve past disputes when engaging with a small group or a select group of representatives. Moreover, the practitioner illustrated the interdependence characteristic of a symmetrical worldview (see Table 3-2) – universities cannot operate in silos. Although they have their boundaries, in this instance, the university refusing to negotiate in public spaces with thousands of stakeholders including the media thus making a politics spectacle, so to say, shows that their environment forms a critical part of their functioning and that the practitioner understood this.

Another practitioner explained how she personally advised management about how stakeholder concerns should be handled. With reference to the protest action that occurred in 2015/16 (see 1.1), she emphasised the aim to acquire an understanding of the perceptions of stakeholders and then engage in a manner that would seek to address and align the perceptions between key stakeholders within these universities. This apparent in her response:

You know, the then it...calls onto the universities, as I said previously...to engage with the students...to understand the students better, what their needs are and to use their positions as recognised public entities to really influence the possible solution at a higher level, at a higher policy level.

Her response emphasised that universities are regarded as social institutions that are obligated to serve their communities (see 2.6.1.1).

Those organisations with a willingness to be reflective view listening and engagement as a research-based process to identify both risks and opportunities (see 2.6.1.3).

The practitioner acknowledged this and expressed the importance of local and regional community engagement committees in the Western Cape. These committees got members of the immediate community involved in various projects in the area an opportunity to participate in discussions and take personal ownership in terms of these projects.

The practitioner represents equal opportunity with respect to the characteristic of equity in that local and regional communities are seen as equals. They are responsible for upholding and promoting ethical behaviour concerning responsibility in advising management about how engagement should be handled and emphasising the importance of understanding the needs of their stakeholders. This responsibility extends to interest-group liberalism in terms of universities representing students based on policy decisions made by government (see 2.6.1.1).

In explaining the importance of the communication programmes he managed, one practitioner indicated the immediate benefit of these programmes on society and the transformational role for internal stakeholders such as students (see 4.3.4 on the communication manager role analysis). The programmes were aimed at empowering students and enabling them to become more financially independent by means of employment or entrepreneurship opportunities. Communication programmes directed at external stakeholders such as alumni were aimed at giving back to the internal university community and the broader community that existed outside the university. This practitioner exhibited autonomy by empowering students towards employment and entrepreneurship opportunities, based on his duty to perform communication programmes. He further elaborated, in terms of responsibility, that the programmes have a transformational role in society and, concerning interdependence, that universities cannot isolate themselves from their environment in which they exist. These are characteristics associated with a symmetrical worldview (see 2.6.1.1).

Another practitioner also highlighted communication programmes based on the primary tasks that she executed. Although, in her case, she expressed the importance of equipping herself accordingly to produce more efficient and future-orientated ways of generating the communication programmes she managed at her university (see 4.3.4). She focused on improving her skills and educating herself by means of attending conferences and workshops, interacting with different types of people, considering innovative notions of practising, and producing more effective and futuristic communication programmes. Her innovation was as a result of her ability to adapt her own behaviour according to the level of independence she was granted. The practitioner therefore exhibited innovation and autonomy in terms of a symmetrical worldview (see 2.6.1.1). These actions relate to the findings of a study referred to in Chapter 2, which reported on trend data based on the roles of the national Public Relations Society of those members from America. The findings indicated that communication practitioners are constantly having to reinvent themselves and stay abreast and ahead of all the changes and demands that occur within their organisations (see 2.6.3). Even though this study was conducted 21 years ago and focused on an international sample, the findings of this study are even more relevant considering the current state of the South African economy and the unemployment rate reaching record highs (see 1.1 and 2.6.3).

Based on the analysis, practitioners adhered in differing degrees to the following characteristics (see constructs in Table 3-2) associated with a symmetrical worldview, namely interdependence, autonomy, innovation, conflict resolution, responsibility, equity, and interest-group liberalism (see 2.6.1.1).

Therefore, these practitioners who assumed the strategist role also expressed concern, sensitivity, and guidance in achieving both social responsibility and good governance within the organisation. In doing so, the practitioner strengthens stakeholder trust (see 2.6.1.4).

4.2.3 Achieve social responsibility and good governance within organisation

The reflective role is the ability to examine varying standards, beliefs, and perspectives within society and converse about these with members of the organisation to amend those standards, beliefs, and perspectives of the organisation to bring them into alignment with social responsibility and legitimacy (see 2.6.1.2).

Achieving social responsibility and good governance within the organisation was analysed according to the following constructs: respect for stakeholder interests/values, community involvement and development, and transparency and accountability in strategic decision-making (see Table 3-2).

Two practitioners in particular displayed respect and consideration for stakeholder interests/values in the form of assisting the executive management of their university in dealing with stakeholder concerns in order to achieve a mutual understanding. Practitioners and their universities addressed the issues of stakeholders based on the call to action by disgruntled students during the 2015/16 student protests relating to government policy decisions (see 1.1). They recognised the issues that their students faced in terms of funding and focused on maintaining the equilibrium between the university and their stakeholders by engaging with these stakeholders in order to reach a consensus and promote cooperation between the university and its stakeholders (see 4.2.2).

Two other practitioners demonstrated adherence to the construct of community involvement and development as they illustrated how universities are not only aimed at achieving their own objectives but that of society at large. Practitioners specifically explained their approach to internal (students) and external (communities) stakeholders of the universities in the towns and cities in which they existed (see 3.3.2.1). One practitioner took the current economic state of the country into account in developing the necessary skills required; mostly for current students to empower students. Another practitioner ensured community involvement and development by adopting a participatory approach toward stakeholders and allowing them to form part of the bigger picture

in community engagement committees through active participation in decision-making. The university acted as a beacon for local community members in terms of the projects they pursued and making a recognisable impact on the community concerning their realities (see 4.2.2).

The three practitioners discussed in the following section displayed adherence to the construct of transparency and accountability based on their participation in strategic decision-making at their respective universities.

4.2.4 Top management and participation in management decision-making

The communication practitioner in this role should function at *top management level or macro level* of the organisation (see 2.6.1.4). It is of utmost importance to a strategist to create meaning when engaging with stakeholders in order to build trust (see 2.6.1.1).

Three participants from three different institutions functioned at top management/the macro level of their university and participated in management decision-making. These individuals described their membership to various governance structures at their university and how they provided support to these different structures in an advisory capacity. They took responsibility for overseeing a number of departments and had numerous managers which reported directly to them in terms of the employees they each managed.

One of these practitioners formed part of the university's executive management and represented them in terms of communication, specifically reputation management. She was a member of different committees and decision-making governance structures, such as the university senate and the senior management group (SMG) where she had served as a chair for a period of two years.

The other practitioner also provided support to her university's executive management committee of the senate (ECS) in terms of communication, reputation management, and image building, and formed part of the council and the senate. As the head of her department, she represented her department in the university management committee (UMC). The UMC worked together with the two governance structures mentioned above in terms of matters pertaining to the strategic management of the university. Furthermore, the participant explained that council and the directorate were regarded as executive or higher-level structures of the university.

The third practitioner explained that she formed part of her university's executive team, also referred to as the Rectorate or Executive, specifically the office of the rector as well as the university's group of senior directors. The Rectorate, also known as Council, is responsible for the day-to-day operational management of the university. The practitioner attended meetings of

the Rectorate, either by appointment by the rector of the university or supporting the particular operations of the Rectorate as required in her senior capacity. She was also a member of the university's senior directors' committee. As in the case of the previous two practitioners, the practitioner fulfilled an advisory role in terms of matters discussed by these structures, be they academic or administrative in nature in terms of the organisational view and considered the expectations of stakeholders, thereby making a strategic contribution.

As far as the reporting line was concerned, two of the practitioners reported directly to the vice-chancellor of their universities, which is the highest authority of the university.

One practitioner who operated at the meso level explained how he attended all council meetings and was also the spokesperson for council at his university; however, he did not participate in decision-making. He reported directly to the executive director of the CRM department (see 3.3.2.1) who functioned at the macro level of the institution and had a direct reporting line to the vice-chancellor. The director only provided feedback to the vice-chancellor with updates regarding media-related enquiries.

The three practitioners who functioned at top management level and participated in management decision-making at their universities expressed that most senior practitioners are still being excluded, in the majority of cases, from playing a critical role as members of the dominant coalition of their universities. This affiliation is a crucial requirement in order to contribute on a strategic level. Even though they have a direct line of report to the vice-chancellor, which in other sectors would be a likened to the CEO of the organisation, they are not regarded as members of the top management team (see 2.6.2.1.1). For those practitioners forming part of the dominant coalition of their university, contributing in an advisory capacity, counselling executive management with regards to communication issues, and the preferred course of action to attain organisational goals their level of informal power and influence are heightened (see 2.6.1).

Although one practitioner does not make decisions at council level, he was present at all council meetings in order to circulate management's decisions. Even though his participation was only based on an observer status, he was able to use the strategic intelligence obtained during these meetings to execute his duties. His executive director, who represents the CRM department at council level, participates in management decision-making (see 3.3.1). This may indicate, based on the experience of this practitioner, that those functioning at the meso level of their university are provided with observer status in terms of these governance structures. However, for those functioning at the macro level, participation is key in terms of the level at which they function.

Thus, while many practitioners functioned at the top-management levels, not all of the practitioners necessarily participated in decision-making to the same extent.

4.2.5 Environmental scanning

It was argued in 2.6.1.1 that environmental scanning is the primary task of the strategist. Environmental scanning encompasses monitoring the external environment of the organisation, which is also referred to as issues analysis, and examining and assessing potential opportunities and threats that arise resulting from interaction and relationships with other organisations, social groups, or individuals. The constructs underpinning the analysis of environmental scanning are the early discovery of emerging problems and stakeholder issues, evaluating problems (current and emerging), analysing and interpreting strategic intelligence gathered, stakeholder mapping, and prioritising stakeholders.

At least seven participants indicated that environmental scanning was part of their tasks. However, these practitioners were not entirely knowledgeable on the techniques nor specific stages of the environmental scanning process, such as the analysis and interpretation of strategic intelligence gathered, for which they are responsible. This would imply that in some instances they do not execute the task in its entirety and only perform certain stages of this process.

There was only one practitioner that explicitly mentioned environmental scanning, as is evident from their remark:

We scan the environment we use various tools and tactics like media monitoring. ...Where we basically...look out for issues that holds... potentially pose a reputational risk, and then obviously mitigate those.

Other participants also referred to some of the tactics and tools used for environmental scanning, for example media monitoring.

The task of media monitoring, especially social media monitoring, became crucial at South African universities during the protest action in 2015/16 (see 1.1 and 2.6.3). In one of the cases of the practitioners, this was deemed so important that the practitioner employed as writer took on the task of media monitoring during the protests.

The practitioner's tasks would involve the daily analysis of various media, including top news stories from different South African universities. The media analyst identified reputational risks by monitoring various social media channels. Particular emphasis was placed on student conversations in which the university was mentioned, including particular hashtags within these conversations. She analysed and summarised relevant articles which she presented to executive

management. A media monitoring company was also appointed to provide updates on any severe risks or crises identified and would inform the relevant individual in her department so that they could monitor these, as explained by one of the practitioners from the same university. Although this forms part of environmental scanning, the actual task performed resembles that of the social media technician (see 2.6.3). A practitioner from another university correspondingly explained how he constantly had someone in his department monitor social media to identify reputational risks. The participant did not acknowledge his analysis and interpretation of the data collected. He did, however, explain that, in the event that a crisis was identified, it was addressed as soon as possible:

And he picks up certain things and then you can see...problems, or you pick up an issue...or topic that's becoming an issue.

In terms of the three practitioners' answers above, environmental scanning consists of more than just media monitoring and media analysis. Although these represent, the methods used to conduct environmental scanning (see 2.6.3), the process involves so much more than simply scanning and monitoring the media in order to identify emerging problems and stakeholder issues and evaluating both current and emerging problems. It appears that in these particular instances, this task was not actually executed by the strategist themselves but that they made use of the information gathered by other individuals within their respective departments.

Just as in the case of media monitoring, practitioners from three other universities expressed the importance and use of risk registers at their university. These registers were used to detect both departmental and institutional risks. One of these practitioners explained how, from a strategic internal perspective, as she put it, regular meetings were held with the advancement division on potential issues at least once a month, and those issues were reflected on within these meetings. In terms of the risk registers, she explained:

We also have risk registers in place, and our risk registers are updated every quarter...and then they feed into the university's overall risk register.

Within her unit, she was responsible for determining what the departmental risks were, and from there the information was elevated and fed into the university's overall risk register, which was performed by an outside company. She was also part of the risk management team which held meetings every quarter. Discussions during this meeting included past crises and situations which were reviewed to determine what measures had been taken to avoid any similar incidences in future.

Another practitioner indicated that social media was of a particularly high priority on her university's risk register due to there being no social media policy, which meant that the risk could not be mitigated.

The use of a communication audit to conduct research, as explained by another practitioner, was another technique used to conduct environmental scanning. He explained how this research was facilitated by an external company, named business DNA, in 2018 to determine the quality of communication, the results of which were released in 2019. The CRM division of the university (see 3.3.2-3.3.2.1) launched an internal communication audit to ensure effective communication with staff members and students on a variety of significant themes. The audit included an anonymous survey and separate focus groups that took place across all three campuses. Staff members were invited to participate in the focus groups via email, while students were invited by making use of the university's learning management platform and SMS.

This audit was conducted to determine the needs of staff members and students with the aim of strengthening relationships. With this they would illustrate that the university valued its internal stakeholders by allowing them to provide feedback. The results of this audit were summarised and presented in a one-page infographic – one directed at students and the other at staff members – which was distributed to staff with the title: "You spoke, we listened". Although the director assisted in coordinating the audit, he did not conduct the research himself.

The early detection of risks, emerging problems, and the task of handling current problems effectively were managed by emergency/crisis management teams at two universities in reference to the unrest caused during 2015/16 protest action (see 1.1). Practitioners at two universities explained how discussions and evaluations took place regularly within these teams. These teams were to review the current status of existing risks and the university's available resources in an effort to deal with emerging risks and thereby ensure that they were prepared for potential future calamities. Within these task teams, senior practitioners were able to share and exchange information in a productive manner with a focus on the future of their universities.

Networking was another technique used to ensure the timely detection of risks, as explained by one practitioner. Networking and speaking with various structures within and outside the university were used to identify current trends and potential threats for which the university could then gear themselves. The practitioner explained:

A very big portion of this is to make sure that you are informed...that you are talking to structures, that you do hear what they're planning. If you pick up something, that somebody is coming through and they intend disrupting, that at least you're geared for it.

Information on the complete execution of the task of environmental scanning, of which the most important stage is analysing and interpreting strategic intelligence, was absent in the practitioners' responses. As in the case of techniques used such as risk registers, media monitoring, and audits, the interpretation of collected data seemed to be outsourced either entirely or partially instead of being done in-house. Therefore, although practitioners at both the departmental and the macro level of their universities were executing the task of environmental scanning to some degree, very few of the universities embraced a structured approach to this task.

The complex nature of the environment in which universities in South Africa exist (see 1.1) may be one reason why environmental scanning-related tasks are outsourced to a very large extent as observed under the participants. Another reason may be that, because of South Africa's dwindling economy, many universities may employ fewer senior employees and outsource their research and counselling needs, as apparent in the analysis (see 2.6.2.1.1).

The reputation of the university is influenced by stakeholder management; therefore, nurturing relationships with these key stakeholders of the university is essential. Universities operating in a responsible manner gain trust from their stakeholders and in doing so improve their reputation. However, identifying these stakeholders first is necessary in order to establish and maintain relations with these stakeholders in the first place.

Within this process of environmental scanning, the strategist is also tasked with identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders and what must be communicated to them to manage their concerns and draw up a stakeholder map to prioritise stakeholders (see 2.6.1.1).

With that said, identifying both internal and external stakeholders and their concerns, which form part of environmental scanning, was carried out by ten participants. This result is to be expected as this is a task that both the strategist (see 2.6.1.1) and communication manager (see 2.6.2) perform. The key internal and external stakeholders that consistently came to the fore were students, staff/staff members, parents, donors, the media, and alumni (see 1.1). As far as stakeholder needs were concerned, a number of these practitioners that identified stakeholders were responsible for establishing and satisfying stakeholder needs.

These stakeholder needs were based on identified stakeholder concerns and involved those stakeholders mentioned by the participants and those that were not necessarily expressed. As illustrated by one of the practitioners, who explained that during the feesmustfall campaign, her

department had to re-evaluate their relationship with parents due to safety and security issues which became extremely prevalent during this time (see 1.1). As a result, stakeholders were prioritised – the parent stakeholder group was shifted from a secondary to a primary stakeholder group.

The practice of two-way communication underlies the identification of stakeholders and their needs.

4.2.6 Two-way communication

It was argued (see 2.6.1.4) that the communication practitioner in the strategist role should practise two-way communication as part of environmental scanning as well as build stakeholder relationships to attain organisational goals.

Two-way communication transfers information back and forth, creating a conversation where information is exchanged – therefore, it is a dialogue (see 2.3.4). The reflective strategist develops stakeholder engagement platforms to achieve certain results and coordinate this engagement with external stakeholders in particular, providing clarity regarding which employees will be needed in order to communicate with which stakeholders and prepare content based on stakeholder engagement for integrated reporting. The feedback loop manifested during stakeholder engagement processes allows stakeholders to express their concerns and norms, which are taken into account in adapting organisational behaviour and strategies (see 2.6.1.3).

The execution of two-way communication was not a widespread task across the different departments at universities housing practitioners. A total of six participants mentioned the importance of two-way symmetrical communication. The need for two-way symmetrical communication across universities, however, was emphasised by a number of practitioners, which they motivated with the fact that communication between different departments within the same university was a major concern for practitioners. It appears thusly that two-way symmetrical communication is still a concern which practitioners are very aware of within their immediate departments and across universities (see 2.3). Only five participants from four different universities explained the methods used to facilitate two-way symmetrical communication and engage with strategic stakeholders to facilitate dialogue and foster stakeholder engagement, the details of which will now be discussed.

As indicated in 4.2.5, one practitioner explained how parents became a primary stakeholder group. The fact that parents were not on campus but their children were meant that parents constantly had to be kept informed. Therefore, the practitioner and her teams' focus shifted to more frequent, personal communication. New measures had to be put in place to improve their

relationship with parents and their need for communication. This was done by increasing engagement such as frequent emails, handling phone calls and initiating delegated discussions with parents and creating spaces where one-on-one discussion and other conversations could take place. This way they would ensure that parents would remain informed at all times. This evident in her answer:

They became, they moved from a secondary to a primary stakeholder, within a day. ...So we had to, to re-evaluate our relationship with parents and then we had to reflect on that, afterwards. And we had to put new measures in place to make sure that we better our relationship with parents.

The process involved briefing her team each morning to discuss the issues of the day and then advising parents accordingly. This scenario in particular highlights the difference between key stakeholder management and crisis management. The practitioner encouraged management to make the university's position known in terms of the current issues, which would lead toward long-term, trusting relationships with parents (see 2.6.1.1).

Therefore, the value of the strategist is emphasised by them assisting their university with maintaining long-term, trusting relationships with strategic stakeholders such as parents, students, and staff.

Another practitioner explained how one-on-one engagement remained the richest form of communication and that traditional forms of communication which are one-way (see 2.3) are a thing of the past. She emphasised the importance of implementing communication opportunities like discussion guides, developing internal communication programmes, and even more than this, actually becoming internal communication coaches to both leaders and line managers. By doing this, practitioners would value their role of communication and take the lead in the line of management towards employee engagement. This in itself would foster a need for two-way symmetrical communication and highlight the importance thereof by creating and implementing such tools.

She indicated her preference in the following statement:

I strongly advocate for within an organisational context, is the notion of organisational listening, to facilitate or to create spaces for conversation or two-way... communication.

Another practitioner explained how her university was involved in a rebranding and renaming process. In this project, the practitioner had the responsibility of driving the process involving various stakeholders from a communications perspective. Both the university and practitioner had

the responsibility of creating awareness and engaging with stakeholders to bring them on board and get their buy-in during this process that began in 2016. The research was conducted by means of consultation sessions with stakeholders so as to facilitate dialogue – she explained:

It's about engaging with your stakeholders...to bring them on board.

One project that one of the universities carried out in 2019, as explained by one participant from that university, involved an assessment based on the staff climate survey and student culture and climate survey of 2017/2018 pertaining to the university's restructuring. This project was conducted by the then Human Resource department and the CRM division, specifically the department of corporate communication. The focus of the survey was to understand the current culture of the university and define the future culture that the university should create by way of stakeholder participation. By engaging in conversations with stakeholders over an informal cup of coffee, staff members and students were interviewed, in order to find out whether they were satisfied with the university's culture. The university's current success model focused on creating a culture that is welcoming, inclusive, and enabling; however, the need for primary stakeholders to take ownership in their own way and share their views was necessary in order to ensure open and honest communication. Invites to these sessions were sent out to students and staff members, but in the event that they had not received an email, they could personally request to join the sessions. The outcome of these conversations was published on the university's website in the form of videos of staff members and students providing their perspectives.

One of the practitioners explained how she instilled the use of two-way symmetrical communication within her team. Because her portfolio included social media and website management, social media content had a significant role to play in this regard. Her interns who majored in communication were responsible for sourcing social media content and would walk around on campus and engage with students to find out what students wanted to see on social media. She guided her team and expressed how dialogue was facilitated with students of the university. The topic centred on social media content preference:

When it comes to social media content, are you sitting in your office and posting what you think your target audience wants, or are you actually out there, asking them and then post what they want.

We also have focus groups, or like what we call thinking tanks with the students, where we ask them about what you want on social media. ...We normally try and implement their ideas and plans in our content strategy.

Although the three practitioners did not operate at a strategic level, they expressed the importance of two-way symmetrical communication and understood the application of two-way symmetrical communication according to theory which was to facilitate an understanding between their university and their stakeholders. Practitioners efforts to establish the perceptions of their stakeholders and ensure their participation based on different initiatives and changes, strengthened the relationships with these stakeholders.

Therefore, practitioners took it upon themselves to ensure the application of two-way symmetrical communication even if their universities may not have (see 2.6.1.3).

As explained in Chapter 2 (see 2.6.1.4), in order to contribute on more than just at a departmental level within the organisation, the strategist also manages the organisation's communication strategy development process. This is done by focusing predominantly on the enterprise strategy.

4.2.7 Organisational communication strategy

Although the enterprise strategy is not always formally mentioned in organisations, it is manifested by means of the organisation's vision and mission statement, codes of conduct and ethics, approach to stakeholders, symmetrical two-way communication, multi-stakeholder dialogue, corporate philanthropy and what is regarded as ethical conduct (see 2.6.1.1).

No participants mentioned the term enterprise strategy; however, this term is unfamiliar to many although it presents in institutional elements such as the vision and mission statements of their university, code of conduct or ethics and two-way symmetrical communication practiced with regards to stakeholders. One practitioner explained how she took responsibility for her university's vision and advocating for organisational listening within the organisational context. Practitioners also formed part of the highest decision-making governance structures at their universities (see 4.2.4).

The enterprise strategy may also be evident in the two-way symmetrical communication they practised (see 4.2.6), as the case of the five practitioners analysed in section 4.2.6 which includes each university's approach to stakeholders (also see 4.3.1).

Therefore, although these practitioners did not actually mention the term, their responsibilities and the processes they formed part of represented their execution and contribution in terms of the university's communication strategy.

The strategist analysis indicates that some of these tasks which are actually the responsibility of the strategist, are performed by a number of other practitioners even though they operate at different levels and enact a different role within their position of employment. The communication

manager performs certain tasks to relieve the strategist of these tasks and allow the strategic practitioner to execute his/her strategic duties. The communication manager role analysis will be discussed next.

4.3 The manager role analysis

It was argued in Chapter 2 (see theoretical statement 2 in 2.6.2.2) that the communication practitioner in the manager role should be a stakeholder expert and focus on developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders. The communication manager should function at the departmental level of the organisation, acting and serving their department and organisation as a trusted advisor.

This implies that the following sub-concepts of the stakeholder expert and trusted advisor form the core of the manager role.

4.3.1 Stakeholder expert

The stakeholder expert role entails managing stakeholder concerns, advising top management about these stakeholder problems, and developing cohesive processes for dealing with these stakeholders (see 2.6.2.1).

There were six practitioners from six different universities that performed the task of stakeholder expert, which will now be discussed.

It is interesting to note that the practitioners that possessed more authority within their position, which included five of the practitioners, performed the task of stakeholder expert. These practitioners dealt with stakeholders, ensuring engagement with strategic stakeholders both internally and externally and guiding the executive management team of their university in terms of these stakeholders. Factors that merited their level of stakeholder expertise and these responsibilities included their level of expertise within their position of employment in dealing with stakeholders, knowledge of stakeholder groups particularly within the higher education sector, and their responsibilities in developing cohesive processes for dealing with different stakeholder groups in terms of the communication they receive to manage their concerns relative to current circumstances faced and in general.

The importance of stakeholder input, dealing with their issues and making them part of decisions was a crucial aspect in fulfilling the role of stakeholder expert. This explained in the following answer:

Having...inputs from...stakeholders such as alumni...could...be...beneficial and also if you running programmes for alumni to...give back and assist students.

The analysis moreover revealed that classifying participants as stakeholder experts was largely dependent on the internal and external communication processes they developed and relied on in dealing with stakeholder needs. This includes practitioners developing cohesive processes for dealing with their relevant stakeholders. One of the practitioners explained how her department handled all communication to stakeholders including staff, students and alumni and the fact that they also dealt with parents if and when necessary (see 4.2.6). Another practitioner from a different institution explained how urgent internal communication was prioritised during the student protest action in 2015/2016 (see 1.1). Students and staff members received numerous emails and SMSs updating them on a continuous basis about the developments on campus and the way forward. Both of these practitioners expressed the importance of creating WhatsApp groups during this time in order to communicate with different academic and support/service departments (see 1.1) and the executive management team(s) of the university separately. Furthermore, these participants were responsible for maintaining relationships with their university's stakeholders and, as one practitioner put it, were specialised in strategic communication management. In explaining her duties, she said the following:

I manage the strategic communication function, stakeholder relations in support of the university's strategic priorities and dreams.

Three other practitioners who served their institutions for an extensive number of years were indeed stakeholder experts based on their years' of experience and areas of specialisation within their position (see 4.2.1). Their duties did not only include communication with stakeholders about their needs but also stakeholder engagement opportunities with both internal and external stakeholders. They also fulfilled an advisory role within their university in providing guidance and advice to executive management (see 4.3.2).

As established with participants that possessed more authority within their position of employment, their responsibilities included overseeing and providing the final sign off in terms of publications directed at internal stakeholders, approving content to be uploaded to the university website, and communication sent out in the form of announcements via SMS, email, or noticeboards directed at both internal and external stakeholders. These duties were therefore associated with developing cohesive processes for dealing with both stakeholder groups. One of these practitioners was not only well-informed and experienced in terms of all these various communication channels but participated in and executed duties related to each by providing the final say in terms of content, sometimes writing himself (see 4.4.1), and dealt with the media on

behalf of his institution, meaning that he dealt with external media relations representing his university externally. Although this does not form part of the definition of a stakeholder expert, it is definite contributor in regard to external stakeholder expertise. Practitioners who liaised primarily with external stakeholders, acted as their university's spokesperson and handled the media had a number of years' experience in dealing with these external stakeholders. These included the media, alumni, prospective students, schools and the general public (see 1.1) and the type of information intended for them as well as the communication channel used, be it their institutions' websites or newsletters directed at these stakeholders (see 2.6.3).

Moreover, there were a number of practitioners that were either employed as or had the primary or secondary responsibility of managing internal communication and internal publications. These practitioners were inevitably then also responsible for dealing with the internal stakeholders of their universities. Although these practitioners contributed to the processes in dealing with these stakeholders, their stakeholder expertise was only based on one stakeholder group. With that said, the practitioners discussed above did engage with both internal and external stakeholders quite regularly; however, one of these stakeholder groups would usually take preference depending on the practitioner's area of specialisation, primary tasks and level of authority. Therefore, these practitioners do not adhere to the task of stakeholder expert, as their expertise in terms of external stakeholders is lacking. This could indicate that the line between internal and external stakeholders at university level is not quite the same as in the case of the corporate world. Therefore, the task of stakeholder expert can possibly be expanded to include practitioners such as these in this definition within the given context.

Together with being a stakeholder expert, the communication manager also has the responsibility of being a trusted advisor. This task will be discussed next.

4.3.2 Trusted advisor

The communication practitioner in the manager role should act and serve their department and organisation as a *trusted advisor* (see 2.6.2.2).

In being trusted communication advisers, communication managers must ultimately rely on their personal priorities, values and thorough understanding and experience of the business, stakeholders, and communication capabilities to demonstrate resilience in critical situations the organisation may face (see 2.6.2.1). Practitioners need to rely on their personal capabilities and thorough experience of their university and stakeholders to act and serve their department and institution as a trusted advisor.

In performing the task of trusted advisor, there were three practitioners that top management turned to during times of crises to advise them on these issues. One of these practitioners explained that his main responsibility and area of expertise was to provide strategic advice to his institution's senior stakeholders pertaining to media and reputation management matters, which included writing speeches and Op-eds.

It should be kept in mind that the interviews were conducted in the aftermath of the feesmustfall campaign (see 1.1) and, therefore, some of the advisory committees focused especially on the aforementioned crisis. The assistant director and the deputy-director for one of the universities, for example, formed part of the crisis committee forum at their university relating to crisis communication and initiated and coordinated crisis communication activities. As outlined by the practitioner:

I deal with a lot of, crisis management issues, firstly work at...at a higher level with the executives, advising.

All three of the practitioners described above also operated at the departmental/meso level of their universities.

Conversely, three practitioners who served at their university for the most number of years (see 4.2.4) did not only advise management during adverse times, like those discussed above, but also formed part of the highest decision-making structures at the university. These structures included council and the university management committee, who looked to them to provide guidance and advice relating to decisions and suggesting solutions (see 4.2.4).

One of these practitioners, for example, indicated that she also fulfilled an advisory role within her university with regards to guiding and advising executive management and dealing with strategic issues (see 4.2.4).

There was somewhat of a divide between those that served as trusted advisors, who only advised during times of crisis, and those that did this as well as participate in decision-making. This implies that the two functions were in fact separate from each other. Based on the analysis, it appeared that the participants' years of experience within higher education and their number of years' experience at their own university and within their current position were key in determining their advisory role to management (see 4.2.4). In the majority of the cases, for those enacting a more strategic role, their position, seniority, and level at which they functioned played a crucial role in their trusted-advisor responsibility, as well as their membership to the dominant coalition of their university (see 4.2.4). The analysis reveals that both managers and strategists were accountable

for these tasks and not only those that function at the departmental/meso level of their university, as was expected.

4.3.3 Participation in communication decision-making

From theoretical statement 2 (see 2.6.2.2) it was evident that the communication manager has the task of developing the communication strategy and policy (with the assistance of the strategist) and participating in communication decision-making. Thus, the constructs that will be analysed in this section are the communication strategy and the communication policy (see Table 3-2).

Five practitioners from seven universities had, either in part or primarily, the responsibility of devising and/or contributing to strategies and policies within their department and the university. These participants mentioned a variety of different strategies and policies for which they were responsible. Examples of these included the communication strategy, communication policy, advancement strategy, internal integrated communication strategy, integrated marketing and communication strategy, internal communications strategy, social media policy, communication plan strategy, and content strategy. These practitioners automatically formed part of communication decision-making and in the majority of the cases were responsible for managing a team of individuals. However, in most cases these decisions were not based on the communication strategy nor policy but rather on the operational requirements within their department due to the fact that they managed staff.

The participants from two institutions were expected to contribute to the communication strategy as evident from the following responses:

I would look after the media and communication component of that strategy. So basically I would develop a communication strategy for...for my unit within, with links to the rest of unit of advancement, and to the units based in the faculties.

Overseeing the...alignment of...my unit's operational plans to the overall divisional integrated communication strategy, so that's internally, and then within the university environment.

In this instance, both these participants that functioned at strategic level (see 4.2.4) took responsibility for their department's communication strategy. Their responsibility included ensuring the alignment of their department's communication strategy with their university's annual strategy. The finding indicates that in certain communication departments at university level, senior practitioners are accountable for the duties of the communication manager and those of

the strategist, fulfilling a dual role as such (see 2.6.2.1.1). In performing this task, the communication strategy clearly took precedence over the communication policy, as is evident with the practitioners described above.

The only exception was one practitioner, who took responsibility for both the communication policy and the communication strategy of his own department. This communication policy was approved by council in 2018 and would be up for review in 2021. The policy included the social media framework and crisis communication plan amongst others. Furthermore, he explained how he also took charge of implementing the media strategy his institution.

Although the practitioner from the other institution did not mention the communication policy, she was responsible for the social media policy. In terms of this duty, she expressed her frustration in devising this policy and the number of drafts she had already completed, the first of which was in 2011. The time it took to approve and receive feedback regarding the social media policy was another issue. She considered the fact that there was no policy to be a very high risk for herself, her team and the university, as she had nothing to protect herself until it was put in place. As explained in 4.2.5, social media was very high up on the university's risk register, as is evident in the following response:

I wrote the first draft in twenty eleven. I wrote a second draft in twenty fifteen. And I'm still waiting. So I'm screwed, kind of.

Even though the practitioner did not take responsibility for the communication strategy, the social media policy formed part of the communication policy as indicated above by the practitioner, and this was one of her primary duties; hence, the communication decisions she made focused on the social media policy.

Another crucial task of the communication manager involves planning and managing communication programmes and the communication plan for their department (see 2.6.2.2).

The next section will discuss communication programmes.

4.3.4 Communication programmes and plans

The Excellence theory also focuses on aspects such as the effective planning and implementation and assessment of communication programmes. These programmes are continuous and aim to influence stakeholder attitudes, opinions and/or behaviours. As such, they are included in the communication plan (see 2.2).

Only three participants from three universities took responsibility for the task of planning and managing communication programmes. Two of these participants performed other similar duties like writing (see 4.4.1), including personally writing, overseeing copies written by other employees, and managing communication campaigns within their department. The participants also possessed similar qualifications, as noted in the strategist analysis (see 4.2.1). However, the size of their communication departments differed greatly, with the practitioner from one university managing a much larger team and the practitioner from another employed in a much smaller communication department and managing a smaller team. Therefore, the task was not relative to the number of practitioners per department but rather their expertise in terms of this task.

The third practitioner functioned at strategic level; however, she performed the managerial task of defining and managing integrated communication programmes on behalf of her institution. This she regarded as part of her mandate as a communications professional and emphasised the importance of directing these programmes at both internal and external stakeholders of her university and the implementation thereof:

Serve as a valued partner that provides...guidance, advice, and expertise with regards to integrated communication programmes and processes.

To implement strategic internal and external communication programmes.

One of the practitioners described how he was not only responsible for overseeing these communication programmes that were employed but for taking control of these programmes with what he termed the writing aspects from a technical point of view (see 4.4.1). In terms of communication programmes directed at internal stakeholders, assisting current students was a key initiative that the department and so too the university undertook (see 4.2.2). Another practitioner explained how she conducted surveys and ensured a return on investment (ROI) in terms of these communication programmes besides the responsibility of planning and managing these programmes.

For the three practitioners that did perform the task of communication programmes, it was clear that this task was a primary duty which was prioritised above other tasks, and a task to which they devoted much of their time. This task was also linked to other technical-related tasks such as writing, specifically in the case of two of the practitioners.

In addition to communication programmes, communication managers were also responsible for the communication plan. The communication plan stems from the communication strategy and deals with specifics – a definite course of action that will be followed for how the department will

go about achieving certain goals, including on-going communication programmes such as corporate identity and publications (see 2.2).

The manager both conceptualises and develops communication plans and relationship building in order to gain public trust (see 2.6.2.1).

Only three practitioners were responsible for the communication plan. One practitioner described his role as overseeing and providing supervision and feedback in terms of the communication plan.

One practitioner was responsible for both the management and implementation of this plan. She highlighted how her specialities included communication strategies and implementation plans over her more than 20 years' experience in the communication field (see 4.2.1). Taking it a step further, another practitioner explained how she was not only responsible for devising and managing the communication plan for her own department but for also ensuring the alignment of the different faculties' communication plans with her department's communication plan. Within the university, each of the ten faculties that existed had their own communication plan and her responsibility was to ensure the alignment of these communication plans with her own communication plan. The practitioner explained:

And then within the university environment I'm also...play a role in aligning the faculties' communication plans to my communication plans.

One practitioner in particular illustrated the importance and achievement of the goals included within the communication plan. He explained how he was responsible for compiling the department's strategic communication plan based on the annual performance plan (APP) of the university. Within this APP, there were certain goals that were allocated to the overall department, namely CRM (see 3.3.2.1) which then linked back to the department's strategic communication plan. His responsibility included providing feedback on the APP and indicating the extent to which the goals were achieved or if not, why not.

In contrast, another practitioner highlighted his main responsibility as only overseeing the communication plan. There would be different weekly marketing and communication sessions, where checks were conducted to determine whether the achievement of certain goals were included in the communication plan. This plan was then monitored by himself and he would follow up and make sure that each component of the plan was executed. In this instance his task was not to develop and implement the communication plan but rather to manage his team and ensure that all elements of the plan had been included and implemented accordingly, as well as provide

guidance and ensure regular updates in terms of these tasks. He did therefore not perform the task in terms of the development and implementation of communication plans.

For practitioners from two of the other universities, the communication plan prevailed over communication programmes. One of these practitioners performed both tasks (communication programme and the communication plan) and both were regarded as a priority even though she operated at strategic level. In this instance, strategic as well as certain managerial duties were regarded as primary responsibilities.

Based on theoretical statement 2 (2.6.2.2), the communication manager takes responsibility for formulating key messages that embody all facets of the organisation and communication that stakeholders should receive.

4.3.5 Formulating key messages

The communication manager performs part of the window function with respect to the preparation and execution of the corporate communication strategy and policy (see 4.3.3), which also includes devising and implementing consistent messages that reflect all aspects of the organisation (see 2.6.2.1).

Seven practitioners from six different universities explained their responsibility in formulating and in some cases communicating the messages devised on behalf of their university. A few of these participants expressed the importance of communicating with one voice, ensuring that the messages conveyed were the same. Especially where an institution had different campuses situated in different cities and provinces (see 3.3.2.1), centralised communication would prove to be more feasible. One participant in particular elaborated on how higher education's (HE) central body, USAF, dedicated two of their workshops to this theme, which he attended, highlighting the importance of speaking with one voice in all messages communicated.

One practitioner not only conveyed these messages, as one of the other practitioners did, but also approved and assisted in the formulation of these messages, as in the case of two other practitioners. Research indicates that at university level, these individuals play a key role in the formulation of consistent messages to stakeholders. Through careful analysis and understanding of the needs of their audience, they play a significant role in disseminating information to their stakeholders (see 2.6.2.1.1).

The importance of conveying the same message across all platforms, including social media platforms, used by the institution and the different campuses was emphasised. This emphasis is a result of issues the institutions had dealt with in the past where each campus communicated their

own message – the uncoordinated communication resulted in chaotic reactions. Here he referred to the protest action that unfolded in 2015/16 (see 1.1) and the mayhem that was experienced by one of their campuses in particular. His response included:

Conveying the same message. And that is one of the golden rules, especially with regard to communication, whatever message goes out, should be exactly the same.

The relevant information had to be sent to his department and from there, decisions were made about how the information would be distributed and how messages directed at different stakeholder groups would be formulated. He referred to the example of a university spokesperson and agreed that if the need arose, two spokespersons that represented the university would be preferable in the event that one was not available, such as the communication officer that would stand in for him at his institution. However, he noted the responsibility of these spokespersons to ensure the following:

But those two people has to make very sure that they're talking from the same mouth. If you've got a sheet that you're working from, these are the core messages that you make sure are constantly included.

Furthermore, practitioners expressed the significant elements to consider in terms of devising these key messages that were communicated and how to ensure they typified all elements of the university. One practitioner stressed the significance of communicating the facts and ensuring these were correct, particularly those about the university, in order to protect its reputation. In addition, they should inform all stakeholders accordingly, internally and externally, by using the existing communication channels correctly and appropriately and always make sure that people were informed as well as know exactly what was expected from them and when.

In terms of the formulation of messages that were conveyed by the university, one practitioner explained how one of her key responsibilities included developing key narratives for her university. These key narratives included things that made her institution stand out above the rest and would influence the decisions made by various stakeholders. She emphasised the following in her answer:

Okay, so my job is to develop the key narratives for the university. In other words, the overriding stories, the things that can set us apart from other institutions.

Storytelling is noted as another one of their key responsibilities, not only for managers but communication departments as a whole, which involves telling the university's story to external stakeholders by making use of mass media to convey the messages (see 2.6.2.1.1).

The task of devising and implementing messages that reflect all aspects of the organisation forms part of the communication strategy and policy. Therefore, as apparent in 4.3.3, even though practitioners did not mention the communication policy, they did express taking responsibility in formulating messages that depict all elements of their university.

As argued in theoretical statement 2 (see 2.6.2.2), it was evident that the communication manager also has the duty of managing day-to-day managerial related duties such as the budget and managing staff.

4.3.6 Managerial related duties

Administrative manager expertise included preparing the departmental budget and managing staff members (see 2.6.2).

These practitioners are responsible for performing a range of tasks in addition managing their department on a daily basis.

A total of six practitioners acknowledged their responsibility in terms of managerial related duties. In the majority of the cases, these individuals explained their responsibility as managing staff. However, very few individuals elaborated on their duties in terms of the budget. There were those that managed staff members stationed at the same campus and then there were those practitioners that managed individuals from their campus and other campuses of the university located in different cities.

Teams varied in size ranging from four to seven or more persons as well as the list of responsibilities noted by participants in managing these individuals. For many of the directors, there were deputy-directors or managers below them responsible for managing smaller groups of individuals within the larger division that made up the different departments within the units (see 3.3.2.1). Those participants occupying a more senior role and operating at strategic level had a multitude of responsibilities to attend to each day together with managing their team accordingly.

Other obligations mentioned by the participants included duties related to managing staff members, administrative duties such as handling performance agreements of staff members and performance management, and signing off on a range of different documents such as leave and training opportunities. Further duties include matters relating to employee discipline such as being present at and mediating disciplinary hearing matters and organising employees by delegating work to different staff members (see 2.6.2).

Certain practitioners formed part of a much larger communication department, who managed a variety of staff members and worked closely together with each of them. Another practitioner

explained how she managed the writers in her own department related to her primary duty as head of publications (see 4.4.2.6). The call centre and switchboard team also resorted under her (including staff from the main campus and the sister campus) (see 3.3.2.1) as well as one other employee who was responsible for events and protocol. These practitioners were committed to tasks of managing, as explained the following responses:

Ja, to a large extent that is the majority of what I'm doing is managing and...ja... basically...ja, managing staff and their activities.

...And then I deal with staff matters as well. You know, there's requests for leave, there's questions about this or that, so sometimes when there are issues I have to deal with disciplinary issues, I have to mediate. So there are a number of things that can happen, depending, some things are ad hoc, some things are standard.

In elaborating on her list of responsibilities, another practitioner went on to explain how each day was unpredictable and that some days entailed more administrative duties while other days did not. She explained how her duties involved not only managing but also carrying out a very prominent technical role that involved approving and managing publications in addition to managing her staff members.

Six of the practitioners outlined the fact that their tasks included managing people. Furthermore, five practitioners mentioned their responsibility in managing the departmental budget. Based on their position of employment and level of seniority within the university structure as such, this budget would possibly stretch beyond their own departmental budget. As evident with one practitioner, who had seven employees reporting directly to her, these individuals in most cases also managed their own team of individuals. She also managed external service providers of the university and those employees from the dedicated brand agency that she worked with very closely. This apparent in her response:

I also allocate functional resources so I oversee...the budget spent...and allocating then the resources to implement the operational plans for the different units.

The manager analysis indicates that there are far more practitioners who execute tasks which are essentially the responsibility of the manager. Together with these manager-related tasks, practitioners similarly accounted for tasks related to the role of the communication technician, and these will be discussed next.

4.4 The technician role analysis

It was argued in Chapter 2 under the third theoretical statement (see 2.6.3.2) that communication practitioners in the technician's role should be able to display a multitude of technical skills and expertise, including writing and media expertise in particular, and function at the implementation/programme level of the organisation.

This implies that technical skills form the core of the technician role and is the first sub-concept that will be discussed, followed by internal technician expertise and media relations expertise (Table 3-2).

4.4.1 Technical skills

These practitioners are usually employed for their writing and media expertise, as the majority of their tasks performed incorporate aspects related to this expertise (see 2.6.3). The constructs supporting the analysis of technical skills were writing and media expertise, producing and distributing information in various forms, and functioning at the implementation/programme/micro level.

One of the constructs of the second sub-concept – internal technician expertise – is writing. Therefore, this construct will also be discussed during this analysis.

Based on the various answers provided by practitioners, it was clear that every one of the 12 participants had different degrees of writing and media expertise. Their expertise was based on the duties performed in their current position, and the majority of practitioners engaged in the writing component to some degree within these positions. For other practitioners, their knowledge was based on previous experience gained in other positions and industries before moving to the higher education sector, where they had been employed as either journalists, writers, presenters, marketing assistants or managers and content managers, to mention but a few (see 4.2.1).

The number of practitioners with media expertise was far less, whereas writing proved to be a collective skill. This may indicate that media relations are to be regarded as a specialised field, which only a few have mastered. For the six practitioners that had gained media experience, their career journeys had involved dealing with the media on some or all levels from the beginning of their career. Within their previous positions, practitioners were equally responsible for managing the media or acting as the spokesperson on behalf of their organisation or both. Although, for many practitioners, this experience was acquired in the higher education sector where they were currently employed and had been serving for many years. For one of the practitioners, it was both previous and current experience (see 4.2.1).

Three of the practitioners frequently took responsibility for technical duties within their department; however, they did not operate at the implementation/programme/micro level of their universities. These practitioners operated at the departmental/meso (see 4.3.2) and macro levels (see 4.2.4) of their university instead, as already indicated. These practitioners were not responsible for distributing various types of information but rather for producing this information at times. Furthermore, these practitioners were responsible for overseeing and approving this information before distribution, but they did not distribute this information themselves, with the exception of media spokesperson duties. Most of the times this information was formulated by those functioning as technicians within their department.

For most of the practitioners, their writing duties included a technical element in terms of overseeing, approving, and even writing for different reasons and including copy directed at the media. Those that were responsible for overseeing and approving internal and external communication, in terms of the written copy produced by others, frequently wrote this communication directed at different stakeholders. One practitioner explained how he both oversaw the content produced by others and actively wrote the aforementioned contents. Some of the practitioners wrote mainly for the website of their universities while others focused on writing for publications that they produced and managed. One of the other practitioners wrote for the website, including producing internal publications and opinion pieces for the entire university.

For most practitioners, it seemed that writing took up so much of their time that they were unable to focus on anything else, and this interfered with their actual duties of managing and strategising, as is evident in the following responses:

So I'm either writing – I do write a lot, I write for the, continuously I write for the website.

That's why I say in...an unreal world, we would all do just what our job descriptions tells us to do, you know, just strategise and manage, but no, I write all the time.

This may indicate that universities are employing fewer technicians within these departments, and therefore senior practitioners are expected to execute this task, or that technicians who are supposed to write do not have sufficient writing experience to cater to their different audiences. Therefore, the task of writing was not only reserved for those practitioners functioning as technicians at the micro level (see 2.6.3) of their university but senior practitioners too.

One practitioner mentioned how he would write occasionally. He made specific mention to media releases (see 4.3.3) in his response:

Not always. ...Quite often I do write, but...otherwise I would allocate it to a specific individual. Supply...him or her with the necessary details...this should be included...indicate okay, more or less I want this and this and this and this included.

Another explained how she was only responsible for writing proposals. This meant that, based on a number of guidelines and factual information, she would provide the reader with the necessary details they required in writing these proposals to make a decision.

As explained in Chapter 2, the technician role can be split into internal and media relations technicians. Internal technician expertise may include writing advertisements, taking photographs, and producing publications (see 2.6.3), while media relations expertise involves writing press releases, feature articles, coordinating press conferences or arranging for media to cover events.

4.4.2 Internal technician expertise

The constructs underpinning the analysis of internal technician expertise were writing, website management, editing, proofreading, design, video and publications (see Table 3-2).

Nearly all the participants who were interviewed took on some form of responsibility for internal technician expertise within their teams and so too their larger or smaller departments.

It appeared that writing and website management tasks were included under the duties of these participants, as the task of writing (see 4.4.1) was performed in order to generate content for the website in the form of copy. Website management will be discussed next.

4.4.2.1 Website management

Technicians also focus on the design and management of the university's website (see 2.6.3).

Three participants indicated their duties related to website management – this included both generating and managing content. However, it would seem that website management is also a team effort, as is evident from the responses provided:

...Which is where we sit around as...colleagues to collect all the articles and images that will go onto the website, all content that goes onto the website. So, we share ideas, we...kind of pen down what our stories for the week is or the schedule that we have of articles that are going to go on that platform.

So what we are responsible for is managing the university's whole website. So that's content as well as design. Designing new pages or redesigning the whole website, changing content, everything that goes with that.

The task of website management such as these were placed upon senior practitioners likely due to a lack of skill or a shortage of employees to carry out technical duties such as these. These tasks may have been assigned to managers due to their level of expertise, understanding of their audience, and years of experience at their university. Therefore, website management was not only the task of the communication technician but also of senior communication practitioners at universities.

4.4.2.2 Editing

Additional tasks which relate to internal technician expertise include editing the spelling and grammar of the writing produced by others within their department and organisation (see 2.6.3).

Only two of the participants were responsible for editing. However, the task of editing may have become so ingrained in their daily to-do's that participants who failed to mention it may have not thought of it as a primary task. Conversely, it may have been a task that only those who dealt with publications and the task of writing executed, as was indicated by this response:

I'm the editor, but I solicit content from the rest of the colleagues in the department.

One of the practitioners was responsible for editing the social media copy before it was published on the different platforms, while another one of his colleagues published the edited content on the relevant platform. He noted the following:

And then in terms of social media, I do the...editing part and then my colleague is... publishing the stuff.

For this practitioner, editing was a task that he would execute occasionally and in his case the task of editing was not related to any of the other tasks already discussed such as writing or website management. Furthermore, for him it seemed that this task was not necessarily a primary task and he would only edit copy when the need arose. The task of editing was therefore not only the task of the communication technician but also of the minority of senior communication practitioners.

4.4.2.3 Proofreading

Technicians spend the majority of their time writing and reading traditional word-based material, far more than managers do (see 2.6.3).

Only two participants had the responsibility of proofreading. In one instance it was only required occasionally, but in the other instance it was a daily task. The two participants operated at different levels within their universities – one at the strategic level; therefore, this was not only the task of the communication technician.

It is interesting to note that the participant who indicated that they proofread on a daily basis formed part of a larger department, which may indicate that larger communication departments do not necessarily spare communication managers from technical duties such as these. It would appear that personal expertise and experience play a role.

4.4.2.4 Design

Design duties also include the design of emails and brochures (see 2.6.3).

Only two participants indicated that they had design responsibilities. However, it would seem that this responsibility was related to managerial tasks and not only technical design tasks:

Designing new pages or redesigning the whole website, changing content, everything that goes with that. We're currently busy with the redesign of the web, so I will have project meetings with IT and then that will be the later part of my day.

...So I work through the design phase, lay-out and printing and distribution. I'm laying out, looking at where which article is gonna go or I'm doing the procurement aspect of it – so I'm getting quotations, who's gonna design and who's gonna print.

4.4.2.5 Video

They also take responsibility for photography, videography, key messages, and institutional messaging (see 3.3.2.1).

The two participants who referred to video production were not as much involved in production itself but rather the decisions pertaining to production. Therefore, producing videos was the responsibility of the communication technician, although communication managers played a very prominent role in making decisions about these videos.

4.4.2.6 Publications

These divisions in turn, have a range of responsibilities, which include formal engagement with the media and corporate, internal, and ad-hoc publications (1.1).

A total of six participants mentioned publications as part of their tasks. In four instances it seemed like their main responsibility was to oversee and approve either the final phase or different stages of the publication process. Only two participants were, however, actively involved in producing publications.

In one instance the participant was the head of publications and referred to herself as the editor, as mentioned earlier on (see 4.4.2.2). These publications included internal publications and ad-hoc publications. Her primary tasks involved requesting content from other colleagues within the department, working through the design phase of the publications that she managed, as well as layout, print, and the distribution of these publications.

Therefore, the task indicated a high level of accountability and authority, based on the decisions made and processes followed. This may explain why it was performed by senior practitioners and not communication technicians, as was expected. The other participant was responsible for writing as well as the planning and production processes related to these publications.

Even though internal technician expertise and media relations expertise are closely related, what separates the two is that all the work done concerning media relations expertise is focused on the media in some or other way.

4.4.3 Media relations expertise

From theoretical statement 3, (see 2.6.3.2) it was evident that the communication technician also takes responsibility for media relations expertise.

Media relations expertise is the third sub-concept, and the constructs were as follows: sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles and arranging media coverage.

Only three participants indicated that they were involved in media relations. Their tasks involved handling media enquiries and the distribution of relevant information to the media in the form of press or media releases, news, success stories based on their institution, and writing media/press releases. These responsibilities consisted of a greater level of accountability than was initially thought, as in the case of publications (see 4.4.2.6) and this may explain why communication managers performed this task and not technicians, as is evident from the following responses:

Not...only media enquiries, but also ensuring that...whatever news or success stories there...are to...make sure that all of those are distributed to the media as well.

Communicate any positive achievements by VUT staff and students and enhancing and improving of VUT image through a number of ways.

Okay, currently I am responsible for PR, which...in this instance refers to media management.

Based on the analysis of the communication technician, senior communication practitioners at different universities performed a variety of the technician tasks even though they did not operate at their level.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter aimed to answer the second specific research question (see 1.5.2) by discussing the results obtained from the semi-structured interviews with senior communication practitioners at universities across South Africa, namely:

What are the current views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles?

The results of the qualitative semi-structured interviews with the 12 senior communication practitioners (see Table 3-4) were reflected upon in accordance with the tasks and constructs of the roles of the strategist, manager, and technician as referred to in Table 3-2.

The strategist analysis indicated that all practitioners were in fact well-trained, as all of them held formal academic qualifications related to their field of work. However, for the minority of practitioners, a higher degree and extensive experience within the higher education sector and occupying a predominantly senior position(s) is what set them apart (see 4.2.1). These practitioners in particular also formed part of various governance decision-making structures, such as the practitioners from two of the universities, who also confirmed their membership to the dominant coalition of their university (see 4.2.4). These practitioners explained how their membership to the dominant coalition of their university enabled them to execute significant strategic duties within their roles, specifically their participation in management decision-making.

Only four practitioners expressed how they operated according to a symmetrical worldview (see 4.2.4) in varying degrees, which may further explain why only five practitioners performed the task of two-way communication (see 4.2.6) within their role.

There were far more practitioners that accounted for the task of environmental scanning (see 4.2.5), which also included stakeholder relationship management. However, practitioners revealed that their complete execution of the task of environmental scanning, particularly the stage of analysis and interpretation of strategic intelligence gathered, was absent. According to the answers the practitioners provided, a number of universities had not only outsourced this phase of the process but also the task itself to a certain degree, as this was the case with media monitoring, communication audits, and risk registers. This may explain why practitioners were not entirely knowledgeable of this task, as universities lack a structured approach in dealing with this process themselves. More importantly, practitioners that accounted for this task indicated that they actually relied on other practitioners within their department to gather this strategic intelligence.

The minority of these practitioners furthermore described how they took responsibility for the organisational communication strategy (see 4.2.7) and used terms such as the university vision and their stakeholder approach in doing so. Certain practitioners expressed their commitment to social responsibility and the practice of good governance within their role, based on their participatory approach towards their community and their participation in strategic decision-making (see 4.2.3 and 4.2.4).

In the communication manager analysis, the minority of practitioners that operated at the macro level of their universities revealed how they also took responsibility for certain tasks associated with the role of the communication manager (see 4.3). Practitioners exposed how they participated in communication decision-making based on the communication strategy and policy (see 4.3.3) and planned and managed communication programmes and the communication plan (see 4.3.3). These practitioners explained how their responsibilities included duties associated with the role of both the manager and strategist within their position, indicating the possible absence of a separate practitioner who only executed tasks associated with the role of the manager. A number of practitioners confirmed that they were not only regarded as stakeholder experts (see 4.3.1) in terms of their role but also as trusted advisors (see 4.3.2). During this analysis (see 4.3.2), most of the practitioners expressed that they functioned at the departmental/meso level of their universities.

In the analysis of the technician role (see 4.4), all 12 practitioners displayed their varying degrees of writing (see 4.4.1) and media expertise (see 4.4.3) which they had acquired based on both their previous and current positions occupied. However, the majority of practitioners disclosed that writing proved to be a fundamental skill and task which they executed in terms of their roles (see 4.4.1). It was evident that tasks related to internal technician expertise dominated the duties of the majority of practitioners within their positions of employment (see 4.4.2). Yet, the tasks

associated with media relations expertise are only performed by the minority of these practitioners and these practitioners possess a greater level of expertise within their role to perform this task (see 4.4.3).

Therefore, although senior practitioners aim to manage and more importantly strategise, executing strategic duties which some of them do according to their answers provided, most of the time their roles are defined by only a few strategic tasks. Furthermore, even though practitioners emphasised and explained how they performed some of these strategic duties, the most important stages of certain tasks – as in the case of environmental scanning – were not performed by themselves, which indicated that this may not be a core task for senior communication practitioners at universities in South Africa. For the majority of practitioners, the level at which they function and non-membership to university decision-making structures hinders them from performing certain significant strategic duties based on the role of the strategist. In the case of some of these practitioners, certain managerial as well as technician duties take prevalence over the strategic duties that practitioners should actually perform based on their position of employment, according to their views.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which the strategist is prevalent in senior communication manager roles at South African universities. In Chapter 1, the many challenges facing higher education in South Africa and corporate communication within the university setting were discussed (see 1.1). The problem statement explained that practitioners are classified according to different roles, as identified by Steyn (2000a; 2000b; 2009), based on the tasks they perform. Moreover, their tasks and so too their roles continue to evolve and, therefore, it is imperative that practitioners adjust accordingly. Given the unpredictable environment in which these practitioners are required to operate in South Africa (see 1.3), it was argued that communication practitioners in the University environment should have a strategic role.

The literature study conducted in Chapter 2 explained the importance of the role and tasks executed by the strategist in order for communication management to make a strategic contribution within the organisation.

In Chapter 3, the theoretical statements for each role led to the formulation of the concepts, sub-concepts and constructs according to which the semi-structured interviews were constructed.

The aim of this chapter is to answer the general research question: *To what extent is the communication strategist prevalent in senior communication practitioner roles at universities in South Africa (see 1.4)?* This question will be answered by answering each of the specific research questions.

5.2 The importance of the strategic role of communication management in attaining organisational goals

The first specific research question, namely: *What is the importance of the strategic role of communication management for the survival of universities in South Africa, according to literature? (see 1.5.1)* was answered in Chapter 2 by means of a literature study.

It was argued that practitioners assume different roles based on their positions of employment and level at which they operate and as such perform different tasks (see 2.4 and 2.6). These roles are identified by Steyn (2000a;2000b;2009) (see 2.6) as the strategist, manager, and technician. The point of departure was that the challenges that communication managers face requires of them to operate at strategic level and perform strategic duties such as environmental scanning or research, identify potential threats and current trends, and evaluate existing problems as well as

stakeholder issues which may affect organisational strategies and the achievement of organisational goals.

The practitioner occupying the strategic role allows the organisation and hence top management to reflect on norms and values in decision-making processes by providing counsel to management. This counsel focuses on how the organisation should go about deciding whether to adapt, alter or maintain their environment in order to achieve organisational goals. The strategic practitioner aids the organisation in reflecting on its own position, within the larger environment and correlates organisational goals, in accordance with the welfare of society. The strategic practitioner ensures the inclusion of stakeholder opinions necessary for the formulation of integrated processes like the enterprise strategy (see 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.2).

Furthermore, this strategic role assists the organisation in achieving organisational legitimacy, by advising top management about their strategic and non-legislative actions. This includes their analysis of legislative actions and the changing, values and trends in society advising management accordingly when their organisational values are in opposition to those of society. In this way, management is able to formulate socially acceptable goals which consider their strategic stakeholders and social concerns in order to achieve organisational goals (see 2.6.1.2).

However, technical-related duties, take precedence in terms of the practitioner's roles (see 2.6.2.1.1). Thus, practitioners are unable to further their strategic skills and expertise by performing these tasks required to actually operate at a strategic level at their institution (see 2.7). This proves to be extremely problematic, particularly in South Africa, considering the volatile environment in which these practitioners operate (see 1.1).

Three theoretical statements were developed from the theory in Chapter 2 to determine the characteristics of the practitioner that executes each role.

5.2.1 The descriptive characteristics and tasks of the strategist

It was evident from the literature study that the communication practitioner in the strategist role should be trained (see 2.2 and 2.6.1.4) in order to understand their function and in doing so execute certain strategic tasks. Secondly, it is essential that these practitioners operate from a symmetrical worldview and thereby practice two-way symmetrical communication to ensure that communication is seen as a strategic management function (see 2.2, 2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.3). The strategist engages in two-way communication with stakeholders to create new meaning and, based on the level at which they function, participates in management decision-making (see 2.6.1-2.6.1.1). Thus, the significance of the two-way symmetrical model is that it focuses on engaging with all stakeholders to ensure strong, long-term, mutually beneficial organisation-stakeholder

relationships based on mutual understanding, thus reinforcing trust and informing environmental scanning (2.6.1.1).

Environmental scanning (or research) was reported as one of the primary tasks of the communication practitioner in the role of the strategist (see 2.6.1-2.6.1.1 and 2.6.1.2) and should be one of the core tasks of marketing and communication departments at universities (see 1.1-0).

This task consists of the early discovery of emerging problems, evaluating existing problems and opportunities within the environment, and acknowledging current trends that may affect organisational strategies so that they may react accordingly, as well as identifying the organisation's strategic stakeholders and their issues (see 2.6.1.1 - 2.6.1.3). The stakeholders within the higher education sector are described in 1.1.

Furthermore, the task of environmental scanning consists of analysing strategic intelligence pertaining to stakeholders, their issues and needs, as well as reputational threats. The strategist expresses concern and sensitivity and offers guidance in achieving social responsibility and good governance – thus reinforcing stakeholder trust – and manages the organisation's communication strategy development process, thus making a strategic contribution that focuses mainly on the enterprise strategy. By expressing concern, sensitivity and guidance, the strategist achieves social responsibility and good governance within their organisation (see 2.6.1.1 - 2.6.1.3).

5.2.2 The descriptive characteristics and tasks of the manager

The practitioner assuming the role of the manager should function at the functional, departmental or meso level of the organisation. The manager is required to perform part of the window function by preparing and executing the corporate communication strategy and policy with the assistance of the strategist. This also involves the formulation of consistent messages that reflect all aspects of their organisation and communication that stakeholders should receive (see 2.6.2-2.6.2.2).

This practitioner should be regarded as a stakeholder expert and as such develop cohesive processes for attending to these strategic stakeholders. In serving both their department and organisation as a trusted advisor, the manager participates in communication decision-making (see 2.6.2.1-2.6.2.2). In addition, the manager conceptualises and develops communication programmes and the communication plan for their department and focuses on managing day-to-day managerial duties such as managing staff members and the budget (see 2.6.2.2).

However, the literature study (see 2.6.2.1.1) revealed that the majority of practitioners with the role of the manager execute more routine technician duties both at corporate and university level.

Within these communication departments of the universities, managers are preoccupied with these technical related duties, and they spend the majority of their time writing and editing different content directed at the media such as press releases and distributing these to the applicable media channels (see 2.6.2.1.1). The primary tasks of middle managers, such as directors of communication departments, involve preparing news articles and news clippings, which clearly concur with the tasks of a communication technician (see 2.6.2.1.1 and 2.6.3). There is a definite surge in these practitioner's workload, specifically in terms of web-based content, which is primarily the domain of the technician (see 2.6.3).

Moreover, practitioners in this role do not operate as members of the top management team within their organisations, although they do have a direct reporting line to the CEO (vice-chancellor at university level) (see 2.6.2.1.1) and most senior levels of management, which assists these practitioners in both decision-making and strengthening relationships. The exclusion of practitioners from top-level decision-making bodies, such as those discussed above, prevents communication managers from circulating management's decisions to various stakeholders of the university (see 2.6.2.1.1).

5.2.3 The descriptive characteristics and tasks of the technician

The communication practitioner in the technician role should be able to display a multitude of technical skills and expertise, specifically writing and media expertise, and function at the implementation or programme level (see 2.6.3, 2.6.3.1 and 2.6.3.2). At university level, communication technician tasks consist of internal technician expertise, which may require of them to perform duties such as writing, website management, editing, photography, proofreading, design, video, and publications. Technical practitioners should also have media relations expertise, which may include sharing information with the media in various forms such as press releases and feature articles or arranging for media coverage for an event (see 2.6.3, 2.6.3.1 and 2.6.3.2).

The technician expertise, as discussed above, relate to stakeholders and communicate with internal stakeholders in that practitioners may make use of emails, the university website and notice boards while externally they might use press releases, print media, billboards, television, radio, and website, which could include the use of social media (see 2.6.3).

Given the challenging HE environment, the dwindling South African economy, and technical-related duties which dominate the roles of practitioners, there is a definite need for practitioners to sharpen their strategic skills by gaining strategic exposure, as there is not enough emphasis placed on the strategic function within the departments housing these practitioners. This will

ultimately lead to more practitioners who are able to enact a strategic role and perform important strategic tasks within their position of employment such as environmental scanning or research.

The abovementioned theoretical statements informed the empirical part of the study where practitioners' perceptions of their roles were determined by means of semi-structured interviews.

5.3 The views of senior communication practitioners regarding their roles

The second specific research question will be answered in this section: *What are the current views held by senior communication practitioners at South African universities regarding their roles* (see 1.5.2)?

5.3.1 The strategist

Based on the first theoretical statement (see 2.6.1.4 and Table 3-2), the first requirement of the practitioner in the strategic role is that the strategist should be well trained in terms of formal qualifications and have extensive experience in the field (see 2.6.1.4). All 12 practitioners who participated in the study held formal academic qualifications that relate to their field of work (see 4.2.1). The most common qualification was a three-year bachelor of arts degree in communication, while some of the other practitioners also held postgraduate qualifications.

Three of the practitioners that possessed a higher degree had extensive experience within the higher education sector. They also belonged to various professional associations, which provided them with the necessary knowledge and skills to understand their function and perform their duties accordingly (see 4.2.1).

The second requirement is that the strategist should operate from a symmetrical worldview in order to contribute to the strategic function (see 2.6.1.4 and Table 3-2). The minority of the practitioners confirmed how they embodied the characteristics associated with a symmetrical worldview in varying degrees (see 4.2.2).

The most common characteristics that the practitioners mentioned, out of the seven characteristics, in this study included (see Table 3-2):

(a) interdependence – the practitioners reported that universities cannot exist as ivory towers; even though there are certain university rules and regulations which need to be respected, their external environment plays a crucial role both in terms of their functionality and survival as an institution of higher learning and therefore the needs of their stakeholders are a necessity that must to be accommodated accordingly.

(b) responsibility - practitioners reported that they exhibited responsible and ethical conduct during adverse times together with their commitment to advising management about the most appropriate communication methods to truly understand the needs and concerns of their stakeholders.

(c) autonomy – practitioners explained their need to further their own skills and abilities to execute their tasks more effectively and empower stakeholders through information and knowledge, particularly students, by means of the tasks they perform like internal and external communication programmes (see 2.6.1.4 and Table 3-2).

The third requirement is that the strategic communication practitioner should function at top management level and participate in management decision-making as part of fulfilling their strategic role (see Table 3-2). In 4.2.4, only three practitioners revealed that they functioned at the macro level of their university governance structures, such as Senate and Council, in an advisory capacity based upon strategic issues their universities faced. Their advisory duty performed was communication and image building of their institution. The analysis in this section clearly distinguished those that do operate at strategic level from those who do not and the opportunities presented to these practitioners to extend the significance of the communication function at their universities.

The most common tasks that the strategist is expected to perform include environmental scanning (which is one of the strategist's most crucial tasks), which involved building stakeholder relationships in order to attain organisational goals (see Table 3-2). Although a number of practitioners identified environmental scanning as one of their tasks, they revealed that numerous communication departments had outsourced the task (see 4.2.5). Moreover, during times of crisis like the feesmustfall campaign, the participants mentioned that senior practitioners identified other individuals in their own department to gather strategic intelligence and did not execute the task themselves. Emergency crisis management teams that were established which certain participants formed part of were only manifested in the wake of the events that led to the feesmustfall campaign that transpired. These findings indicated that universities have not necessarily adopted a systematic approach to this process and that universities rely on external companies to complete the most significant stage of interpreting and analysing strategic intelligence, which strategists should actually perform.

In terms of stakeholder relationship management (see 4.2.5 and Table 3-2), which formed part of the of environmental scanning (and which is a task of the strategist), the practitioners expressed that the identification of internal and external stakeholders (stakeholder mapping) was executed by those that operated at strategic level as well as those who did not (see Table 3-2). This result

concurred with previous research in that stakeholder identification was the responsibility of both the strategist and the communication manager. However, those practitioners that operated at strategic level (see 4.2.4) described their personal responsibility in satisfying stakeholder needs and addressing concerns and the subsequent processes as being far more comprehensive in order to prioritise these stakeholders (see 4.2.4). The prioritisation of stakeholders (see Table 3-2) involved practitioner's reconsideration of their universities' relationship with these stakeholders and shifting them from secondary to primary stakeholders as determined by the challenges and implications that the external environment presented for stakeholders. Together with prioritising stakeholders, one practitioner explained how the communication that took place with these stakeholders was also reviewed and as such became more frequent and personal. One practitioner illustrated the difference between crisis management and key stakeholder management during the time of the protest action which occurred in 2015/2016.

The strategist is expected to practise two-way communication as part of the task of environmental scanning (see Table 3-2). This task was only performed by a limited number of them (see 4.2.6). However, all these practitioners maintained that one-on-one engagement with stakeholders of their university, still remained the most paramount method of communication. Practitioners explained that this engagement proved to be of particular significance when universities faced either major challenges, as in the case of more frequent, personal communication required with parents during the unrest in 2015/16 or changes that universities were experiencing such as rebranding, renaming or restructuring processes. Practitioners' engagement with stakeholders promoted understanding between themselves (the university) and fortified mutually beneficial relationships based on the deliberate and transparent communication processes they introduced.

The strategist is furthermore expected to achieve social responsibility and good governance within the organisation (see 4.2.3), which form part of the tasks of environmental scanning and two-way communication (see Table 3-2). The practitioners demonstrated their concern and respect in considering stakeholder interests/values, being socially responsible practitioners, and ensuring the same for their university to sustain their long-term relationship with their stakeholders (see 4.2.3). Practitioners did so by promoting collaboration between the university and its stakeholders in dealing with stakeholder concerns. Furthermore, practitioners also explained their involvement in their communities and the development of their communities. They considered the needs of internal and external stakeholders together with the objectives of their universities based on the communication programmes they undertook. One practitioner explained that she ensured equal participation in terms of the community engagement committees that existed, allowing community members to participate where potential decisions were made and enabling local community members to play their part. In terms of practitioner's adherence to transparency and

accountability in strategic decision-making, three of the practitioners explained how they formed part of structures in which these decisions were made and will be discussed next.

The next task that was brought forward is that the strategist should manage the organisation's communication strategy (see Table 3-2) in order to make a strategic contribution, with a main focus on the enterprise strategy. Practitioners revealed their execution of this task by making use of other terms and not the enterprise strategy which concurred with previous findings (see 4.2.7). Practitioners referred to this responsibility as the vision of their institution, organisational listening within the organisational context, and the formulation of integrated processes which contribute to the enterprise strategy. These processes included the communication strategy (see 4.3.4 and 5.3.2) as well communication programmes and plans (see 4.3.3 and 5.3.2). Practitioners who confirmed that they functioned at strategic level ensured the inclusion of stakeholders in the decisions made at the highest level within their university governance structures of which they formed part (see 4.2.4). Even though the other practitioners did not operate at strategic level (see 5.3.2), they demonstrated their contribution to this strategy by for example two-way symmetrical communication (see 4.2.6), their stakeholder approach (see 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 5.3.2), and community involvement and development (see 4.2.3).

Based on the analysis and conclusion of the strategist role, only three practitioners embodied the true meaning of the role of the strategist within their current job titles. The two most significant factors that contributed to this included the fact that practitioners functioned at the macro level and as such participated in university management decision-making.

As explained in 5.2, the communication manager works side by side with the strategist and has various tasks to execute in terms of their role. The communication manager will be discussed next.

5.3.2 The manager

Based on theoretical statement 2 (see 2.6.2.2 and Table 3-2), the communication practitioner in the manager role is required to be a stakeholder expert and focus on developing cohesive processes for dealing with stakeholders. They are also required to act and serve their department and organisation as a trusted advisor at the department/meso level of their organisation. A number of tasks which the practitioner in the manager role is responsible for (see Table 3-2) will also be discussed in this section (see Table 3-2).

It was argued that the practitioner in the communication manager role is required to function at the departmental/meso level which as the analysis revealed (see 4.3.2) the majority of practitioners did. Based on the analysis (see 4.3.1), six practitioners adhered to the requirement

of being a stakeholder expert (see Table 3-2). The characteristics that classified these practitioners as stakeholder experts were as follows:

- (a) their comprehensive years of experience gained in dealing with different stakeholder groups based on their previous and current positions of employment;
- (b) their knowledge of these different stakeholder groups, specifically within the higher education sector; and
- (c) the cohesive processes these practitioners developed to deal with different stakeholder groups, based on the communication they received, to manage their concerns which related to current and general circumstances.

Practitioners revealed their responsibility regarding media relations – even though it did not form part of the stakeholder expert role, it definitely formed part of the duty as practitioners represented their university externally. The remaining practitioners were not regarded as stakeholder experts. Although, they explained how they did contribute to the cohesive processes in dealing with these stakeholders. Their expertise, key duties executed and authoritative power within their position focused mainly on internal stakeholders at their universities. Therefore, this requirement may be expanded in order to accommodate such practitioners within the university setting.

As in the case of the above discussion, six practitioners were also in accordance with the requirement of a trusted advisor (see 4.3.2) at their universities in that executive management depended on them during times of crises to advise them accordingly. Practitioners described the advisory committees of which they formed part, specifically following the feesmustfall campaign. Practitioners specified a definite divide between those that only fulfilled an advisory role during times of crisis and those that did so and participated in decision-making within university governance structures (see 5.3.1). In other words, these duties were entirely separate from one another. These practitioners elucidated that their years of experience within the sector and at each of their respective universities within their current position contributed greatly and as such defined their advisory roles. Practitioners succeeded in establishing the necessary respect and trust from executive members, who also formed part of the dominant coalition of their university, and they were therefore highly esteemed. They did not aim to lead as a result of their power but rather as a result of their influence – this strengthened the communication management function within their department and so too their university. In terms of the other six practitioners, although their years of experience may have been in accordance with acting and serving their departments as trusted advisors, they did not acknowledge their responsibility in guiding and advising top

management during crises and stakeholder concerns. Therefore, they were not viewed as trusted advisors.

The communication manager tasks include developing the communication strategy and policy, participating in communication decision-making plans, and managing communication programmes and the communication plan for their department, formulating key messages, managing, as well as day-to-day managerial related duties (see 5.2.2 and Table 3-2).

Practitioners confirmed that the communication strategy task clearly took precedence over the communication policy (see 4.3.3). Five practitioners regarded this task as their primary responsibility, and this was based on their university's annual strategy. One practitioner explained how he took responsibility for both. The communication policy and/or plans or frameworks that formed part of the communication policy, such as social media and crisis communication, were only the priority of two practitioners. This may be explained by the challenges practitioners face in acquiring approval for these policies and ensuring they are updated regularly. Certain practitioners confirmed that they assumed the duties of the communication manager even though they functioned at and assumed a strategic position within their university. All of these practitioners (see 4.3.3) participated in communication decision-making and did not only make decisions based on the operative requirements within their department in terms of the staff members they managed. As for the rest of the practitioners, their decisions were not based on the communication strategy or policy but rather on the effective functioning of their team which they managed on a daily basis.

In terms of the analysis (see 4.3.4) practitioners established how planning and managing communication programmes were clearly based on practitioner expertise, which certain practitioners regarded as part of their mandate, even though the task was performed by only three practitioners. On-going communication programmes such as publications and corporate identity did form part of the communication plan, and this may indicate why practitioners did not necessarily mention the communication plan although they did execute this task. Practitioners differentiated their level of responsibility based on the communication plan in that certain practitioners were not only responsible for their departments' communication plans but also the alignment of the other faculties' communication plans with their departmental communication plan. The practitioner assumed a dual role, as mentioned above, and performed both strategic duties and the primary tasks associated with the role of the communication manager, communication programmes, and the communication plan. This may therefore indicate that at certain South African universities where the strategist role is prevalent, there are not separate practitioners performing these duties; rather, the strategist accounts for the tasks of both roles.

In the formulation of key messages analysis (see 4.3.5), practitioners revealed that this was a common task amongst the majority of practitioners. Since this task forms part of the communication strategy and policy, it is necessary to consider that just because practitioners failed to mention the communication policy, this policy may still have been represented by practitioners in their formulation and implementation of clear and consistent messages (see 4.3.5). Moreover, this task may bear ties with the stakeholder expert in terms of the cohesive processes followed in dealing with communication that is based on different stakeholder groups (see 4.3.1). Together with this, practitioners took ownership for the development of key narratives, and for their university, storytelling as such was emphasised as making their university stand out above the rest. In terms of the analysis, practitioners executed this task for a number of years and spoke from experience as they highlighted the areas of importance in terms of this task. Practitioners that did not perform this task neither participated in the formulation processes of these messages nor did they approve these messages.

In terms of manager related duties (see 4.3.6), only half of the practitioners accounted for this task, the majority of which were of an administrative nature. These duties which practitioners stressed consumed the majority of practitioners' time and related to them managing people which comprised: the approval of leave and training opportunities; managing each employee's performance agreement; and being present during staff member disciplinary hearings to mediate and organise employees within their department by delegating work to different staff members. In most cases, these duties were routine; however, there were incidences where ad-hoc tasks also needed to be performed. Certain practitioners explained how they managed staff members across different campuses of their institution and different units ranging in size from 13 to 30 practitioners (see 3.3.2.1). Their responsibility regarding the budget was influenced by their level of seniority within their department and university structure and in certain instances the budget focused not only on the budget spend for one unit but on all the units which exist within the department which practitioners operating at strategic level confirmed.

During the analysis of this task (see 4.3.6), practitioners further confirmed how the majority of them performed other routine technical duties and took responsibility for the management and approval of the technical work completed by others within their department. Therefore, the task of managing people and the technical related duties these practitioners performed did not provide much room for strategic tasks and its execution.

Consequently, based on the analysis and conclusion of the communication manager role, the remaining nine practitioners together with two of the practitioners discussed in the previous section (see 5.3.1) perform a range of tasks associated with the role of the communication manager.

This leads to the conclusion of the communication technician, based on the discussion of the analysis in 4.4.

5.3.3 The technician

Based on theoretical statement 3 (see 2.6.3.2 and Table 3-2), the practitioner in the communication technician role should be able to display a multitude of technical skills and expertise, including, in particular, writing and media expertise and function at the implementation/programme level of the organisation. The tasks of the technician include: internal technician expertise such as writing, website management, editing, proofreading, design, video, publications; and media relations expertise, which may include sharing information with the media in various forms such as writing press releases and feature articles or arranging for media to cover an event (see 5.2.3).

Practitioners confirmed that their writing expertise (see 4.4.1) was far more common than media expertise. This suggested that writing proficiency was a common denominator amongst senior practitioners housed in these departments at universities in South Africa and consumed the majority of their time. Certain practitioners engaged in this task on a daily or at least weekly basis (see 4.4.1) and therefore it was a frequent responsibility for some. Practitioners who did, referred to how they either wrote primarily for their university's website, articles based on the publications they produced and managed, articles for a range of departments at their university, media/press releases, proposals, and opinion pieces.

This indicated a high prevalence of technical duties that continued to dominate the responsibilities of senior practitioners functioning at university level. The analysis already indicated that universities outsourced their research needs (see 4.2.5) and employed fewer senior practitioners. Thus, universities may have employed fewer communication technicians and expect managers to also perform duties such as these or that technicians who are supposed to write, do not have sufficient writing experience to cater to their university's range of internal and external stakeholders.

Furthermore, these practitioners affirmed that none of them carried out their role at the implementation, programme, or micro level of their university (see 4.2.4 and 4.3.2). Correspondingly, they also did not distribute the information produced but contributed to the formulation of the information directed at different stakeholder groups of their university (see 5.3.2). Technical skills were therefore not only a task of the technician but managers and to a far lesser extent the strategist.

Internal technician expertise is said to be the domain of the communication technician; however, practitioners (see 4.4.2) specified that most of them were responsible for one or more of the tasks associated with internal technician expertise. Writing was the most common and the tasks related to internal technician expertise were very much interrelated.

In terms of website management (see 4.4.2.1), three practitioners described how they performed this task either directly or indirectly. Indirectly, practitioners made decisions about relevant content for their university website in the form of articles and images, while directly, practitioners managed the landing (home) page of their university website or the university website in its entirety in terms of content and design (see 4.4.2.4). This may be explained by the fact that these departments were short-staffed or lacked the skills required in order to execute this task (see 4.4.2.1).

As in the case of website management, practitioners who took responsibility for video (see 4.4.2.5) indicated that they were not personally responsible for producing these videos but rather made decisions based on the video material produced by others within their department. These decisions were based on specific video content published on the university website, for example announcements, important messages from the vice-chancellor, and faculty videos. Those decisions that needed to be made could be ascribed to practitioners' years of experience in dealing with internal and external university stakeholder groups, their preferred communication channel, and the intended message. This also related to two of the tasks of the communication manager (see 5.3.2).

Only two practitioners explained how they produced publications while being employed as deputy-directors at their universities (see 4.4.2.6). One of these practitioners was the editor of the publications she produced and, as the practitioner, she revealed that editing was one of her primary responsibilities (see 4.4.2.2). These practitioners managed the entire planning and production process of these publications and according to their descriptions were not only responsible for one duty, but a range of duties related to internal technician expertise, like writing, editing, and design (see 4.4.1, 4.4.2.2 and 4.4.2.4). Publications therefore have a far greater level of responsibility, based on the accountability and authority associated with the decisions that practitioners accounted for.

Furthermore, one practitioner revealed that proofreading (see 4.4.2.3) was the only task performed by a practitioner that operated at the macro level of her university. However, the practitioner explained that this task was only performed occasionally and was therefore not a daily duty. This indicated that depending on the demands within the department, practitioners were, at times, required to perform technical-related duties such as these. Conversely, another practitioner employed within a much larger communication department regarded proofreading as one of her

primary daily duties. Therefore, larger communication departments did not necessarily relieve practitioners of this duty and departmental demands assisted in defining the duties of practitioners at certain times.

Based on the analysis of internal technician expertise, it was evident that many of these tasks were not only the duty of the technician but also the manager and, in one particular case, the strategist. Although, in the majority of cases, practitioners did not take direct responsibility for these tasks but made decisions based on these tasks executed by others, except in the case of publications, website management and design.

As indicated in 5.2.3, technicians also take responsibility for media relations expertise, which may include sharing information with the media in various forms such as press releases and feature articles or media coverage.

In terms of the analysis (see 4.4.3), three practitioners acknowledged that they performed media relations expertise. Practitioners that handled media enquiries likewise took responsibility for media releases which they sometimes wrote themselves or delegated to other employees within their department like the media liaison. Furthermore, practitioners shared relevant information about their university with the media such as news, success stories, and positive achievements by their staff members and students. One practitioner explained how she was responsible for setting up the media and making sure she obtained sessions with the media in terms of different events. This may be explained by the fact that other departments employed journalists or other practitioners who took charge of this duty, which was not the case for this practitioner.

Practitioners indicated that internal technician expertise and media relations expertise are related to a certain extent, apparent in terms of writing. However, according to practitioners, there were far fewer practitioners that took responsibility for the tasks related to media relations expertise and those that did had previous experience in dealing with the media and continued to build on this experience by executing these duties according to their current position of employment.

According to the views of practitioners' regarding their roles (see 5.3.1 to 5.3.3), even though the minority of them demonstrated how they performed strategic duties associated with the role of the strategist, these tasks were not prioritised according to their role nor were they executed in their entirety. Rather, the tasks associated with the role of the manager evidently took precedence, as these tasks were regarded as primary tasks which, according to certain practitioners, formed part of their mandate. Practitioners revealed that only the minority of them functioned at strategic level, which enabled them to participate in management decision-making, which is a primary task of the strategist.

As evident in the analysis, the majority of senior practitioners functioned at the departmental/meso level of their universities which hindered their ability to perform certain strategic duties such as the aforementioned task. According to practitioners, their roles were defined by managerial tasks such as the communication strategy and managerial related duties, as well as technician related duties such as writing, which they executed far more frequently as opposed to strategic duties. Although practitioners were of the opinion that they performed the defining task of the strategist, that is, environmental scanning, practitioners did not perform critical stages of the task themselves, and their views indicated that this task was actually outsourced to a very large degree. Therefore, although practitioners were of the belief that the term strategist best defined their role, their execution of these tasks and specific requirements needed to enact this role were absent.

5.4 The prevalence of the communication strategist in senior communication practitioner roles

This section will focus on answering the general research question which was (see 0):

To what extent is the communication strategist prevalent in senior communication practitioner roles at universities in South Africa?

The higher education sector of South Africa has become highly unstable in recent years and senior communication practitioners employed at universities across the country face this reality on a daily basis. The volatile environment in which these practitioners operate has a direct influence on their functional activities (tasks) and so too the role which they enact based on their position of employment within their department and university. It is, therefore, necessary for practitioners to evolve within their role and gain experience by performing the strategic tasks associated with the role of the strategist. Yet, for practitioners at university level, writing – which relates to technical skills – and internal technician expertise dominate their role as it consumed the majority of their time (see 2.6.2.1.1 and 2.6.3). This has a direct effect on practitioners' ability to prevail within this unstable environment, as this task in particular is not of a strategic nature (see 1.3).

Previous research indicated that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the roles and that certain tasks overlap (see 2.6). Against this background, it was argued that the majority of the tasks of a senior communication manager should pertain to the strategist. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to determine to what extent the strategist role was prevalent amongst senior communication managers.

Within the role of the strategist, even though practitioners should function according to a symmetrical worldview, only the minority of the practitioners in this study did adhere to these characteristics to varying degrees when considering society and their university in all the decisions they make (see 5.2.1 and 5.3.1). Likewise, the minority of practitioners practise two-way communication with their stakeholders, based on the engagement opportunities created, which are crucial in order to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships (see 5.2.1 and 5.3.1). The concern that practitioners express regarding the need for communication between different universities and amongst diverse departments at the same universities signified that that two-way asymmetrical models may still be practiced at certain universities in South Africa. This has a direct effect not only on the tasks performed by practitioners but also the opportunity for them to gain strategic exposure at their universities.

Although practitioners were educated and had obtained a minimum of two to three tertiary academic qualifications related to their field of work, which assisted them in performing the task of environmental scanning or research, practitioners did not necessarily perform the task of environmental scanning themselves, particularly the stages of gathering strategic intelligence and interpreting and analysing this information (see 5.2.1 and 5.3.1). The current state of the South African economy has definitely had an effect on these tertiary institutions, as research requirements are being outsourced to a very large degree. This is evident in the interpretation and analysis phase of the environmental scanning process, such as risk registers, which is a critical phase of the environmental scanning process that the strategist should actually complete. Other important techniques used to conduct the process are revealed with media monitoring and internal communication audits.

Only three practitioners functioned at the macro level of their universities and therefore formed part of university governance structures, such as Council. The level at which practitioners functioned was critical, as it enabled them to perform other strategic tasks like participation in management decision-making, which only the minority seem to be able to do (see 5.2.1 and 5.3.1). Therefore, in the majority of cases, practitioners are still excluded from the dominant coalition of their university in terms of decision-making (see 5.3.1) and do not function at the top-management/macro level of their university as required (see 5.2.1 and 5.3.2).

The three practitioners that did function at the macro level of their university had clearly furthered their formal academic qualifications by completing a higher degree, a master's degree in particular. Moreover, their work experience attained within the higher education sector was far more extensive than any of the other practitioners, and this experience was based primarily on their senior management positions that they currently occupied or had occupied in the past (see

5.3.1). These practitioners also had a direct line of report to the vice-chancellor of their university which in certain cases related to their reporting line (see 5.2.2 and 5.3.1).

The majority of the senior practitioners that functioned at the departmental/meso level of their university (see 5.2.2 and 5.3.1) did not only require more experience within the higher education sector but needed to gain this experience within a senior management position. Furthermore, they needed to expand their theoretical knowledge by completing a degree that would elevate their educational background within the field of communication, specifically strategic communication.

The large number of practitioners that belong to MACE, an organisation which represents practitioners within the higher education sector, is highly regarded and relevant, as organisations such as these assist practitioners in gaining the skills and knowledge needed to understand their function (5.3.1). Practitioners functioning at strategic level within their universities can collaborate with organisations like MACE to coach and mentor practitioners within the field, based on their strategic experience.

In addition to the strategic tasks the practitioners performed, they also executed tasks associated with the communication manager role (see 5.2.2). Those that operate at strategic level within their universities and those who did not were regarded as stakeholder experts and trusted advisors (see 5.3.2). The three practitioners that belonged to the dominant coalition of their university served within these governance structures in an advisory capacity (see 5.3.1).

Moreover, within these departments these practitioners also participated in communication decision-making in terms of the communication strategy and to a lesser extent the communication policy as well as communication programmes and the communication plan. They engaged in managerial-related duties, both regarding managing staff and the budget (see 5.3.2). This indicated that in certain instances, the role of practitioners at universities is twofold since they performed both managerial and strategic tasks (see 5.3.2). This result may further explain why practitioners failed to execute more strategic tasks and gain the necessary exposure, as they are responsible for the tasks of both roles (see 5.3.1 and 5.3.2).

In contrast, the majority of practitioners that functioned at the departmental/meso level at their universities have (see 5.2.2) and still continue to perform numerous technical-related duties (see 5.3.3) that are actually the responsibility of the technician (see 5.2.3). These technical duties – writing being the most prominent – relate to other technician tasks such as website management, publications, and media relations (see 5.3.3).

Despite the fact that the practitioners, based on their role and level at which they function, did not adhere to all the criteria for the strategist, they still performed a range of strategic tasks associated with the role of the strategist (see 5.3.1). Therefore, it seems that practitioners are still gaining some strategic experience. However, if universities continue to outsource the defining task of the strategist, namely environmental scanning, practitioners will need to empower themselves in accordance with the strategic expectations of their positions.

Whether universities operate according to a more favourable two-way symmetrical model or mixed-motive model has a direct impact on the strategic proficiency that practitioners acquire in terms of the predominant tasks they execute and level at which they function. The organisations that represent these practitioners, such as MACE, need to assist them in acquiring and enhancing their strategic skills set and include the participation of strategic practitioners in order to do so. Ultimately, practitioners need to rely on their personal integrity as far as possible to operate in accordance with the tasks and values of the reflective strategist (which forms part of the strategist role), as summarised in the Melbourne Mandate (see 2.6.1.3), by way of their values and ethical compass has been established through their education and years of experience acquired in practice employed in senior management positions.

5.5 Future opportunities for research

Only 12 senior communication practitioners, from nine of the 23 public universities in South Africa took part in the study and therefore, results could not be generalised to all universities in South Africa. However, the study's aim was not to generalise the results but rather understand the extent of a specific role at South African universities.

The sample for this study only focused on public universities and did not include private universities. In future, a comparative study between private and public universities may provide a comprehensive picture of how higher education institutions manage their communication.

Furthermore, given the sensitive nature of this study, a number of practitioners were reluctant to participate in this study and eventually decided to not participate.

In conclusion: Practitioners that performed the tasks of the strategist were prevalent in senior communication manager roles at universities in South Africa. However, only the minority of practitioners embodied the true meaning of this role in terms of their position of employment and the level at which they operated which enabled them to perform critical strategic duties associated with this role.

LIST OF REFERENCES

- Africa Check. 2016. *Factsheet: funding and the changing face of South Africa's public universities*. <https://africacheck.org/factsheets/factsheet-funding-changing-face-sas-public-universities/> Date of access: 25 February 2020.
- Aldrich, H. & Herker, D. 1977. Boundary spanning roles and organisational structure. *The Academy of Management Review*, 2(2):217-230.
- Alkhouli, M. 2012. *Public relations practice in Palestinian universities, 1994-2012*. England: University of Exeter. (Thesis – PhD).
- Amulya, J. 2011. *What is reflective practice?* <http://www.communityscience.com/images/file/What%20is%20Reflective%20Practice.pdf> Date of access: 4 May 2016.
- Aspers, P. & Corte, U. What is qualitative in qualitative research. *Qualitative sociology*, 42:139-160.
- Avram, E.M. 2015. Internal and external communication in higher education institutions. *SEA – Practical Application of Science*, 3(2):273-282.
- Bankston, J. 2015. *Why you might need an MBA for your PR job*. <https://www.topmba.com/mba-programs/why-you-might-need-mba-your-pr-job> Date of access: 22 March 2019.
- Benecke, D.R., Simpson, Z., Le Roux, S., Skinner, C.J., Janse van Rensburg, N., Sibeko, J., Bvuma, S. & Meyer, J. 2017. Cultural intermediaries and the circuit of culture: the Digital Ambassadors project in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Public relations review*, 43(1):26-34.
- Benneworth, P. & Jongbloed, B.W. 2009. Who matters to universities? A stakeholder perspective on humanities, arts and social sciences valorisation. *Higher Education*, 59(1):567-588.
- Berger, A.A. 2014. *Media and communication research methods: an introduction to qualitative and quantitative approaches*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Bhardwaj, S.S. & Kumar, D. 2014. Environmental scanning by FMCG companies in India: a comparative study. *International Journal of Management and International Business Studies*, 4(1):39-50.

- Bloomberg, L.D. & Volpe, M. 2016. *Completing your qualitative dissertation: a road map from beginning to end*. 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Braun, V. & Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2):77-101.
- Brønn, P.S. 2001. Communication managers as strategists? Can they make the grade? *Journal of Communication Management*, 5(4):313-326.
- Brønn, P.S. 2014. How others see us: leaders' perceptions of communication and communication managers. *Journal of Communication Management*, 18(1):58-79.
- Broom, G.M. & Smith, G.D. 1979. Testing the practitioner's impact on clients. *Public Relations Review*, 5(3):47-59.
- Broom, G.M. 1982. A comparison of sex roles in public relations. *Public Relations Review*, 8: 17-22.
- Brown, S. 2014. You can't always get what you want: change management in higher education. *Campus-Wide Information Systems*, 31(4):208-216.
- Burger, C. 1983. How management view public relations. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 27(4):27-30.
- Burger, M. 2016. *Corporate communication strategy: aligning theory and practice amongst selected public relations practitioners in South Africa*. Cape Peninsula University of Technology. (Dissertation – M Tech).
- Careaga, A. 2011. Telling our story. In: Cohen, G., ed. *The future of public relations in higher education*. <http://meetcontent.com/blog/the-future-of-public-relations-in-higher-ed/> Date of access: 12 Dec. 2016.
- Cloete, J. 2020. SA universities are failing to meet the challenges of teaching during the Covid-19 lockdown. *Daily Maverick*. Retrieved from: <https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/opinionista/2020-04-09-sa-universities-are-failing-to-meet-the-challenges-of-teaching-during-the-covid-19-lockdown/> Date of access: 10 May 2020.
- Cornelissen, J. 2004. *Corporate communications: theory and practice*. London: Sage.
- De Beer, E., Steyn, B. & Rensburg, R. 2013. The Pretoria school of thought: from strategy to governance and sustainability. In: Sriramesh, K., Zerfass, A., & Kim, J.N., eds. *Public relations*

and communication management: current trends and emerging topics. New York: Routledge. pp. 303-323.

Department of Higher Education and Training. 2018. *Statistics on Post-School Education and Training in South Africa: 2016*.

https://www.dhet.gov.za/Research%20Coordination%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation/6_D_HET%20Stats%20Report_04%20April%202018.pdf Date of access: 19 Sept. 2020.

Didisse, J., Nguyen-Huu, T.T. & Tran, T.A. 2019. The long walk to knowledge: on the determinants of higher education mobility to Europe. *The Journal of Development Studies*, 55(6): 1099-1120.

Diga, M. & Kelleher, T. 2009. Social media use, perceptions of decision-making power, and public relations roles. *Public Relations Review*, 35:440-442.

Dlamini, M.A. 2016. *Public relations models and corporate social responsibility in the mining sector in Richards bay, South Africa*. South Africa: Cape Peninsula University of Technology. (Dissertation – MA).

Dlamini, S. 2020. *SAB joins growing list of companies planning to retrench, putting 500 jobs on the line*. <https://www.iol.co.za/business-report/companies/sab-joins-growing-list-of-companies-planning-to-retrench-putting-500-jobs-on-the-line-42611134> Date of access: 23 May 2020.

Dorny, P. & Adiku, E. A. 2015. Public relations practice in Ghanaian tertiary institutions: a study of Islamic university college and valley view university. *International Journal of ICT and Management*, 3(2):35-40.

Dozier D.M., Grunig, J.E. & Grunig L.A. 1995. *Manager's guide to excellence in public relations and communication management*. Lawrence Erlbaum: Mahwah, New Jersey.

Dozier, D.M. & Broom, G.M. 1995. Evolution of the manager role in public relations practice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 7(1):3-26.

Dozier, D.M. 1983. *Toward a reconciliation of "role conflict" in public relations research*. Paper delivered at the Western Communication Educators Conference, Fullerton, CA, November.

Dozier, D.M. 1984. Program evaluation and roles of public relations practitioners. *Public Relations Review*, 10(2):13-21.

Dozier, D.M. 1986. *The environmental scanning function of public relations practitioners and participation in management decision making*. Paper delivered at the meeting of the Public

Relations Division, Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication. Norman.
<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED274978.pdf>

Dozier, D.M. 1992. The organizational roles of communications and public relations practitioners. In: Grunig, J.E., ed. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 327-355.

Dozier, D.M. 1992. The organizational roles of communications and public relations practitioners. In: Grunig, J.E., Dozier, D.M., Ehling, W.P., Grunig, L.A., Repper, F.C. & White, J., eds. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 327-355.

Du Plooy, G.M. 2009. *Communication research techniques, methods and applications*. 2nd ed. Lansdowne: Juta.

Dwyer, J. 2012. *Communication for business and the professions: strategies and skills*. 5th ed. Frenchs Forest, Australia: Pearson.

Eger, L., Egerova, D. & Kryston, M. 2019. Facebook and public relations in higher education: a case study of selected faculties from the Czech Republic and Slovakia. *Romanian Journal of Communication and Public Relations*, 21(1):7-30.

Ejoke, U.P., Enwereji, P.C. & Chukwuere, J.E. 2019. An analysis of the #FeesMustFall agenda and its implications for the survival of education in South Africa: the NWU Mafikeng campus Writing Centre experience. *Research in World Economy*, 10(3):65-77.

Elken, M., Stensaker, B. & Dedze, I. 2018. The painters behind the profile: the rise and functioning of communication departments in universities. *High Educ*, 76(1):1109-1122.

Flick, U. 2009. *An introduction to qualitative research*. 4th ed. London: Sage.

Flick, U. 2014. *An introduction to qualitative research*. 5th ed. London: Sage.

Franz-Balsen, A. & Heinrichs, H. 2007. Managing sustainability communication on campus: experiences from Lüneburg. *International journal of sustainability in higher education*, 8(4):431-445.

Gerson, K. & Horowitz, R. 2002. Observation and interviewing: options and choices in qualitative research. In: May, T., ed. *Qualitative research in action*. London: Sage. pp. 199-224.

Global Alliance. 2012. *The Melbourne mandate: a call to action for new areas of value in public relations and communication management*. Paper delivered at the World Public Relations Forum, Melbourne, Australia.

<https://melbournemandate.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/melbourne-mandate-text-consultation-draft-final.pdf> Date of access: 15 Aug. 2017.

Gravengaard, G., Eiberg, K. & Rendtorff, A.M. 2019. *The CEO and the future adviser*. <https://www.communication-director.com/issues/game-changer-communications-catalyst-organisational-success/ceo-and-future-adviser/> Date of access: 24 Oct. 2020.

Gregory, A. 2010. *Planning and managing public relations campaigns*. 3rd ed. London: Kogan Page.

Gregory, A. 2015. Practitioners-leaders' representation of roles: the Melbourne mandate. *Public relations review*, 41(1):598-606.

Grunig, J.E. & Grunig, L. 1992. Models of public relations and communication. In: Grunig, J.E., Dozier, D.M., Ehling, W.P., Grunig, L.A., Repper, F.C. & White, J., eds. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 285-325.

Grunig, J.E. & Hunt, T. 1984. *Managing public relations*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson Learning.

Grunig, J.E. & White, J. 1992. The effect of worldviews on public relations theory and practice. In: Grunig, J.E., Dozier, D.M., Ehling, W.P., Grunig, L.A., Repper, F.C. & White, J., eds. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 31-64.

Grunig, J.E. 1992. Communication, public relations, and effective organizations. In: Grunig, J.E., Dozier, D.M., Ehling, W.P., Grunig, L.A., Repper, F.C. & White, J., eds. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 1-30.

Grunig, J.E. 2006. Furnishing the edifice: ongoing research on public relations as a strategic management function. *Journal of public relations research*, 18(2):151-176.

Grunig, J.E. 2008. Two-way symmetrical public relations: past, present and future. In: Zerfass, A., Van Ruler, B. & Sriramesh, K., eds. *Public relations research: European and international perspectives and innovations*. Germany: Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden. pp. 11-30.

- Grunig, J.E. 2009. Paradigms of global public relations in an age of digitalisation. *Prism*, 6 (2):1-19.
- Grunig, J.E., Dozier, D.M., Ehling, W.P., Grunig, L.A., Repper, F.C. & White, J. 1992. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Grunig, J.E., Grunig, L.A. & Dozier, D.M. 2006. The excellence theory. In: Botan, C.H. & Hazleton, V., eds. *Public Relations Theory II*. New York: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 19-54.
- Grunig, L.A., Grunig, J.E. & Dozier, D.M. 2002. *Excellent public relations and effective organizations: a study of communication management in three countries*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Gullan, M. 2019. *What the future of PR looks like*. <https://www.business2community.com/public-relations/what-the-future-of-pr-looks-like-02237287> Date of access: 19 Mar. 2020.
- Gupta, S. 2011. Enhancing the role of corporate communications: a practice-based approach. *Corporate reputation review*, 14(2):114-132.
- Hammarberg, K., Kirkman, M. & De Lacey, S. 2016. Qualitative research methods: when to use them and how to judge them. *Human Reproduction*, 31(3):498-501.
- Harris, T.E. & Bryant, J. 1986. The corporate communication manager. *The journal of business communication*, 23(3):19.
- Higgins, S.K. 2017. *Exploring public relations excellence and integrated marketing communications at private, non-profit higher education institutions*. California: University of La Verne. (Dissertation – PhD).
- Hjelmgren, D. 2016. Creating a compelling brand meaning by orchestrating stories: The case of Scandinavia's largest department store. *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, 32(1):210-217.
- Hodis, G.M. 2017. Key roles played by PR/Communication departments: the perspective of senior communication practitioners from Aotearoa New Zealand. *Asia Pacific Public Relations Journal*, 18:73-84.
- Hogg, G. & Doolan, D. 1999. Playing the part: practitioner roles in public relations. *European journal of marketing*, 33(5/6):597-611.

Holmström, S. 1996. *An intersubjective and social systematic public relations paradigm*. Denmark: University of Roskilde. (Dissertation – MA).

Holmström, S. 1997. The inter-subjective and the social systemic public relations paradigms. *Journal of Communication Management*, 2(1):24-39.

Holmström, S. 2006. The co-evolution of society and organization: reflexivity, contingency and reflection. In: Holmström, S., ed. *Organizational legitimacy and the public sphere*. Roskilde, Denmark: Roskilde University. pp. 54-72.

Howitt, D. 2010. *Introduction to qualitative methods in psychology*. 2nd ed. England: Pearson.

Ihlen, Ø. 2012. Communicating with stakeholders. In: Idowu, S.O. ed. *Encyclopedia of corporate social responsibility*. Heidelberg, Germany: Springer. p. 393-398).

Jansen van Vuuren, P. 2002. *Environmental scanning: a South African corporate communication perspective with special emphasis on the tertiary sector*. Pretoria: UP. (Thesis – PhD).

[https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/27444/Complete.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/27444/Complete.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y)

[y](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/27444/Complete.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y)

Jansen van Vuuren, P. 2002. *Environmental scanning: a South African corporate communication perspective with special emphasis on the tertiary sector*. University of Pretoria. (Dissertation – PhD).

[https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/27444/Complete.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/27444/Complete.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y)

[y](https://repository.up.ac.za/bitstream/handle/2263/27444/Complete.pdf?sequence=8&isAllowed=y)

Johansson, B. & Larsson, L. 2015. The complexity of public relations work: PR managers in the public and private sector in Sweden. *Nordicom Review*, 36(1):125-139.

Jordan, S. 2010. Learning to be surprised: how to foster reflective practice in a high-reliability context. *Management learning*, 41(4):391-413.

Kamga, G.E.K. 2019. The #FeesMustFall protest: when the camp(u)s becomes the matrix of a state of emergency. *Acta Academia*, 51(1):88-108.

Kanihan, S.F., Hansen, K.A., Blair, S., Shore, M. & Myers, J. 2013. Communication managers in the dominant coalition: power attributes and communication practices. *Journal of Communication Management*, 17(2):140-156.

Katz, D. & Kahn, R.L. 1978. *The social psychology of organizations*. 2nd ed. New York: Wiley.

- Kelleher, T. 2001. Public relations roles and media choice. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 13(4):303-320.
- Kettunen, J. 2015. Stakeholder relationships in higher education. *Tertiary Education and Management*, 21(1):56-65.
- Kjaerbeck, S. & Holmström, S. 2007. *The reflective paradigm in theory and practice: an interdisciplinary approach*. Paper delivered at the conference, "Legitimacy in a changing world". Roskilde University/Lund University, Denmark, 27-30 Sep.
- Langa, M. 2017. *#Hashtag - An analysis of the #FeesMustFall Movement at South African universities*. <file:///C:/Users/NWUUser/Downloads/An-analysis-of-the-FeesMustFall-Movement-at-South-African-universities.pdf> Date of access: 26 Apr. 2018.
- Le Roux, T. & Naudé, A. 2011. A profile of South African public relations practitioners in top performing organisations. *Journal of Public Affairs*, 11(4):303-315.
- Le Roux, T. 2010. *The contribution of South African corporate communication practitioners to organisational performance*. Potchefstroom: NWU. (Thesis – PhD).
- Le Roux, T. 2014. The description of South African corporate communication practitioners that contribute to organisational performance. *Public Relations Review*, 40(1):193-215.
- Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. 2001. *Practical research: planning and design*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education International.
- Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. 2005. *Practical research: planning and design*. 8th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education International.
- Leedy, P.D. & Ormrod, J.E. 2016. *Practical research: planning and design*. 11th ed. Boston: Pearson.
- Lindlof, T.R. & Taylor, B.C. 2002. *Qualitative communication research methods*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lindlof, T.R. 1995. *Qualitative communication research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lukaszewski, J.E. 2012. *How to develop the mindset of a strategist: getting to the table earlier & with more personal power*. Paper delivered at the annual meeting of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Buffalo, Niagara, 29 Nov.

Luo, Yi. 2005. *Public relations function in a higher education setting: An examination of communication management in two Eastern U. S. Universities*. (Published Thesis).

Mack, N., Woodsong, C., MacQueen, K.M., Guest, G. & Namey, E. 2005. *Qualitative research methods: a data collector's field guide*. North Carolina, USA: Family Health International.
<https://www.urbanreproductivehealth.org/sites/mle/files/datacollectorguideenrh.pdf> Date of access: 1 Jun. 2016.

Mahlakoana, T. 2018. Productivity SA may be forced to retrench staff. *Business Day*, 20 March.
<https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/business-and-economy/2018-03-20-productivity-sa-may-be-forced-to-retrench-staff/> Date of access: 18 Oct. 2018.

Manev, I.M. & Stevenson, W.B. 2001. Balancing ties: boundary spanning and influence in the organization's extended network of communication. *Journal of Business Communication*, 38(2):183-205.

Marques, J.F. 2010. Enhancing the quality of organizational communication: a presentation of reflection-based criteria. *Journal of communication management*, 14(1):47-58.

McCleneghan, J. S. 2006. University PR managers: 'marketing' the product with less resources. *Public Relations Quarterly*, 51(2): 40-45.

Meintjies, H. 2011. The perceived and potential role of a public relations/corporate communication practitioner in central Banks of the common monetary area. Cape Town: CPUT. (Dissertation – MA).

Moodley, S. 2015. *Retrenchment crisis already affecting 45 000 jobs in S Africa – union*.
http://www.engineeringnews.co.za/article/retrenchment-crisis-already-affecting-45-000-jobs-in-s-africa-union-2015-08-18/rep_id:4136 Date of access: 18 Oct. 2018.

Morse, J.M., Barrett, M., Mayan, M., Olson, K. & Spiers, J. 2002. Verification strategies for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 1(2):1-20.

Moss, D., Newman, A. & DeSanto, B. 2005. What communication managers do? Defining and refining the core elements of management in a public relations/corporate communication context. *J & MC Quarterly*, 82(4):873-890.

Moss, D., Warnaby, G. & Newman, A.J. 2000. Public relations practitioner role enactment at the senior management level within U.K. companies. *Journal of public relations*, 12(4):277-307.

- Muchena, E. 2018. An investigation into the role played by public relations in selected public institutions in Harare, Zimbabwe. *The International Journal of Humanities and Social Studies*, 6(9): 64-72.
- Narteh, B., Akwensivie, D. & Agyapong, K. 2011. Public Relations Practices: a study of selected private universities in Ghana. *Journal of Methodist University College Ghana*, 2(1):170-184.
- Nassaji, H. Qualitative and descriptive research: data type versus data analysis. *Language Teaching Research*, 19(2):129-132.
- Neil, M.S. & Lee, N. 2016. Roles in social media: how the practice of public relations is evolving. *Public Relations Journal*, 10(2):1-25.
- Neill, M.S. & Drumwright, M.E. 2012. PR professionals as organizational conscience. *Journal of mass media ethics*, 27(1):220-234.
- Neuman, W.L. 2014. *Social research methods: qualitative and quantitative approaches*. 7th ed. Harlow, England: Pearson.
- Newsom, D., Vanslyke Turk, J. & Kruckeberg, D. 2004. *This is PR: the realities of public relations*. 8th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- NMU (Nelson Mandela University). 2019. *About communication and stakeholder liaison*. <https://marketing.mandela.ac.za/> Date of access: 17 Dec. 2019
- Nothhaft, H. 2010. Communication management as a second-order management function: roles and functions of the communication executive – results from a shadowing study. *Journal of Communication Management*, 14(2):127-140.
- NSFAS (National Student Financial Aid Scheme). 2020. *The DHEST bursary scheme*. <http://www.nsfas.org.za/content/bursary-scheme.html> Date of access: 25 Feb. 2020.
- NWU (North-West University). 2017. *Integrated Report: Structured for success*. http://www.nwu.ac.za/sites/www.nwu.ac.za/files/files/i-institutional-information/annual-report/AR-2017/NWU_Annual%20Report_Financial%20web1.pdf Date of access: 28 May 2020.
- NWU (North-West University). 2020a. *Corporate relations and marketing*. <http://www.nwu.ac.za/corporate-relations-and-marketing> Date of access: 1 Dec. 2019.
- NWU (North-West University). 2020b. *NWU Services A-Z*. <http://services.nwu.ac.za/> Date of access: 13 May 2020.

Oxford dictionaries. 2019. *Practitioner*. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/practitioner>

Date of access: 11 Apr. 2019.

Oxford dictionaries. 2019. *Professional*. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/professional>

Date of access: 11 Apr. 2019.

Pangalele, T. 2017. *What is the impact of social activist movements like Fees Must Fall on the brand health of the University of Cape Town?*

http://iiespace.iie.ac.za/bitstream/handle/11622/262/Pangalele%20Tanya_RESM%20Submission.pdf?sequence=1 Date of access: 12 May 2020

Patton, M. 1990. *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Patton, M.Q. 2015. *Qualitative research and evaluation methods*. 4th ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pirožek, P. & Hesková, M. 2003. Approaches to and instruments of public relations: higher education in the Czech Republic. *Higher Education in Europe*, 28(4):487-494.

Plecher, H. 2020. *South Africa: Unemployment rate from 1999 to 2020*.

<https://www.statista.com/statistics/370516/unemployment-rate-in-south-africa/> Date of access: 9 Nov. 2020.

Porter, L., Sweetser, K. & Chung, D. The blogosphere and public relations: investigating practitioners' roles and blog use. *Journal of Communication Management*, 13(3):250-267.

Prines, A. 2015. *The role of internal corporate communication in supporting better workplace safety*. Case: SSAB. Aalto University. (Dissertation – MSc).

QS Top Universities. 2020. *Top 10 Universities in South Africa 2019*.

<https://www.topuniversities.com/university-rankings-articles/brics-rankings/top-10-universities-south-africa-2019> Date of access: 27 May 2020.

Salkind, N.J. 2009. *Exploring research*. 7th ed. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.

Salkind, N.J. 2012. *Exploring research*. 8th ed. Boston: Pearson.

Sánchez, A. & Singh, A. 2016. *Accessing higher education in developing countries: panel data analysis from India, Peru, and Vietnam*. Oxford, UK: Young Lives, [ODID](#), Oxford Department of International Development.

Schön, D.A. 1983. *The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action*. New York: Basic Books.

Schwartz, D.F. 1977. Organizational communication network analysis: the liaison communication role. *Organizational behavior and human performance*, 18(1):158-174.

Siziba, N. 2020. *The Covid-crises could lead to large-scale university retrenchments: to create a new economy, a new society, you cannot underfund universities*: Prof Tawana Kupe from the University of Pretoria. <https://www.moneyweb.co.za/moneyweb-radio/safm-market-update/the-covid-crisis-could-lead-to-large-scale-university-retrenchments/> Date of access: 21 Oct. 2020.

Steyn, B & Everett, T. 2009. International comparative study indicates different PR roles in South Africa and the UK, using the same measuring instrument. *Trípodos*, 24:95-105.

Steyn, B. & Bütschi, G. 2003. Reflective public relations: a commentary on conceptual and empirical similarities and differences between South African and European research. Paper delivered at the 10th International Public Relations Research Symposium, BledCom, Lake Bled, Slovenia, 3-6 July.

Steyn, B. & De Beer, E. 2012a. Conceptualising strategic communication management (SCM) in the context of governance and stakeholder inclusiveness. *Communicare*, 31(2):29-55.

Steyn, B. & De Beer, E. 2012b. Strategic role of public relations in the process of 'integrated reporting' - an exploratory study. *Sinergie*, 88:53-72.

Steyn, B. & Niemann, L. 2010. Enterprise strategy: a concept that explicates corporate communication's strategic contribution at the macro-organisational level. *Journal of Communication Management*, 14(2):106-126.

Steyn, B. & Puth, G. 2000. *Corporate communication strategy*. Sandown: Heinemann.

Steyn, B. 2000a. CEO expectations in terms of PR roles. *Communicare*, 19(1), 20-43.

Steyn, B. 2000b. *Strategic management roles of the corporate communication function*. Pretoria: UP. (Dissertation – M.Com).

Steyn, B. 2002a. A meta-theoretical framework for the role of the corporate communication strategist. *Communicare*, 21(2): 42-63.

Steyn, B. 2002b. *From strategy to corporate communication strategy: a conceptualisation*. Paper delivered at the 9th International Public Relations Research Symposium, Lake Bled, Slovenia, 4-7 July.

Steyn, B. 2003a. A metaphorical application of the concept 'paradigm' to the public relations domain: paper read at the Annual SACOMM (South African Communication Association) conference, Durban, June.

Steyn, B. 2004. A metaphorical application of the concept 'paradigm' to the public relations domain. *Communicare*, 23(1): 54-78.

Steyn, B. 2007. Contribution of public relations to organizational strategy formulation. In: Toth, E.L., ed. *The future of excellence in public relations and communication management: challenges for the next generation*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 137-172.

Steyn, B. 2009. The strategic role of public relations is strategic reflection: a South African research stream. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53(4):516-532.

Steyn, B., Green, M. & Grobler, A. 2001. *Strategic management roles of the corporate communication function: are they being played in the government departments? – a case study on the department of housing, South Africa*. Paper delivered at the 8th International Public Relations Research Symposium, "Politics of communication and communication of politics: Cross-cultural theory building in the practice of public relations and political marketing", Lake Bled, Slovenia, 6-8 July.

Strauss, A.L. & Corbin, J.M. 1998. *Basics of qualitative research: techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Studyportals. 2020. *Best universities in South Africa according to international rankings*. <https://www.mastersportal.com/ranking-country/191/south-africa.html> Date of access: 27 May 2020.

SU (Stellenbosch University). 2013a. *Our services*. <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/corporate-communication/our-services> Date of access: 18 Dec. 2019.

SU (Stellenbosch University). 2013b. *Our work*. <https://www.sun.ac.za/english/corporate-communication/our-work> Date of access: 13 May 2020.

SU (Stellenbosch University). 2013c. *General Management*. <http://www.sun.ac.za/english/management> Date of access: 29 May 2020.

Svrluga, S. 2015. *Former South African president calls campaign to remove Rhodes's statue to protest racism 'folly.'* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2015/12/28/former-south-african-president-calls-campaign-to-remove-rhodess-statue-to-protest-racism-folly-and-protesters-laugh-him-off/> Date of access: 22 Nov. 2019.

Szymańska, A. 2003. Public relations: the process of communication between a higher education institution and its environment: the case of the Wrocław University of Economics. *Higher Education in Europe*, XXVIII(4):471-485.

Tamrat, W. & Teferra, D. 2020. *COVID-19 poses a serious threat to higher education.* <https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200409103755715> Date of access: 12 May 2020.

Tench, R. & Yeomans, L. 2006. *Exploring public relations*. Harlow, England: Pearson.

The World Bank. 2019. *South Africa economic update: tertiary education enrollments must rise*. The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Washington, USA.

Thomas, C.S. *Interest group: political science*. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/interest-group>

Tindall, N.T.J. & Holtzhausen, D.R. 2011. Toward a roles theory for strategic communication: the case of South Africa. *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 5:74-94.

Tjønneland, E.N. 2017. *Crisis at South Africa's universities – what are the implications for future cooperation with Norway?* <https://www.cmi.no/publications/6180-crisis-at-south-africas-universities-what-are-the> Date of access: 19 Nov. 2019.

Toth, E.L., Serini, S.A., Wright, D.K. & Emig, A.G. 1998. Trends in public relations roles: 1990–1995. *Public relations review*, 24(2):145-163, Summer.

TUT. 2020. *About corporate affairs and marketing*. <https://www.tut.ac.za/cam/about> Date of access: 17 Dec. 2019.

UFS (University of the Free State). 2020. [Support services University of the Free State UFS Home / Communication and Marketing](https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/communication-and-marketing-home) <https://www.ufs.ac.za/supportservices/departments/communication-and-marketing-home> Date of access: 17 Dec. 2019

UP (University of Pretoria). 2020. *Department of University Relations: our team*.
<https://www.up.ac.za/university-relations/article/2750183/our-team>- Date of access: 1 Dec.
2019.

USAf (Universities South Africa). 2017. *Welcome to USAF*. <https://www.usaf.ac.za/> Date of access: 16 Apr. 2017.

UWC (University of the Western Cape). 2013. *Welcome to About Us*.
<https://www.uwc.ac.za/IA/Pages/AboutIA.aspx> Date of access: 28 Dec. 2019.

UWC (University of the Western Cape). 2016. *Annual Report: University of the Western Cape*.
<https://www.uwc.ac.za/SO/Finance/Pages/Annual-Reports.aspx> Date of access: 28 May 2020

Van der Berg, S. & Knoesen, M. 2018. *Demand for education in five countries of the South African Customs Union – projections and implications*. Stellenbosch Economic Working Papers (No. 20). www.ekon.sun.ac.za/wpapers/2018/wp202018

Van Ruler, B. & Verčič, D. 2002. *The Bled Manifesto on public relations*. Paper presented to the Ninth Public Relations Research Symposium, Bled, Slovenia, July.

Van Ruler, B. & Verčič, D. 2003. *Reflective communication management, a public view on public relations*. Paper delivered at the 53rd Annual Conference of the International Communication Association, "Communication in Borderlands", San Diego, CA, 23-27 May.
http://195.130.87.21:8080/dspace/bitstream/123456789/534/1/Reflective%20Communication%20Management_a%20Public%20View%20on%20Public%20Relations.pdf Date of access: 17 Feb. 2016.

Van Ruler, B. & Verčič, D. 2005. Public relations and communication management in Europe: challenges and opportunities. *Comunicação e Sociedade*, 8(1):179-191.

Van Ruler, B. 2000. Communication management in the Netherlands. *Public relations review*, 26(4):403–423, Winter.

Van Ruler, B. 2004. The communication grid: an introduction of a model of four communication strategies. *Public Relations Review*, 30(2004): 123-143.

Van Ruler, B., & Verčič, D. 2004. Overview of public relations and communication management in Europe. In: van Ruler, B., & Verčič, D., eds., *Public relations and communication management in Europe: a nation-by-nation introduction to public relations theory and practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Guyter. pp. 1-11.

- Van Ruler, B., Verčič, D., Flodin, B. & Bütschi, G. 2002. Public relations in Europe: a kaleidoscopic picture. *Journal of Communication Management*, 6(2):166-175.
- Vardeman-Winter, J. & Place, K. 2015. Public relations culture, social media, and regulation. *Journal of communication management*, 19(4):335-353.
- Venter, B.P. 2004. *The role perceptions of public relations practitioners in South Africa*. Cape Town: CPUT. (Dissertation - M Tech).
- Verčič, D., Van Ruler, B., Bütschi, G. & Flodin, B. 2001. On the definition of public relations: a European view. *Public Relations Review*, 27:373-387.
- Verwey, S., Bencke, D.R. & Muir, C. 2017. Purpose and practice: educating PR professionals for the future. *Communicare*, 36(1):67-78.
- Vieira, E.T. & Grantham, S. 2015. Determining factors leading to strategic management PR practitioner roles. *Public Relations Review*, 41:544-550.
- VUT (Vaal University of Technology). 2019. Welcome to the department of corporate affairs <https://www.vut.ac.za/corporate-affairs/> Date of access: 17 Dec. 2019
- Waddington, S. 2012. *Grunig revisited: digital communication and the four models of public relations*. <https://wadds.co.uk/blog/2012/09/14/grunig-revisited-digital-communication-and-the-excellence-model> Date of access: 11 Jun. 2018.
- White, J. & Dozier, D.M. 1992. Public relations and management decision making. In: Grunig, J.E., ed. *Excellence in public relations and communication management*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum. pp. 91-108.
- Wiggill, M.N. 2009. *Strategic communication management in the non-profit adult literacy sector*. NWU: Potchefstroom. (Thesis – PhD).
- Wilson, C. 2016. How dominant coalition members' values and perceptions impact their perceptions of public relations participation in organizational decision making. *Journal of Communication Management*, 20(3):215-231.
- Wits (University of the Witwatersrand). 2018. *Annual Report*. <https://www.wits.ac.za/media/wits-university/students/academic-matters/documents/2018%20Annual%20Report.pdf> Date of access: 28 May 2020

Wits (University of the Witwatersrand). 2019. *Wits Communications*.

<https://www.wits.ac.za/news/contact-us/> Date of access: 5 Dec. 2019.

Wood, D. 1991. Corporate social performance revisited. *Academic Management Review*, 16(4):691-718.

Wright, D.K. 1995. The role of corporate public relations executives in the future of employee communications. *Public relations review*, 21(3):181-198, Fall.

Yang, M.L. 2005. *Public relations practice in nine Taiwanese higher educational institutions*. Texas: University of the Incarnate Word. (Dissertation – PhD).

Zhang, Y. & Wildemuth, B.M. 2009. *Unstructured Interviews*.

https://www.ischool.utexas.edu/~yanz/Unstructured_interviews.pdf. Date of access: 6 Aug. 2019