

**The role of public relations: A case of selected corporate organisations within the greater
Durban area**

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DECLARATION

I, Zukiswa Gqamane, do hereby declare that the work presented in this dissertation is my own work and findings, except where indicated. All sources used have been duly acknowledged.

Zukiswa Gqamane

ABSTRACT

Public relations is an important subsystem of an organisation and the effective practice of public relations is integrally bound to the health of an organisation. As such, it provides the avenue for the organisation to effectively monitor, interact and react with other key groups within the organisational environment.

According to Naidoo (2007:3), “public relations has been described as synonymous to marketing. The function of public relations is becoming more confusing as initial scanning of the environment has revealed that certain organisations within the greater Durban area have merged public relations with other departments such as marketing”. Whilst some organisations may view public relations as a separate entity as opposed to marketing, others see these two functions as falling under a common umbrella. It is, therefore, evident that the boundaries between public relations and marketing are very blurred. Many organisations do not show the public relations office as an independent role. Since so many factors influence how public relations begins in organisations, public relations departments, in some organisations, have large numbers of staff and generous budgets even though the original motivations for their functions have long been forgotten and their mission is not clearly defined. Conversely, many, if not most, organisations reorganise the public relations functions, reduce the number of staff and try to do more with fewer people. Even practitioners disagree about what is the best structure and place for their functions in various types of organisations.

This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the role that public relations plays within the selected corporate organisations in the greater Durban area.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preamble

According to Lamb and Mc Kee (2005:1), “no formal organisation is an island. Each is composed of an internal system of social networks, and each exists within a framework of interrelated systems of relationships with key stakeholders such as competitors, consumers, sponsors, regulators, and the media”. Lamb and Mc Kee (2005:1), therefore, argue that public relations is an important subsystem of an organisation and the effective practice of public relations is integrally bound to the health of an organisation. As such, it provides the avenue for the organisation to effectively monitor, interact and react with other key groups within the organisational environment. Public relations is thought of as the communication and action on the part of an organisation that supports development and maintenance of mutually beneficial relationships between the organisation and the groups with which it is interdependent. The above, therefore, shows that public relations, as a subsystem within an organisation, plays an important, if not integral, part in ensuring that organisations meet their overall aims and objectives. Davis (2004:190) argues that many organisations do not show public relations as an independent role. This view may be because of the multiple functions of public relations from events organising to marketing or service management. However, public relations can contribute to the success of every function of the business, whether it be staff relations, marketing or even finance. No activity conducted by any organisation can succeed if understanding is lacking, which is why public relations relates to the total communication of any organisation, inside and outside.

Naidoo (2007:3) argues that public relations has been described as synonymous to marketing. Traditionally, public relations and marketing functioned separately and maintained separate departments in most organisations. However, the functions of public relations are becoming more confusing as the initial scanning of the environment has revealed that certain organisations within the greater Durban area have merged public relations with marketing. Whilst some organisations may view public relations as

a separate entity, as opposed to marketing, others see these two functions as falling under a common umbrella. It is, therefore, evident that the boundaries between public relations and marketing are very blurred. As a result, in some organisations, one will not find a public relations or a marketing department but rather a communications department that is responsible for both public relations and marketing functions.

Cutlip, Center, and Broom, (2000:60) maintain that since so many factors influence how public relations begins in organisations, public relations' departments, in some organisations, have large numbers of staff and generous budgets even though the original motivations for their functions have long been forgotten and their mission is not clearly defined. Conversely, many, if not most, organisations reorganise the public relations functions, reduce the number of staff and try to do more with fewer people. Even practitioners disagree about what is the best structure and place for their functions in various types of organisations. Public relations is, in essence, communications. It functions as a subsystem within an organisation and, furthermore, given recognition, can play a vital role in the management of an organisation.

Tench and Yeomans (2006: 4) support this view by defining public relations as:

A distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and co-operation between an organisation and it's publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinions; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management to keep abreast of and effectively utilise change; serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools.

The above definition contains overall goals, processes and tasks of public relations and positions the discipline firmly within the organisation, as a management role. This definition stresses public relations as a communication and management function aimed at establishing and maintaining a positive image amongst groups on which an organisation depends in order to achieve its mission.

Public relations in organisations has evolved tremendously. Some organisations have opened their doors for public relations professionals. However, it seems that organisations still battle to define the functions and the role of public relations, let alone positioning the discipline. It is evident that public relations' activities differ within the various organisations. This study, therefore, seeks to investigate the role that public relations plays within the selected corporate organisations within the greater Durban area.

1.2 The problem and its settings

Davis (2004:202) argues that the public relations industry simply lacks credibility; people just do not take the industry seriously. Furthermore, the discipline might be regarded dispassionately as being positively beneficial to society but also questions why organisations are reluctant to let public relations' professionals "beat their own collective drum". Public relations deserves to be taken seriously by organisations, but, most times, it is assigned solely 'low end' tasks, given roles that invariably underestimate its value. Therefore, the home for public relations functions is still not clear in most organisations.

Henslowe (2003:1-2) postulates that the public relations discipline is often either misunderstood or deliberately misinterpreted so that it is used in a pejorative way, associating it with propaganda, 'economy of the truth' or evasion. Most organisations disregard public relations as an integral part of the organisation. In most instances, organisations only acknowledge the importance of public relations when things go wrong and in times of a crisis. Consequently, public relations practitioners salvage the situation by apologising to the organisations' publics, assuring them that all will be dealt with and that the crisis is under control. Ströh (2007:1) maintains that it is important to recognise that many cross-disciplines have been integrated to build theory for public relations in terms of relationships and relationship management. This postulation reinforces the view that public relations is a communications process. However, problems are often encountered with organisations not understanding the difference

between public relations as a discipline on its own, and public relations as a marketing tool. Ströh (2007:1) emphasizes that to solve these problems, organisations need to recognise and acknowledge and start from the premise that public relations is the function that manages the communication between an organisation and its publics in order to build and enhance healthy relationships to the benefit of all parties involved. Most organisations have given little or no attention to public relations while some organisations do not understand the role that public relations plays within an organisation and, therefore, have failed to position the discipline. This study, therefore, sets out to seek and analyse the role that public relations plays within organisations.

1.3 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of public relations within an organisation. This aim will be accomplished through the following objectives:

- To establish the positioning of public relations within the hierarchy of the selected organisations;
- To determine the reasons that prompt organisations to merge public relations and marketing departments into one department; and
- To examine the role of public relations within the selected organisations.

1.4 Rationale for the Study

Previous research has confirmed that most organisations have not established or identified the role and position of public relations within their organisations. This finding is supported by Cutlip *et al.* (2000:60) who argue that even practitioners disagree about what is the best structure and place for their functions in various types of organisations. Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002: 262) state that there is a genuine need to develop a new paradigm under which marketing and public relations can function effectively in the interest of the organisation and the public it serves. Henslowe (2003:1-2) argues that public relations plays an important part in a wide variety of ways throughout people's lives. Public relations can help organisations to inform both its own (internal) public and

external ones, by providing information in a factual, easily understood format so that ignorance of an organisation or product can be overcome through knowledge and understanding. Public relations is a complex profession, an emerging industry that is at the heart of all communication. This study, therefore, sets out to examine the role of public relations and to establish its positioning within the hierarchy of the selected organisations. This study is important as it addresses the importance of public relations within an organisation. Therefore, the findings from this study may be utilised by the selected organisations to review the role that public relations plays within their organisation. The study provides a holistic based theory outlining public relations as an integral subsystem within an organisation. Organisations can use this study as a guideline in assessing their in-house public relations departments or any other department under which public relations falls, for the overall interest and success of the organisation.

1.5 Scope of the Study

The study focus is confined to organisations within the greater Durban area. These organisations represent various business sectors and were selected in terms of their size and influence within the South African corporate world, and their willingness to participate in the study.

1.6 Research methodology

This section describes the research framework. The research is mainly empirical in that it seeks to draw conclusions based on the data collected from the interviews. The researcher has used one methodological approach for this study, namely, the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is based on flexible and explorative methods because it enables the researcher to change the type of data being collected progressively so that a deeper understanding of what is being investigated can be achieved. Based on this understanding, the research instrument took the form of interview schedules. Seven corporate organisations were selected

for this study. The purposive sample method was chosen as the most appropriate method for this research and the researcher applied knowledge of the research problem to handpick the participants from the selected organisations.

Data collection is a key feature of the research process. Semi-structured interviews were appropriate for this study where the researcher knew in advance exactly what needed to be known and could then frame appropriate questions to obtain the necessary data. Reliability of the research was ensured by making use of the research instrument, namely, the interview schedule for all the respondents. Swetnam (2000:30) states that validity is about carefully constructing definitions of concepts, hypotheses or propositions so that they can be translated clearly and predictably into detailed operational methods, down to the level of specific questions and observations. The research instrument was developed after the researcher studied the literature. The questions were valid as they were interlinked with the objectives and also related to the overall study. Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2009: 221) claim that triangulation is the technique that is often associated with establishing credibility in qualitative research. This study used the literature as primary data to compile the interview guide; a content analysis was conducted on the data gathered from the interviews (primary data) and the organisation's reports and manuscripts (secondary data). Lee and Lings (2008:239) maintain that triangulation is one way in which one can try to enhance validity. Therefore, the findings will be valid as the study uses data triangulation to attempt to corroborate findings according to different approaches.

1.7 Division of chapters

The dissertation is divided into five chapters. Chapter one introduces the research topic; provides a background and gives an outline of the study.

Chapter two presents an overview of the theoretical foundation. This is a basis for the design of the research instrument. This chapter critically reviews the relevant literature

and how it relates to the study. Emphasis is placed on the concept, role, functions, the positioning of public relations within the hierarchy of an organisation and a detailed discussion on how public relations differs from marketing.

Chapter three examines the methodology employed in the empirical study. This was achieved by determining the research instrument, sample, and the method of obtaining data, reliability and validity of the research study.

Chapter four presents the results of the field work conducted. It sets out to analyse and interpret the data gathered from the interviews and use the findings to either confirm or reject the literature review.

In chapter five, conclusions are drawn based on the findings from the study. Based on the interpretation of the results, this chapter further offers a set of recommendations pertaining to the current role and positioning of the public relations discipline within the selected corporate organisations in the greater Durban area.

1.8. Conclusion

This chapter introduces the research problem, objectives of the study and justifies the necessity for the research. The limitations, the key assumptions upon which the study is based, and the methodology are presented. Finally, the chapter presented an overview of the chapters that follow and lays the foundation for this thesis. On this basis, the study now proceeds to provide a theoretical underpinning for the study, by examining the role of public relations.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has given an outline of the study; which set out to seek and investigate the role of public relations within organisations. This chapter examines the literature related to the study. This entails discussing the concept, various definitions, functions and roles of public relations; highlighting how public relations differs from marketing; discussing the models of public relations; and reviews the location of public relations within the hierarchy structure of an organisation. Furthermore, the systems model is also investigated as well as its application to public relations. The theoretical approach of the model is significant to this study as it provides a detailed explanation as to how all parts of an open system need to work together for the overall success of the system. Therefore, the study uses the systems model to provide a theoretical underpinning for the study in examining the role of public relations within organisations.

2.2 The concept of public relations

Wilcox and Cameron (2009:5) explain that people often define public relations by some of its visible techniques and tactics, such as publicity in a newspaper, a television interview with an organisation's spokesperson, or the appearance of a celebrity at a special event. What people fail to understand is that public relations is a process involving many subtle and far-reaching aspects. Public relations includes research and analysis, policy formation, programming, communication, and feedback from numerous publics. Its practitioners operate on two distinct levels – as advisers to their clients or to an organisation's top management and as technicians who produce and disseminate messages in multiple media channels.

Public relations is, therefore, a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance, and co-operation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of

problems or issues; helps management keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound ethical communication techniques as its principal tool. Davis (2004:202) argues that the home for public relations functions is still not clear in most organisations. Wilcox and Cameron (2009:5) contend that public relations practitioners serve as an intermediary between the organisation and all the publics that exist in the organisation. Theaker (2004:6) further claims that public relations, as a discipline, is concerned with the reputation of organisations (or product, services or individuals) with the aim of creating understanding and support. Koekemoer (2004:397) argues that the differing concepts of public relations reflect the evolution of this maturing function in organisations and society. The above authors all indicate the struggle of an emerging profession seeking its unique identity. The evolution of the concept and the numerous descriptions of the practice lead us to the definitions of public relations. These various definitions are important as they are indicative of the rapidly changing roles of public relations.

Seitel (2004:3) defines public relations as a planned process to influence public opinion, through sound character and proper performance, based on mutual satisfactory two-way communication. Lattimore, Baskin, Heiman and Toth (2004:5), on the other hand, define public relations as a leadership and management function that helps achieve organisational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organisational change. Johnston and Zawawi (2004:6) add that public relations is the ethical and strategic management of communication and relationships in order to build and develop coalitions and policy, identify and manage issues and create direct messages to achieve sound outcomes within a socially responsible framework. Focussing specifically on the South African context, the Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa (PRISA) (2005) defines public relations as the management, through communication, of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders.

Moloney (2000:6) argues that public relations is too multifaceted to be incorporated into a single definition, but that its effect on society demands extensive investigation regardless. He suggests that public relations can be defined differently as a 'concept' (communication management by an organisation with its publics), as a 'practice' (mostly dealing with the media) and in terms of its effects on society (a category of persuasive communication undertaken through the mass media or through private lobbying by groups to advance their material or ideological interests). Center, Jackson, Smith and Stansberry (2008:9) highlight a formal three part definition of public relations, which states that public relations is a condition common to every individual and organisation in the human environment. Firstly, public relations is the systemized function that evaluates public attitudes and behaviours; harmonises the goals, policies and procedures of an individual or organisation with the public interest; and executes a program of action to earn public understanding, acceptance and supportive behaviour. Secondly, public relations is the full flowering of the democratic principle, in which every member of society is valued for himself or herself and has both a right and a duty to express an opinion on public issues and in which policies are made on the basis of free exchange of those opinions that result in public consent. Thirdly, public relations is something everyone has; public relations fosters the improvement of public relationships through specific activities and policies.

National and international public relations' organisations have formulated definitions of public relations. According to Wilcox and Cameron (2009:6), "the British Institute of Public Relations defines public relations as influencing behaviours to achieve objectives through the effective management of relationships and communication". On the other hand the British Institute of Public Opinion defines public relation as "the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and all its publics". Cutlip *et al.* (2000:5) state that the Dansk Public Relations Klub of Denmark maintains that "public relations is the sustained and systematic managerial effort through which private and public organisations seek to establish understanding, sympathy and support in those public circles with which they have or expect to establish contact".

It can be acknowledged that there are literally hundreds of definitions of public relations. Thus organisations should carefully study these definitions and be able to pin-point one that will reflect their organisation's vision, mission, objectives and overall values as practiced by their organisation. Wilcox and Cameron (2009:6), therefore, reinforce that there are key words to remember in the above definitions such as: deliberate, planned, publics and stakeholders, management. Deliberate implies that public relations activities are intentional. They are designed to influence, gain understanding, provide information and obtain feedback and reaction from those affected by the activities. Planned implies that public relations activities are organised. Therefore, solutions to problems are discovered and logistics are thought out, with activities taking place over a period of time. It is systematic, requiring research and analysis. Publics or stakeholders refer to everyone affected by the activities. Public relations activities should be mutually beneficial to these publics. Management implies that public relations is most effective when it is an integral part of decision making by top management. Here public relations is involved in counselling and solving problems at high levels, not just the dissemination of information after a decision has been made. Seitel (2001:4) reinforces that the definitions of public relations will always differ, but almost all will agree that good public relations requires a firm base of theoretical knowledge, a strong sense of ethical judgment, solid communication skills and, above all, an uncompromising attitude of professionalism.

Public relations evolved over many years to become a discipline but only recently in the last century has it received more prominence in the corporate world. Skinner *et al.* (2004: 19) claim that we are inclined to think of public relations as a 20th century phenomenon, but efforts to communicate with others and to deal with the force of opinion go back to antiquity. Rensburg and Cant (2009: 31) maintain that public relations as it is practised today originated in the United States. To a large extent the development of public relations in the rest of the world has been influenced by developments in the United States of America. For example, Americans have been using Press Agency and other publicity methods for some time. This has led others to follow this trend and to manufacture news and use stunts and gimmicks to gain

attention. Public relations was later employed to defend powerful US business interests against negative journalism and government relations. The emphasis was on 'telling our story' to ensure that the public sees the other side of the story.

Ravindran (2000: 2) states that the concept of public relations as one-way persuasive communication continued to dominate as the United States entered World War I and created the committee of Public Information. Headed by George Creel, the committee was responsible for uniting public opinion behind the war efforts through an extensive nationwide propaganda campaign. Seitel (2001:9) argues that during these early years, public relations was viewed as a publicity effort to influence others. Furthermore, various communication media such as advertising, films and exhibitions were used to such an extent that people eventually talked of 'the words that won the war'. Rensburg and Cant (2009: 29) reinforce that public relations as we know it today is much younger than many other disciplines. The relative newness of this practice means that the field is still evolving and its status is continuously improving. Therefore, a closer look into the early history of public relations is essential as it will clearly indicate the development of the public relations discipline.

2.3 A relational perspective on public relations

Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000: 51) suggest that public relations practitioners should place their focus on studying and understanding organisational relationships. Grunig (2006: 158) states that most of the latest research in public relations has focused on organisation public relations and maintains that this is a clear indication of the future development of the field. Ledingham (2003: 183) argues that it would be difficult to overstate the importance of the relational concept of public relations. The purpose and direction of an organisation is affected by the various relationships that it has with key constituents in its environment. Dozier (1995), quoted in Ledingham (2003: 83), therefore, suggests that the relational perspective of public relations proposes that the primary purpose of public relations' professionals in the organisation is to build sustainable and long-term relationships with key stakeholders in the organisation's

environment. These relationships should be managed so that the public and the organisation's interests are balanced and mutual benefit is gained.

Rensburg and Cant (2009: 52) postulate that:

Public relations serves the purpose of balancing the interest of organisations and their publics through the management of relationships. This relational perspective of public relations has been explored in various contexts and in terms of various public relations functions, including public affairs, community relations, issue management, crisis management and media relations. It is consistent with major theoretical concepts such as systems theory and the two-way symmetrical model of communication.

Therefore, a relational perspective of public relations attempts to define the organisational function of public relations, clarify the role of communication within that function and provide a framework for determining the contribution of public relations to the attainment of organisational goals. Ledingham (2003: 182) states that relationships also give organisations a competitive advantage. Organisations that are able to accumulate resources and capabilities that are 'rare, valuable, non substitutable, and difficult to imitate will achieve a competitive advantage over competing organisations. Dyer and Singh (1998), quoted in Rensburg and Cant (2009: 52), claim that strategic relationships in the organisation's environment act as an intangible asset towards a competitive advantage. An organisation's critical resources may span the organisational boundary and may be embedded in organisational public relations. Relationships form an increasingly important unit of analysis for understanding competitive advantage. Heath (2006:99) affirms that quality relationships are, therefore, also critical for successful organisations in the current turbulent environment, in which successful organisational relationships are dependent on excellent public relations.

Thomlison (2000: 178) states that the public relations function contributes to organisational effectiveness when it effectively manages strategic relationships and sustainable relationships that contribute to organisational success by:

- Facilitating innovation;
- Working towards mutual benefit for the organisation and its stakeholders;

- Contributing towards enlightened choice in decision-making; and
- Providing a competitive advantage as an intangible asset to the organisation.

Vervic, quoted in Heath (2006: 101), argues that, what distinguishes communication and public relations managers from other managers is that they contribute a special concern for broader societal issues and approaches to problems in the boardroom. This perspective forms the foundation for a relational view of public relations, where public relations managers are most adept to manage key relationships with stakeholders in the organisation's environment. Public relations must be organised in such a way that makes it possible to identify strategic publics as part of the strategic management process and to build quality long-term relationships with them through symmetrical communication. Public relations must, therefore, act with a strategic mandate, the primary goal being to build sustainable and mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders. Grunig (2006: 160) further maintains that it is also critical that public relations is empowered through representation in the dominant coalition of an organisation, where communication managers can contribute a special concern for broader societal issues or problems. Rensburg and Cant (2009: 53) reinforce that the responsible candidate for organisational relationships needs to represent stakeholders in the dominant coalition and also constantly assess the impact of organisational decisions on key organisational relationships. This communication function in an organisation would also be able to align these relationships with organisational strategy, sufficiently fitting it into the 'bigger picture'.

Therefore, good public relations cannot be bought, but it must be earned. Public relations is not a once-off phenomenon but an ongoing process, which may take years to bear fruit. In South Africa, public relations as a serious practice became recognised as such only after World War II. Today, it's a major force in corporate life. Center *et al.* (2008:3) affirm this by stating that historically the function has evolved from one-way information transfer, to a two-way concept of sending messages and listening to feedback, to the present idea of an organisation's adjusting harmoniously with the

publics on which it depends. Seitel (2004: 32) establishes that public relations has come of age as a result of the confluence of four general factors in our society:

- The growth of large institutions and their sense of responsibility to the public;
- The increased changes, conflicts and confrontations among interest groups in society;
- The heightened awareness of people, brought about by increasingly sophisticated communication technology; and
- The spread of global democracy.

Based on this, public relations practitioners have the responsibility to be at the forefront of all activities within an organisation. Driven by new theory, modern public relations practice is prepared to 'move beyond communication to behaviour'. This 'behaviour public relations' puts public relations in a position to compete with other organisational departments in that its results can now be compared and quantified with previously established goals. This is how public relations holds its own in a corporate organisational environment.

Public relations plays an important, if not integral, part in ensuring that organisations meet their overall aims and objectives. This view is supported by the various theoretical models that are commonly used to define the manner in which public relations works or functions within organisations. A close examination of these models reveals that public relations operates within and across the different departments within an organisation. According to Wilcox and Cameron (2006:63), "perhaps the most widely discussed theoretical model of public relations communication is that formulated by Professor James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt." Grunig and Hunt proposed four models that define public relations communication. L'etang and Pieczka (2006:13) maintain that these four models describe the way in which public relations programmes are conducted by public relations practitioners. These models are the press agency model; the public information model; the two-way asymmetric model and the two-way symmetric model.

2.3.1 The press agency/ publicity

Tench and Yeomans (2006:269) emphasize that public relations serves as a propaganda function in the press /publicity agency model. Practitioners spread the faith of the organization involved, often through incomplete, distorted or half-truth information. Wilcox and Cameron (2006:63) reinforce that this is essentially one-way communication that beams messages from a source to a receiver with the express intention of persuading the recipient into action. Such an approach is most associated with “propaganda”, the dissemination of messages to persuade public support for positions or action without seeking feedback. Lubbe and Puth (2002:8) also suggest that this model describes public relations as being a little more than a publicity function that is striving for coverage in mass media. The sole purpose of this model is to promote an individual, an organisation, or a product, therefore, encouraging a one-way flow of information to the public.

2.3.2 The public information model

This is another one-way communication model designed not necessarily to persuade but rather to inform. The public relations practitioner in this model, communicates objective information designed to enlighten the public. Seitel (2004:56) states that this model focuses on the technician role of public relations. Here the public practitioner’s role is to report information objectively about the organisation.

2.3.3 The two-way asymmetric model

Wilcox and Cameron (2006:63) postulate scientific persuasion is the purpose, and communication is two-way, with imbalanced effects. The model has a feedback loop, but the primary purpose of the model is to help the communicator better understand the audience and how to persuade it. Tench and Yeomans (2006: 147) maintain that this is a two-way communication designed to persuade through the classic public relations’ functions of research, objective setting, communicating and then evaluating to see if the

communication changed attitudes and opinions as desired. Two-way asymmetric communicators use what they have learned to persuade publics to accept the organisation's position.

2.3.4 The two-way symmetric model

According to Lattimore *et al.* (2004:58), "the two-way symmetrical model describes public relations efforts in terms of its research based description as the use of communication in improving understanding with strategic publics". Seitel (2004:56) argues that the two-way symmetric model differs from two-way asymmetric model in that mutual understanding rather than persuasion is the purpose. In this way, this approach is more 'balanced' and, therefore, symmetrical, with the public relations communicator serving as a mediator between the organisation and the publics.

Although all four models are used in public relations work, Wilcox and Cameron (2006: 63) mention that it is clearly more advisable, whether attempting to persuade or inform to seek two-way communication. Feedback, in other words, is critical for true understanding. Rensburg and Cant (2009: 28) state that traditionally the role of public relations in an organisation was to focus on communicating with stakeholders. Today, public relations takes on a broader role. Public relations aims to establish and nurture a positive image of an organisation in the eyes of its publics.

2.4 The roles and functions of public relations

Seitel (2001: 25) argues that, although modern public relations initially developed as a tool used in power struggles in America, its role in present day society is vastly different because we are living in a complex society and are confronted by a knowledge explosion which is fuelled by advanced technology, which changes the role of public relations. In short, as institutions have grown larger, they have been forced to refine their methods of communicating with their publics. This, therefore, is the role of public

relations practitioners today, to interpret institutions to the publics they serve and to promote both the image and reputation of these institutions.

Rensburg and Cant (2009: 49) affirm that:

Public relations does not exist as a function on its own. It is an integral part of the communication function of an organisation. Public relations affects almost everyone; all of us practice public relations in one way or another. During the past few decades public relations has increased prominence and professional stature. While marketing and sales have as their primary objective the selling of an organisation's products, the aim of public relations is to sell the organisation itself.

Underpinning this perspective, are a variety of activities that are basic and endemic to the public relations perspective. Lubbe and Puth (2002:10) further maintain that public relations practitioners are involved in a variety of work assignments or functions which may include the following:

- *Research*: the first step in any project is to gather intelligence, in order to understand the variables in the case. What are the key publics, opinions and attitudes? Who are the opinion leaders that matter? Which groups or persons are concerned enough to act? This involves gathering information about public opinion, trends, emerging issues, political climate, media coverage, concerns of consumer and environmental special-interest groups, and so forth, and to plan programmes responsive to publics and problem situations. According to Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000: 36), "research also includes monitoring programme implementation and assessing programme impact to evaluate programme effectiveness".
- *Strategic planning*: The situation and the data need to be formed into a strategy. This involves asking; where are we now? How did we get here? Where do we want to be? How do we get there? Wilcox, Cameron, Ault and Agee (2004:7) reinforce that essentially planning and advising means collaborating with management or clients in a problem-solving process.

- *Counselling*: Fellow managers must understand the plan and agree it should be implemented. They may have a role in implementation and at least, will need to explain it to their staff.
- *Internal education*: People in the organisation need to be informed about the plan and their roles in it.
- *Communication/Action*: The plan must be carried out. Messages or appeals are sent to the various publics involved: activities or actions are staged; feedback must be interpreted; and everyone must be kept informed as the project unfolds.
- *Evaluation*: Another type of research is evaluation, Evaluation charts effectiveness, or lack of it, and very likely will result in a new plan.
- *Media relations and placement*: This is one of the key functions in which practitioners may be engaged. Johnston and Zawawi (2004:259) maintain that it involves contacting the news media, magazines, freelance writers and trade publications with the intention of getting them to publish or broadcast news and features about the organisation. It may also involve responding to media requests for information and acting as a spokesperson for the organisation. Finally, it may mean arranging for the production, booking and placement or broadcasting of corporate advertisements used as part of a public relations programme. Media relations is one of the best known elements of public relations because the outcomes can be seen everyday in the media.
- *Organising*: Cutlip *et al.* (2000: 36) state that public relations practitioners could handle a variety of functions ranging from media conferences, conventions and exhibitions, to open-house days, anniversary celebrations, fund-raising events, contests, awards programmes and sponsorships.
- *Writing*: Public relations practitioners should be adept at writing news releases, newsletters, correspondence, reports, booklets, texts, radio and television copy, film scripts, trade papers and magazine articles, corporate advertisements,

product information, and technical material. Seitel (2004:10) adds that this is a fundamental public relations function designed to communicate to target publics via written communication.

- *Editing:* In addition to research and writing special features, practitioners are involved in editing special publications, employee newsletters, shareholders' reports, and other communications directed at internal and external publics.
- *Production:* Production is multifaceted and very challenging. It involves creating communication using multimedia knowledge and skills, including art, photography, and design for brochures, booklets, reports, corporate advertisements, and occasional publications; recording and editing audio and video tapes and preparing audiovisual presentations.
- *Speaking:* The public relations practitioner either speaks him or herself or arranges for others to address meetings. Skinner *et al.* (2004:12) postulate that the process of gathering information enables organisations to plan programmes in response to the publics and problem situations, to monitor their effectiveness during implementation and evaluate their overall impact.
- *Training:* This involves working with executives and other organizational representatives to prepare them for dealing with the media and for presentations and other public appearances. Practitioners could also assist with in-service staff development.
- *Management:* Another very important duty is the management of the public relations function with regard to personnel, budget, and action programmes.

According to Cutlip *et al.* (2000:60), "public relations in organisations can often be traced back to unintended and humble beginnings. It can begin with someone simply answering letters from customers or members; with someone writing annual reports, handling visitors, conducting tours or even someone arranging the annual meeting. In other organisations, public relations started as a product and service publicity, as a

news support for an advertising campaign or fundraising". Davis (2004:21) reinforces that public relations in organisations is the category that covers the routine of daily exchange of information to manage all corporate communication including marketing activities. Public relations is a very diverse profession with various functions. The functions and roles of public relations are important as they indicate the responsibilities of a public relations practitioner. Ravindran (2000:2) mentions that public relations has a key role in developing understanding and support for a particular cause or event. Essentially, public relations helps to define and explain relationships of mutual benefit between organisations and their key stakeholders both amongst their employees and their customers or clients. This, therefore, implies that public relations can play a managerial role within an organisation, a position of managing relationships between an organisation and its stakeholders and maintaining open communication amongst the various stakeholders. This view is reinforced by Wilcox *et al.* (2009: 7) who state that public relations plays a managerial role to develop strategies to maintain relations with public groups in order to gain public trust and mutual understanding. This role is concerned with organisational mission and strategy and is aimed at commercial or other internal and external publics.

Ströh (2007:1) argues that public relations should be the umbrella function that manages the communication between an organisation and its publics to build and enhance healthy relationships to the benefit of all parties involved. Therefore, this view of relationships, being at the centre of the function of public relations, can be seen as one of the most important ingredients for an effective organisation. This perspective puts public relations on the level of a strategic management function, because it can influence the way stakeholders support an organisation's goals. Grunig *et al.* (2002:553) reinforce that public relations' professionals add value to an organisation when they develop communal relationships with all publics affected by organisational behaviours, not just those who give the organisation something in return. Apart from all the other activities of the public relations function, such as community relations, fundraising, crisis communication, and corporate social responsibility, communal relationships are important if organisations are to be socially responsible and to add

value to society as well as to clients. Public relations also plays a societal role in that it helps organisations survive in their social environments by working on relationships with publics in order to bring about social and economic change and development.

Wilcox *et al.* (2009:7) further postulate that apart from playing a managerial role, public relations plays operational, reflective and educational roles within an organisation. The operational role is responsible for preparing means of communication for the organisation in order to help the organisation formulate its communication strategies. This role is also concerned with communication plans developed by others and is aimed only at the implementation and evaluation of the communication process. The reflective role is there to analyse changing standards and values in society and discuss these with members of the organisation in order to adjust the standards and values of the organisation. Tench and Yeomans (2006:40) suggest that the educational role aims to increase the communication competence of employees.

Grunig *et al.* (2002:553) suggest that public relations' professionals add value to an organisation when they develop communal relationships with all publics affected by organisational behaviours not just those who give the organisation something in return. Apart from all the other activities of the public relations function, such as community relations, fundraising, crisis communication, corporate social responsibility etc, communal relationships are important if organisations are to be socially responsible and to add value to society as well as to clients. Public relations also plays a societal role in that it helps organisations survive in their social environments by working on relationships with publics in order to bring about social and economic change and development. Communication, relationship building, involvement in strategic management, and recognition of communication as a critical management function that supports all other management functions, are integral functions of public relations. More importantly emphasis should be placed on the strategic and management role that public relations can play within an organisation.

Grunig *et al.* (2002: 280) further maintain that the public relations' function also supports other organisational functions, such as human resource management (relationships with employees and unions), lobbying (governmental communication), and financial management (investor relations and other financial relationships with stakeholders such as analysts and shareholders). Public relations and marketing work together by building exchange relationships with consumer, customers, clients, distributors, and other marketing parties through areas such as sponsorships, corporate identity, image building and media relations. It is important to stress that public relations performs a much larger role than just being a support system for these functions. This role involves establishing relationships and maintaining them; most importantly to ensure that communication prevails between all subsystems within an organisation. Thomlison (2000: 178) describes a successful relationship as consisting of "awareness, influence, benefit and behaviour". With respect to public relations, relationship management is "the development, maintenance, growth, and nurturing of mutually beneficial relationships between organisations and their significant publics". Furthermore public relations gives a transactional perspective so that it is a "dynamic, process-orientated, meaning-creating relationship between the two participating parties" Its purpose, therefore, is to "establish dialogic communication".

Wilcox and Cameron (2006:26) maintain that attempting to define a single public relations' type of personality is pointless, because the field is so diverse that it needs people of differing personalities. Some practitioners deal with clients and the public in person, on a frequent basis; others work primarily at desks, planning, writing and researching and many do both. Wilcox and Cameron further suggest that public relations' practitioners should develop knowledge and ability in five basic areas, no matter what area of work they are involved in: Writing skills; research ability; planning expertise; problem solving abilities and business/economics competence. Meanwhile, Center *et al.* (2008: 51) argue that public relations' work of a basic nature is involved in various areas of an organisation's community relationships and thus, with the dynamics of change, public relations' work is becoming less concerned with "routine" and more with the unusual: controversies between factions in the community; activism on social

issues; and dealing with calamity, crisis and governmental regulations as they affect the local community or as they are echoed in local ordinances affecting an organisation.

Tench and Yeomans (2006:29) identify two dominant public relations roles:

The *communication manager*, who plans and manages public relations programmes, advises management, makes communication policy decisions and oversees their implementation. The *communication technician*, who is not involved in organisational decision making, but who implements public relations programmes such as writing press releases, organising events or producing web content. Technicians usually do not get too involved in research or evaluation; they are the 'doers'. The communication manager role itself is divided into three identifiable types. Firstly, the *expert prescriber*, who researches and defines public relations problems, develops programmes to tackle these problems and implements them. Secondly, the *communication facilitator*, who acts as a communication broker, maintaining two-way communication between an organisation and its publics, liaising, interpreting and mediating. Thirdly, the *problem solving process facilitator*, who helps others solve their communication problems, acts as a counsellor or advisor on the planning and implementation of programmes. Tench and Yeomans (2006:29) further note that there are two other roles, sitting between the manager and technician. The first role is the media relations' role, a highly skilled job requiring profound knowledge and understanding of the media. This is not just about the dissemination of messages, but a crucial function where the needs of the media are met in a sophisticated way. The second role is the communication and liaison role, meaning the individual who represents the organisation at events and meetings and creates opportunities for management to communicate with internal and external publics. The classification into manager and technician roles does not mean that the lines are fixed. Most public relations' professionals perform a mix of manager and technician work, but the point is that one role will tend to predominate. Steyn and Puth (2000:20-21) reinforce that there is enormous variety within these roles. A technician employed for their writing skills may be involved in a range of work such as writing press releases, speech writing, writing for the web, or may be involved in just one job, for

example producing the in-house journals. The communication manager maybe responsible for the full public relations programme or, if they work for a large corporate organisation may be responsible for one specialist area such as government or investor relations. Tench and Yeomans (2006:38) argue that there is a lot of confusion about who does what in public relations. The lack of an agreed definition is, however, still a problem for the practice. Some of the long-winded definitions still do not easily convey what the discipline stands for and what professionals do.

These roles define the everyday activities that practitioners assume. Through these roles, organisations delineate expectations of individuals that make up the organisation. From the above, it is evident that public relations plays an integral part in the functioning of an organisation. Grunig (2006:151) states that public relations makes an organisation more effective, when it identifies strategic constituencies in the environment and then develops communication programmes to build long-tem, trusting relationships with them. However, despite the clear identification of the roles and functions of public relations, some organisations are still battling to position the discipline as the confusion between the public relations and the marketing functions still exists. It is, therefore, also important to make a distinction between the two disciplines in order to reflect the diverse view of their roles and their position within an organisation.

2.5 Locating public relations within organisations

Tench and Yeomans (2006: 27-28) argue that apart from all the external and internal considerations, the location of public relations within an organisation depends on a variety of other factors: such as the position of the most senior practitioner; the tasks allocated to the discipline; and how it is situated in relation to other disciplines. The position of the senior public relations practitioner provides a good indication of how the function is regarded within organisations.

Seitel (2004: 87) maintains that when managing an organisation's public relations' system, practitioners must demonstrate comfort with the various elements of the

organisation itself; must be the interpreter of the organisation, its philosophy, policy and programs, all which emanate from top management. Therefore, public relations must report to those who run the organisation. However, in many organisations, this reporting relationship has not always been the case. Many times, public relations has been subordinated to advertising, marketing and other disciplines. Seitel (2004:88) points out that in many corporate organisations, public relations has suffered the impact of downsizing and decentralization. This has led to the shrinkage of once-large operations to the formation of smaller departments. This has, further, led to the question of what is the best way to organise for public relations in an organisation. But, there is no one answer. However, it can be argued that the strongest public relations department is one led by a communications executive who reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

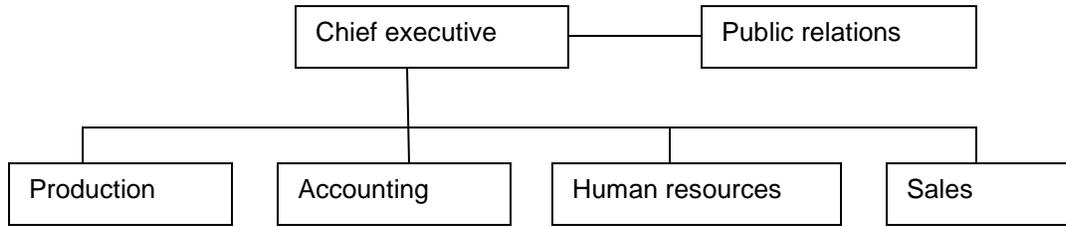
Skinner *et al.* (2004:6) reinforce that public relations is regarded as, and should of necessity be, a management function. This obviously refers to public relations practiced at an advanced level by experienced practitioners. The role of public relations in strategic management within organisations is viewed in terms of four areas, namely; the environment, strategy, organisation and people.

- The environment: The conventional perception of public relations is that it is concerned primarily with communicating with the organisation's external publics and involves a more or less one-way flow of information from the organisation to the outside world. Lubbe and Puth (2004:20) argue that as a management function, public relations has a major role to play in acquiring information of relevance from outside and analysing and interpreting it.
- Strategy: Without public relations' input of information about trends and developments within the environment, no meaningful strategies can be constructed. Grunig (2006: 151) states that public relations must help to define the target audiences to be reached by the organisation and develop and implement communication plans to reach those audiences.

- Organisation: Public relations interprets and transfers environmental information into the organisation. It focuses on communicating corporate messages to its external audiences. According to Theaker (2004:48), “public relations’ external communication functions can be relevant only in an environment where management recognises the public relations’ role in environmental analysis and strategic planning”. Public relations is a vital tool for strategic management in building and maintaining the reputation of an organisation.
- People: Employees are one of the critical success areas in which management effectiveness may be evaluated. Lubbe and Puth (2004:20) maintain that one of public relations’ roles is to communicate with employees as one of the target audiences that an organisation attempts to reach as part of its overall public relations strategy.

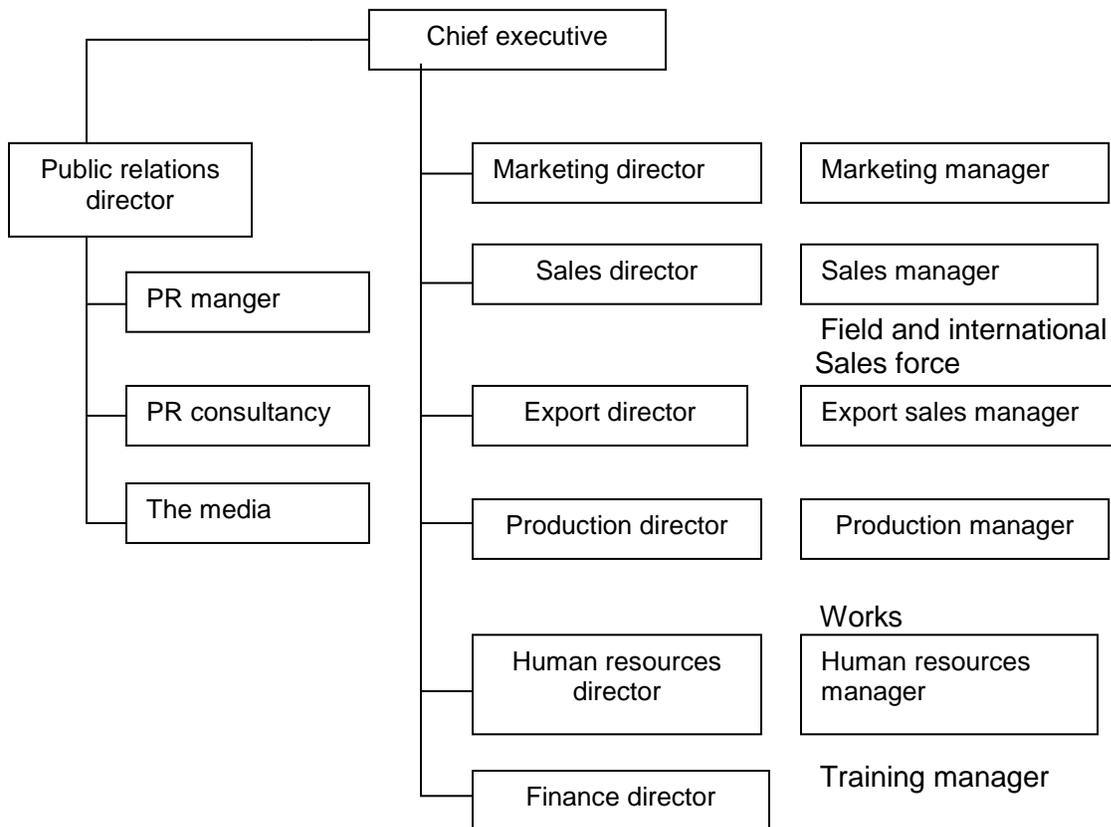
Seitel (2004:74) states that as a management function, public relations is in a position to: evaluate internal and external opinions, attitudes and needs on an ongoing basis; advise management regarding their possible effect and to act as an instrument in bringing about policy changes and in directing new courses of action. Wilcox and Cameron (2006:98) maintain that in a changing environment, and faced with the variety of pressures, executives increasingly see public relations not as publicity and one-way communication, but as a process of negotiation and compromise with a number of key publics. In many organisations, top-level management perceive public relations as primarily a journalistic and technical function (media relations and publicity). In large-scale mechanical organisations of low complexity, there is also a tendency to think of public relations as only a support function of the marketing department. Such perceptions by top management severely limits the role of the public relations’ departments as well as its power to take part in management decision making. Instead, public relations is relegated to being a tactical function, simply preparing messages without input on what should be communicated. The following organograms of a corporate management organisation describes the position occupied by public relations.

Figure 2.1: The organogram of a corporate management organisation



Source: Skinner *et al.* (2001:6)

Figure 2.2: The organogram of a corporate management organisation indicating public relations as a director status



Source: Skinner *et al.* (2004:7)

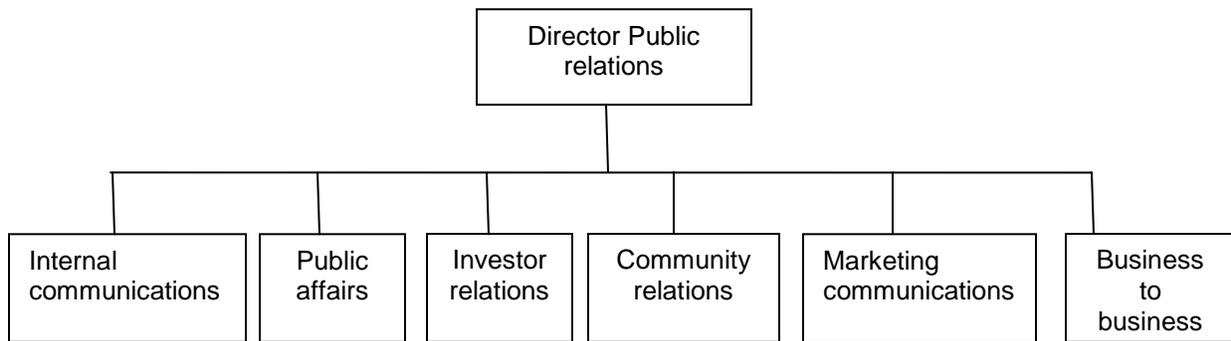
In order for an organisation to function effectively, Skinner *et al.* (2004:7) maintain that public relations managers need to be positioned at management level so that they are responsible to top management and serve all departments of the organisation. Ideally, the public relations manager should have a board of director status, as this happens in the world's successful companies as depicted in the above organograms. Both figures 2.1 and 2.2 indicate that public relations is a management function. Public relations helps organisations by assisting them to reach decisions and fulfil functions more effectively and helps the organisation to contribute to mutual understanding between the organisation and its environment.

Seitel (2004:75) argues that public relations, rightfully, should be the corporate conscience. An organisation's public relations professionals should enjoy enough autonomy to deal openly and honestly with management. As for the names of the department in which public relations is housed, organisations use a wide variety of names for the function. Ironically, the trend today seems to be away from the use of the traditional term 'public relations' and towards 'corporate communication'. Van Riel (1995), quoted in Tench and Yeomans (2006:29), states that public relations, in essence is 'corporate communication'. He further divides corporate communication into three areas:

Management Communication is communication by management aimed at developing a shared vision, establishing and maintaining trust in the leadership, managing change and empowering and motivating employees. The above regards management communication as the responsibility of public relations, as public relations' professionals are communication experts. *Marketing communication* is aimed at supporting the sale of goods and/or services. This will include advertising, sales promotion, direct mail, personal selling and market-oriented public relations or publicity, as he calls it. Typically this includes media relations and events. All these are public relations tasks. *Organisational communication* is a host of communication activities, usually at a corporate level, all of which will be necessarily located in the public relations department; which includes public affairs, environmental communication, investor

relations, corporate advertising, internal communication and public relations. Such division along functional lines is often reflected in the structure of public relations departments.

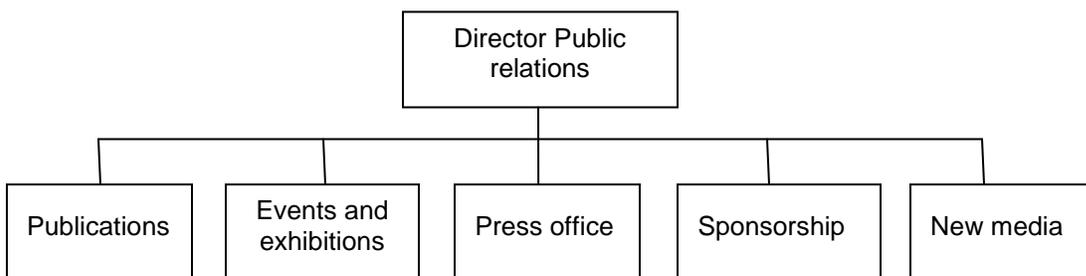
Figure 2.3: Public relations department structured by functions



Source: Tench and Yeomans (2006:30)

Figure 2.3 above shows a typical functional structure. Tench and Yeomans (2006:30) mention that in such a structure, an individual or group will look after all the activities falling within the area, whether these are media relations, sponsorship, events or individual relationships.

Figure 2.4: Public relations department structured by tasks



Source: Tench and Yeomans (2006:31)

Figure 2.4 above is an example of a public relations department structured on task lines. Therefore, an obvious danger of both approaches (Figure 2.3 and Figure 2.4) is that the specialist individuals or teams become functional or task oriented and lose the

overall picture of organisational priorities. The job of the manager is to ensure this does not happen. Cutlip *et al.* (2000:36-37) maintain that many in-house departments use a mixture of functional and task teams. Because they are part of the support function of an organisation, public relations' departments and professionals will operate with all other departments; offering support and advice as required. This is part of the *boundary-spanning* role described earlier and fits in very well with the Systems Theory approach.

Wilcox and Cameron (2006:99) postulate that the role of public relations in organisations often depends on the type of organisation, the perceptions of top management, and even the capabilities of the public relations executives. Whilst some organisations may view public relations as a separate entity, as opposed to marketing, others see these two functions as falling under a common umbrella. It is, therefore, evident that the boundaries between public relations and marketing are very blurred. As a result, in some organisations, one will not find a public relations or a marketing department but rather a communications department that is responsible for both public relations and marketing functions. However, problems are often encountered with organisations not understanding the difference between public relations as a discipline on its own, and public relations as a marketing tool. To solve these problems, organisations need to recognise and acknowledge and start from the premise that public relations is the function that manages the communication between an organisation and its publics in order to build and enhance healthy relationships to the benefit of all parties involved

The literature has shown that public relations is an important, if not an integral, part of an organisation. However, public relations should be with top management, where public relations can take up a more strategic role within an organisation and be involved in strategic decision making. Given the number of roles that public relations can play within an organisation, public relations as a subsystem within an organisation should be a department that functions to contribute to the greater well-being of the organisation as a whole.

Strategic planning for public relations is an essential part of management. Planning is critical not only to know where a particular campaign is headed but also to win the support of top management. Seitel (2004:95) affirms that, in the 21st century, the practice of public relations is firmly accepted as part of the management process of any well-run organisation. Public relations' objectives and goals; strategies and tactics must flow directly from the organisation's overall goals. Public relations strategies must reflect organisational strategies, and tactics must be designed to realize the organisation's business objectives. Stated another way, public relations' programmes are worth little if they fail to further management's and organisation's goals. Management must depend on the able assistance of proper public relations practice to help re-establish trust in society's major institutions.

The relationship between marketing and public relations has received increased attention, and various debates have formed regarding this relationship. According to Cornelissen and Lock (2000:231), "marketing and public relations vie for supremacy as both specialise in communication, and convincing arguments for the one being subsumed by the other abound." Botha (2010:94) states that the seminal work in communication, done by the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC), proposes that communication programmes should be integrated or co-ordinated by a public relations or communications department that is separate from the marketing department, and that this department should have matrix arrangement with the department it serves. However, organisations are still reorganising the public relations function due to the influence of environmental factors and key trends in the market.

2.6 How public relations differs from marketing

Wilcox and Cameron (2009:17-18) state that public relations is distinct from marketing in several ways, although their boundaries may often overlap. Their functions overlap, for example, because both deal with an organisation's relationships and employ similar communication tools to reach the public. Both have the ultimate purpose of assuring an organisation's success and economic survival. The two disciplines, however, approach

this task from somewhat different perspectives or worldviews. This difference is illustrated by the description of each field: Public relations is the management process whose goal is to attain and maintain accord and positive behaviours among social groupings on which an organisation depends, in order to achieve its mission. Its fundamental responsibility is to build and maintain a hospitable environment for an organisation. Whilst, marketing is the management process whose goal is to attract and satisfy customers (or clients) on a long-term basis in order to achieve an organisation's economic objectives. Its fundamental responsibility is to build and maintain markets for an organisation's product and services. In other words, public relations is concerned with building relationships and generating goodwill for the organisation; marketing is concerned with customers and selling products and services.

Grunig *et al.* (2002: 280) further maintain that public relations and marketing work together by building exchange relationships with consumers, customers, clients, distributors, and other marketing parties through areas such as sponsorships, corporate identity, image building and media relations. It is important to stress that public relations performs a much larger role than just being a support system for these functions. This role involves establishing relationships and maintaining them; most importantly to ensure that communication prevails between all subsystems within an organisation. Tench and Yeomans (2006: 30) argue that the relationship between public relations and marketing can be a frictional one. For many marketing people, public relations is all about getting free 'publicity' in the media to support the promotion of products or services to consumers. However, public relations, is much more than that; it is about building relationships with numerous stakeholders by using a whole range of channels and techniques.

There is a growing recognition that public relations, with its particular skills in relationship building, has a role far beyond marketing communication. Seitel (2004:465) points out that marketing, literally defined, is the selling of a service or product through pricing, distribution and promotion. However, public relations, liberally defined, is the marketing of an organisation. Most organisations now realise that public relations can

play an expanded role in marketing. In some organisations, the selling of both individual products and the organisation itself are inextricably intertwined. Belch and Belch (2007: 23) define public relations as the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual organisation with the public interest, and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance.

According to Kotler and Keller (2009:45), “marketing has been defined as an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in a way that benefits the organisation and its stakeholders.” Here marketing is seen as the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping, and growing customers through creating, delivering, and communicating superior customer value. Seitel (2004:465) states that the practice of marketing creates and maintains a market for products and services, and the practice of public relations creates and maintains a hospitable environment in which the organisation may operate. Tench and Yeomans (2006: 31) reinforce that marketing assumes that there is a ‘profit’ in any exchange relationship and the organisation comes out as the net beneficiary. The notion of relationships being of value in themselves is one of the key tenets of public relations and is a point of major difference between the two disciplines.

Grunig, Grunig and Toth (2007: 357) put the differences between public relations and marketing in sharp contrast by arguing that the marketing function should communicate with the markets for an organisation’s goods and services. Public relations should be concerned with all the publics of the organisation. The major purpose of marketing is to make money for the organisation by increasing the slope of the demand curve. The major purpose of public relations is to save money for the organisation by building relationships with publics that constrain or enhance the ability of the organisation to meet its mission. Wilcox and Cameron (2009: 18) maintain that public relations’ theorists point out another fundamental difference between public relations and marketing. In their view, “excellent” public relations is devoid of persuasion; its purpose

is to create mutual understanding and co-operation through two-way dialogue. Marketing, by definition, is persuasive in intent and purpose to sell products and services. Stroh (2007: 1-15) affirms that marketing is one of the public relations field's cross-disciplines: hence there are many points of intersection between marketing and public relations both in a theoretical and a practical sense.

Skinner *et al.* (2004:43) reinforce that as communicators, marketers and public relations practitioners have a lot in common. Both deal with organisational relationships and employ similar processes, techniques and strategies. However, the two functions have to be separated by mission and goal. Kotler and Keller (2009: 45) assert that marketing is about identifying and meeting human and social needs. Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering, and freely exchanging products and services of value with others. Belch and Belch (2007: 23) maintain that it is important to recognize the distinction between marketing and public relations. When an organisation systematically plans and distributes information in an attempt to control and manage its image and the nature of the publicity it receives, it is really engaging in a function known as public relations. The relationship between the public relations and marketing functions has always been an ambiguous and confusing one. It is, therefore, important to make a distinction between the two disciplines. However, it is again crucial to acknowledge that both public relations and marketing convey the essence of communication. The main focus of both functions is to maintain and build harmonious relationships with the organisations and their publics (both internal and external).

2.7 Public relations in the marketing mix

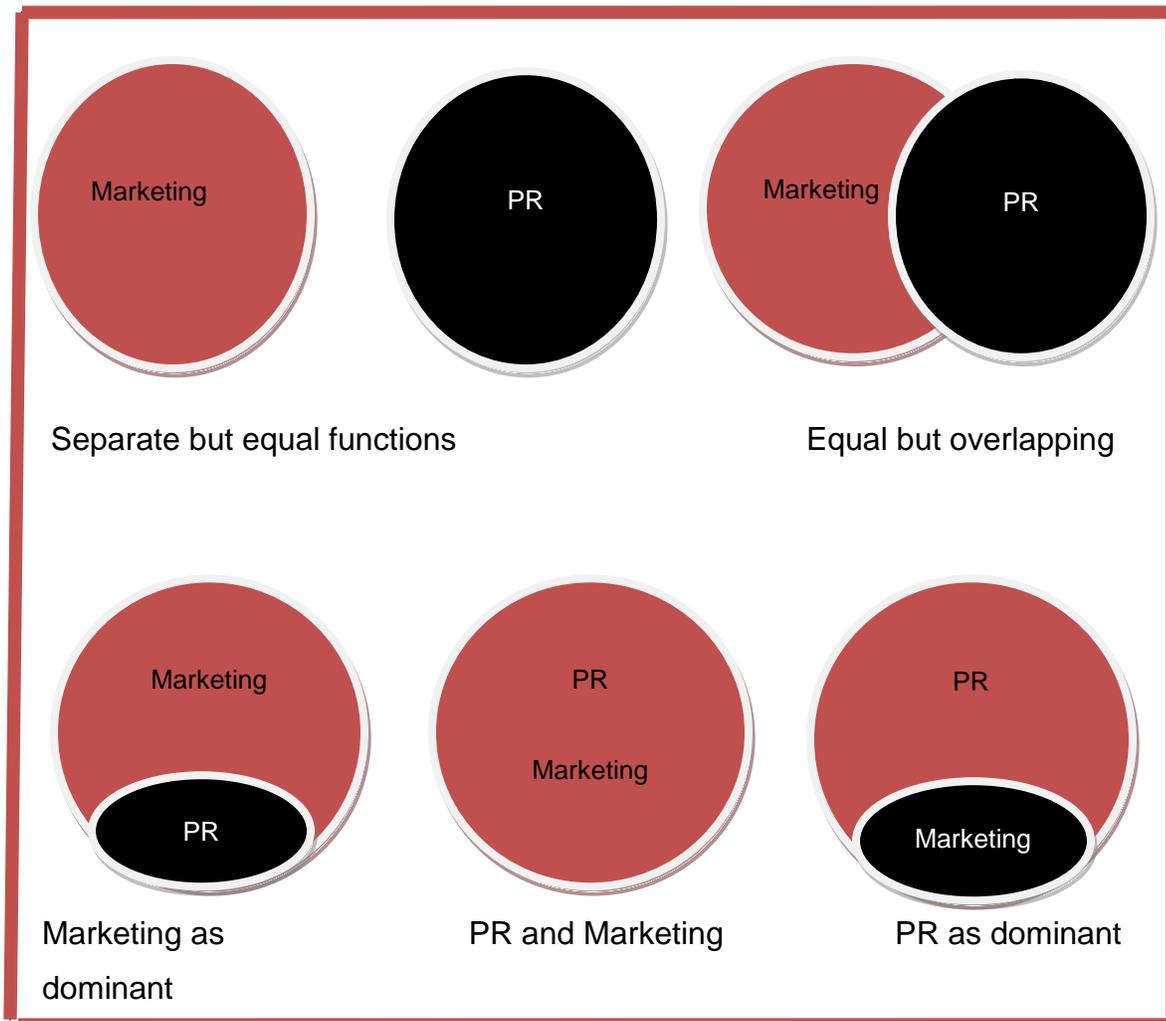
Skinner *et al.* (2004: 102) identify marketing and public relations as major external functions of a company. Both functions start their analysis and planning from the point of view of satisfying one or more of the publics that have already been identified. Skinner claims that some organisations treat exchange relationships with customers as only one of many organisational relationships. On their organisational charts, marketing

is part of the larger public relations function. Other organisations view marketing as the basic function paying attention only to those “non-customer relationships” seen as important to the marketing effort. Public relations is subordinate to marketing in these organisations. Other companies put “customer relations” under public relations making it responsible for non-marketing concerns of customers such as complaints, instructions for product use, safety information and repair services.

Koekemoer (2004: 400) states that in practice, marketing consists of a coordinated programme of research, product design, packaging, pricing, promotion and distribution. The goal is to attract and satisfy customers on a long-term basis. Its fundamental responsibility is to build and maintain a market for an organisation’s products and/or services. Product publicity is part of marketing communication. Since many think that publicity is synonymous with public relations, product publicity also contributes to the confusion between marketing and public relations. Public relations specialists do help in the marketing effort by writing product publicity stories and arranging media coverage of new products. However, Cutlip *et al.* (2000: 8) argue that effective public relations contributes to the marketing effort by maintaining a hospitable, social and political environment. Similarly, successful marketing and satisfied customers make good relations with others easier to build and maintain for the public relations function.

Koekemoer (2004:399) concludes that public relations and marketing are two functions that are most often confused, with public relations typically being subsumed under the larger more powerful marketing function. Figure 2.5, below illustrates the relationships that exist between public relations and marketing and further highlights that although public relations and marketing are seen as different functions in certain organisations they are inevitably interrelated as a result of one of their common functions being ‘communication’.

Figure 2.5: Public relations in the marketing mix



Source: Skinner *et al.* (2004: 46)

In many other organisations, marketing and public relations are viewed as separate entities with different but complementary roles. It is therefore, evident that public relations' activities will differ from organisation to organisation and depending on the nature of the organisation, public relations may serve as either a complement or a counterbalance to marketing activities.

Hutton (2001:205) argues that public relations has lost the battle for supremacy with marketing and is terminally threatened by its failure 'to define itself and to develop sophisticated and progressive theory' or develop its 'central tenet or core concept'. He

claims that 'there remains a critical need for public relations to define its intellectual and practical domain to regain control of its own destiny'. This view is in support of Grunig, Grunig, and Dozier (2002: 262) who contend that there is a genuine need to develop a new paradigm under which marketing and public relations can function effectively in the interest of the organisation and the public it serves.

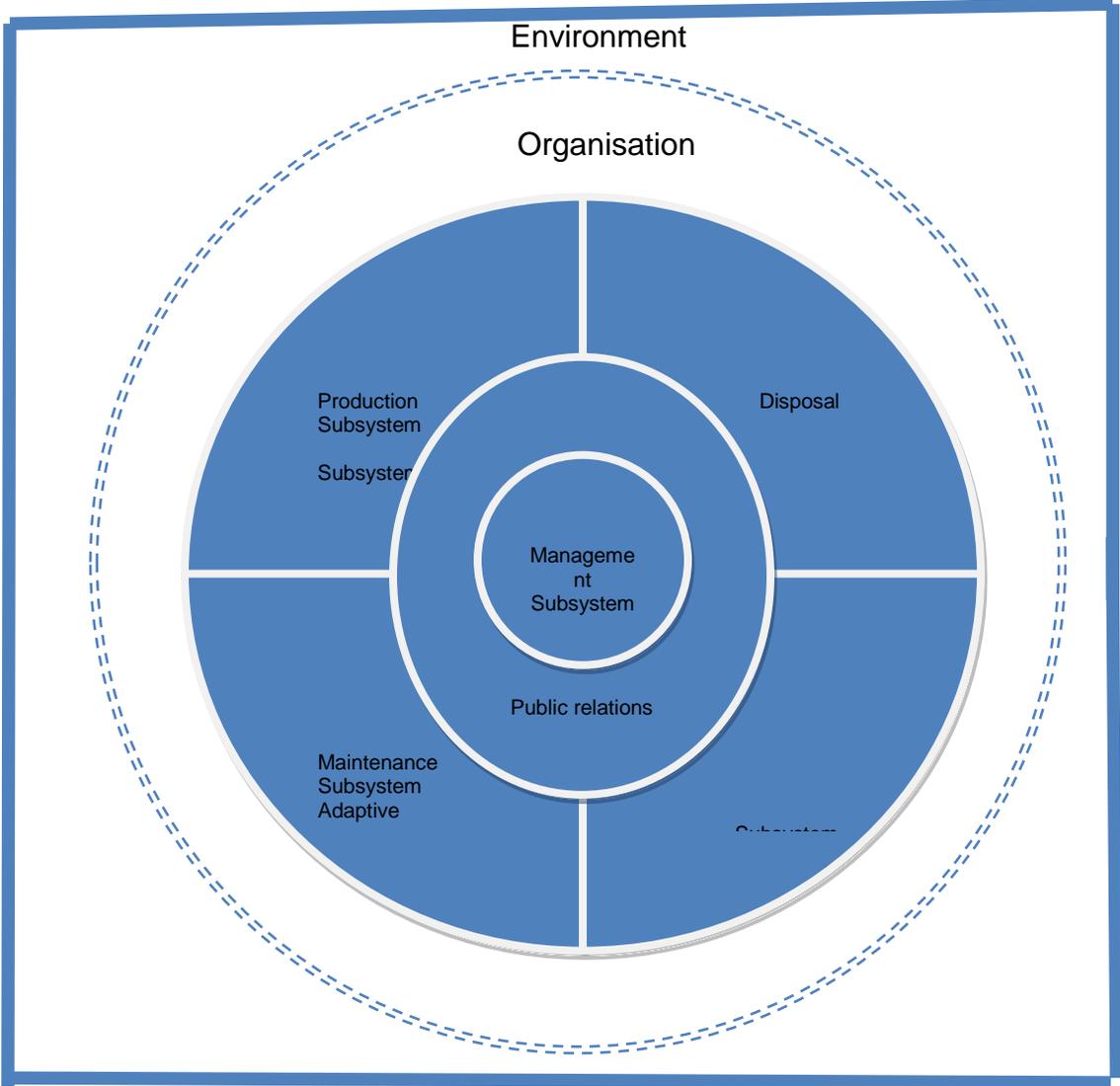
It is evident that different perceptions regarding the distinction between marketing and public relations exists across organisations, as do different perceptions regarding the key tasks that marketing and public relations practitioners are responsible for. Cornelissen and Lock (2000:231) mention that some organisations argue for the integration of the two disciplines, while others proclaim that these two organisational functions should remain independent. Based on this, it can be concluded that without a clear indication of the role and place of these two functions in the organisation, their contribution to the overall functioning and performance of the organisation will be greatly misunderstood and diffused. Heath (2006: 93) asserts that public relations can productively rest on systems theory, the rhetorical heritage and premises espoused by social change theory that guide our understanding of relationships. The systems theory offers a great perspective of the role and influence public relations has within an organisation. Public relations is strategically positioned at the heart of all operations within an organisation.

2.8 The Systems Theory

Tench and Yeomans (2006:27) postulate that it is clear that organisations are not free-floating bodies unaffected by what is around them. They are affected by and in turn affect the environment in which they operate. Systems Theory describes organisations as a set of subsystems that affect each other and jointly interact with the external environment. Lubbe and Puth (2002:41) define a system as 'a set of objects or entities that interrelate with one another to form a whole'. Organisations have to adjust and adapt as they change from within and as the environment changes. They form part of a social system that consists of individuals or groups such as suppliers, local

communities, employees, customers and government, who all interact with it. Public relations is there to develop and maintain good relationship with these publics, to help the organisation achieve its objectives. Tench and Yeomans (2006:27) describe organisations as having typically five subsystems.

Figure 2.6: Organisational subsystems



Source: Tench and Yeomans (2006: 27)

Figure 2.6 above illustrates the five subsystems of an organisation. Tench and Yeomans (2006: 27) maintain that production subsystems produce the products or services of an organisation. Maintenance subsystems work throughout the organisation encouraging employees to work together. Disposal subsystems encompass the marketing and distribution of products and services. Adaptive subsystems help the organisation adjust to its changing environment, such as the strategic planning role. Management subsystems control and direct all the other subsystems and manage any conflicting demands that they might have. They also negotiate between the requirements of the environment for example, demand for a particular product and the survival needs of the organisation (supply of that product). Usually the board and senior management of the organisation undertake this responsibility.

According to Lubbe and Puth (2002:41), “the systems approach is one of the most fruitful approaches to public relations management. This approach illuminates the part which public relations plays in the effective operation of the organisation”. For an organisation to be successful, it needs to operate as an open system. It has been noted that the organisation which has the greatest potential for ongoing success is one that interacts actively with its environment. Tench and Yeomans (2006: 27) suggest that by taking a systems perspective, it can be seen that public relations professionals have a *boundary-spanning* role. They work at the boundaries within organisations, working with all the internal subsystems by helping these subsystems with their external communication by both providing expert advice on what and how to communicate and by helping them with implementation. For example, public relations may work closely with marketing (disposal subsystem) on product support and with senior management (management subsystem) on investor relations.

Seitel (2006:87) further claims that public relations’ practitioners function at the edge of an organisation as liaisons between the organisation and its internal and external publics. In other words, public relations practitioners have one foot inside the organisation and one outside. As ‘boundary managers’, public relations practitioners support their colleagues by helping them communicate across organisational lines both

within and outside the organisation. In this way, public relations professionals also become systems managers, knowledgeable about and able to deal with complex relationship inherent in the organisation.

Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000: 218) base their theoretical framework on the systems theory. They state that the interdependence of elements in a system forms the basis of all interactions and relationships. Furthermore, the elements of “mutuality of understanding, trust, credibility, emotion, intimacy and similarity, immediacy, and dominance-submission” should be taken into account, as all contribute to the understanding of relationships. Based on this, public relations is, therefore, a practice where the process includes the influencing of the environment. Public relations performs surveillance and information- distribution roles; in addition it has an important role to govern and maintain an organisation as an open system and ensure that an organisation is adaptable and flexible to all changes within the environment and remains stable at all times. Public relations can help and govern organisations to maintain this interaction.

Lubbe and Puth (2002:41) maintain that the Systems Approach offers a framework which places and positions the public relations process logically within the ambit of the organisation’s operations. The Systems Approach is an abstract perceptual framework which is an exceptionally good aid to understanding and practising public relations. Cutlip *et al.* (2000:190) maintain that applying the open systems approach to public relations calls for purposeful sensing of the environment to anticipate and detect changes that affect organisational relationships with publics. Public relations must be selectively sensitive to specifically defined publics that are mutually affected or involved by organisational policies, procedures and actions. An open systems approach to public relations has the capacity to initiate corrective actions within organisations and direct programmes to affect knowledge, predisposition and behaviour of both internal and external publics. The outcomes sought are maintenance or achievement of goals that reflect the mutual interest of organisations and their publics. Thus, organisations employing open systems public relations maintain their relationships by adjusting and

adapting themselves and their publics to ever-changing social, political and economic environments.

Therefore, public relations is important to build an understanding and knowledge of the contribution of both terrains to the importance of relationships. Emphasis should also be placed on the strategic importance of public relations in organisations so that organisations may acquire a holistic approach to communication and relationship management. Lubbe and Puth (2002:41) reinforce that it should also be noted that in addition to all the public relations functions, the open systems approach gives public relations the role to recognise changes in the organisation's social settings and advise clients or employees on how the organisation should change itself and respond to establish a "common meeting ground". Public relations professionals are agents and managers of change, both inside and outside their organisations.

2.9 Qualities of an open system

Cutlip *et al.* (2000:60), identify the four important qualities of an open system, namely openness, adaptability, stability and flexibility.

2.9.1 Openness

An open system has permeable boundaries which permit the exchange of information, material or energy with its environment. All organisations function as an open system. Public relations can therefore, perform a surveillance and information- distribution role to maintain the openness of an organisation.

2.9.2 Adaptability

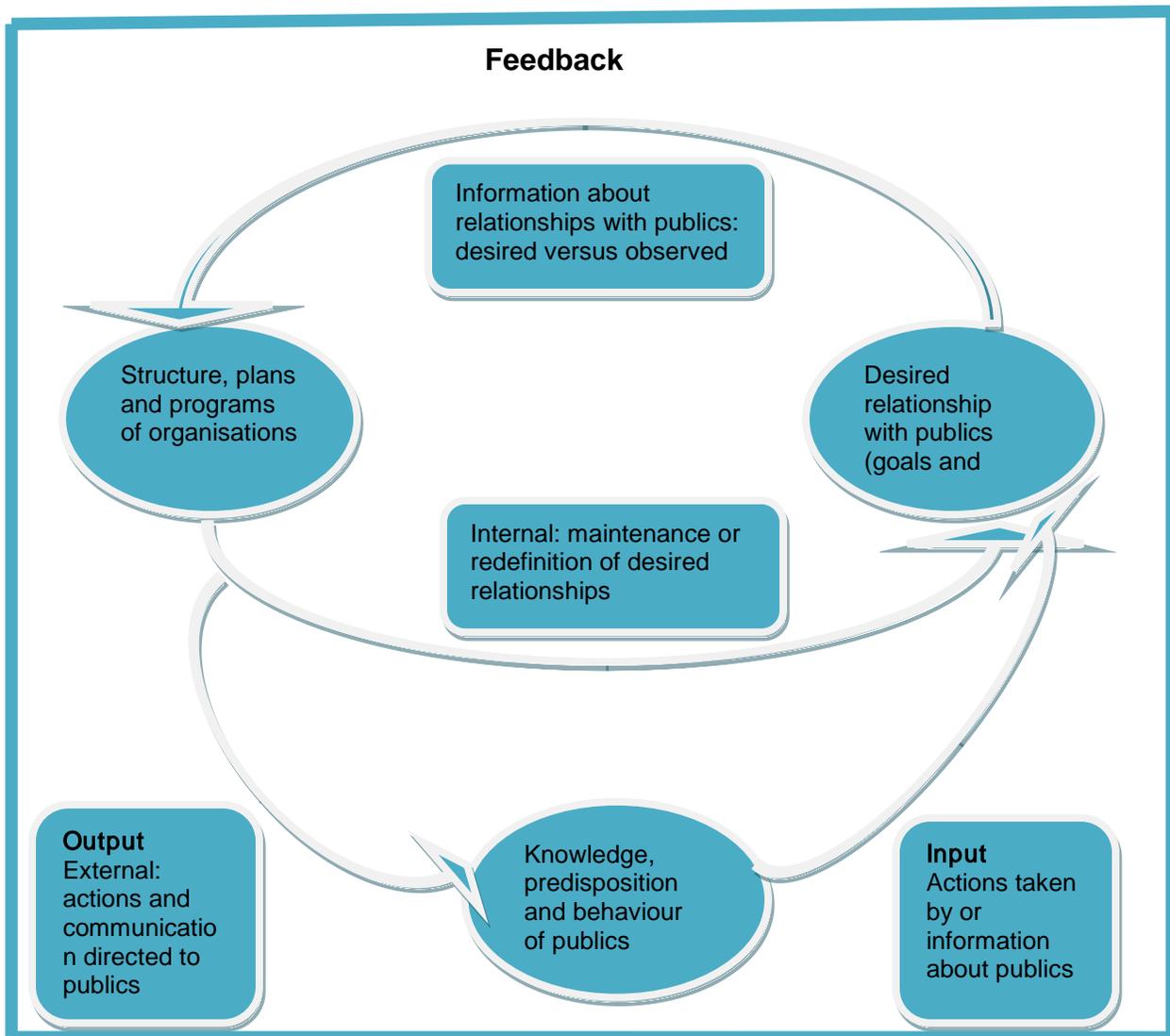
The systems approach emphasizes the dynamic nature of systems, concentrating upon emerging processes rather than static structures. Open systems change and adapt because of their interaction with their environments. "Public relations exists to keep

institutions alert to an ever shifting environment of circumstances and public opinion". Therefore, in times of change within the environment, public relations can assist organisations with research, implementing plans of action and evaluating those plans to determine how the organisation can better adapt to the changes in the environment. Public relations is therefore an on-going activity. It must anticipate problems and eliminate causes before problems arise. It is not there to rescue an operation or to apologise for it.

2.9.3 Stability and Flexibility

Stability permits the continued existence of the system as a whole over time. Flexibility permits the alteration of the system which in turn allows the appropriate operation of that system within a changing environment. Due to changes in the environment, organisations may find themselves in positions they never anticipated. Here again public relations may play an advisory role whereby they do research as to what an organisation needs to do in order to sustain its stability and give advise as to what organisations can do to adapt to change. Lubbe and Puth (2002:42) conclude that the systems approach offers a framework which places and positions the public process logically within the ambit of the organisations operations. The interaction patterns are the product of communication, which is an essential component of organisational functioning. To maintain the organisation as an actively outward orientated entity, management and public relations promote and maintain a perception of the organisation as an adaptable open system.

Figure 2.7: Open systems model of public relations



Source: Cutlip *et al.* (2000:190)

Figure 2.7 above illustrates the open systems model applied to public relations. The approach emphasises the primary role of communication in a system. Cutlip *et al.* (2000:190) maintain that applying the open systems approach to public relations first and foremost calls for purposeful sensing of the environment to anticipate and detect changes that affect organisational relationships with publics. Public relations must be selectively sensitive to specifically defined publics that are mutually affected or involved by organisational policies, procedures and actions.

Cutlip *et al.* (2000:190) postulate that the open systems approach gives public relations the role to recognise changes in the organisation's social settings and advise clients or employees how the organisation should change itself and respond so as to establish a "common meeting ground". Public relations professionals are agents and managers of change, both inside and outside their organisation. They plan and facilitate organisational and social adjustments and adaptation using, primarily, communication. Public relations has an important management role to play, through communication of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholder'. Consequently, public relations exists, and all modern organisations regardless of size, complexity and needs should be concerned with public relations. It should be emphasised that good public relations is the conscious effort to inform and be informed, provides knowledge, understanding, goodwill and good reputation. Stone (1995: 18) further notes that public relations exists to keep institutions alert to an ever shifting environment of circumstances and public opinion. Public relations is, therefore, an on-going activity and a part of a policy of ongoing communication. It must anticipate problems and eliminate causes before problems arise. Organisations ought to acknowledge the importance of public relations, its functions and how public relations can help improve communication within an organisation.

This is not to say that advertising, marketing and all other disciplines should not enjoy a close partnership with public relations. Clearly, all departments must work to maintain their own independence while building long-term, mutually beneficial relationships for the good of the organisation. Lubbe and Puth (2002:48) maintain that the systems approach implies an understanding of the 'Glue' which holds organisational systems together; the communication process of the underlying culture which exists within the organisation. Tench and Yeomans (2006:27) maintain that systems refer to the theory that describes how organisations work in terms of interlocking and interdependent systems of communication. It embraces both the internal and external environments. Systematized organisations tend to be authoritarian, highly structured and reactive in nature. Based on this, public relations should, therefore, know the ends towards which

the organisation strives. From the systems perspective, public relations may even play a role in the definition of desired objectives. Public relations incorporates thorough and effective communication within the organisation and with the environmental publics. Public relations, therefore, plays an important role of being the 'Glue' which holds organisational systems together, and promoting a free flow of information throughout the organisation both internally and externally.

Cutlip *et al.* (2000:175) postulate that public relations deals with the interdependence of organisations and others in their environments. Furthermore, public relations maintains that organisations depend on their environments for many things: charters to operate, personnel, funds to operate and grow, freedom to pursue missions. To prosper and endure, all organisations must accept the public's responsibility imposed by an increasingly interdependent society; communicate, despite multiplying barriers, with publics that are often distant and diverse; and achieve integration into the communities that they were created to serve. The first point represents the source of public relations thinking in management. The second point explains the growth of public relations as a specialised staff function. The third point states the goal of both management and public relations. Viewed in this perspective, public relations' essential role is to help organisations adjust and adapt to changes in their environment. Furthermore, public relations should take a strategic role and be part of management in order to better manage, influence and enhance an organisation's relationships with its stakeholders. The above also justifies the role of public relations by highlighting that public relations should be at the heart off all activities within an organisation. Consequently, the public relations practitioner is responsible both to the institution and to its various publics. He or she distributes information that enables the institution's publics to understand its policies.

A close examination of the systems theory reveals that public relations operates within and across different departments within an organisation. The theory explains and illustrates how the public relations process unfolds at both the organisational level and how it is carried through to the various departments. Furthermore, the theory helps the

marketing and public relations functions to co-exist and share a synergistic relationship. Based on this, research continues to investigate existing perceptions of the positioning of the public relations function within the organisation, with the aim of examining the role of public relations within the selected organisations. The literature from this chapter is, therefore, used to formulate an instrument to examine the role of public relations within organisations.

2.10 Conclusion

The above literature review explains the role and functions of public relations within an organisation. It further discusses how the public relations department is positioned within an organisation as a subsystem. It then uses this review to underpin the research instrument with the intention of probing the role of public relations within selected corporate organisations in the greater Durban area.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter explained the role and functions of public relations within an organisation. It further discussed how the public relations department is positioned within an organisation as a subsystem. It then used the review to underpin the research instrument with the intention of probing the role of public relations within selected corporate organisations in the greater Durban area. This chapter focuses on the research methodology employed in this study. It explains the necessary research steps, the instruments used to gather data and the procedures followed in the administration and co-ordination of the research instrument.

3.2 Research Approach

Welman, Kruger, and Mitchell (2005:52) postulate that when one conducts research to investigate a research hypothesis or a research question, one collects data from the objects of one's enquiry in order to solve the problem concerned. The results that are obtained should, therefore, shed light on the tenability of the hypothesis and it should give an indication whether to accept or reject the hypothesis. A crucial element in this connection is the research instrument that one intends to use. Creswell (2007: 249) states that the term 'research approach' refers to the entire process of research, from conceptualising a problem to writing the narrative, not simply the methods such as data collection, analysis and report writing. Yin (2003:20) further argues that the research approach is the logical sequence that connects the empirical data to a study's initial research questions and, ultimately, to its conclusions.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 134) maintain that qualitative research studies typically serve one or more of the following purposes:

- *Description:* They can reveal the nature of certain situations, settings, processes, relationships, systems, or people;
- *Interpretation:* They enable a researcher to gain new insights about a particular phenomenon; develop new concepts or theoretical perspectives about the phenomenon; and/or discover the problems that exist within the phenomenon;
- *Verification:* They allow a researcher to test the validity of certain assumptions, claims, theories, or generalisation within real-world contexts; and
- *Evaluation:* They provide a means through which a researcher can judge the effectiveness of particular policies, practices, or innovations.

Bergman (2008:11) reinforces that qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality; they intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. Such research emphasises the value laden nature of inquiry. They seek answers to questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning. Qualitative research generally examines people's worlds and actions in narrative or descriptive ways more closely representing the situation as experienced by the participants. Kluge (2000: 1) explains that qualitative field studies can be used successfully in the description of groups, small communities and organisations. Such field studies focus on the behavioural regularities of everyday situations, organisational relationships between individuals or within groups, attitudes and rituals. Denzin and Lincoln (1994), quoted in Welman *et al.* (2005:8), state that qualitative research deals with subjective data that is produced by the minds of respondents or interviewees. Here, the researcher tries to understand the significance which respondents attach to their environment.

Creswell (2007: 249) further affirms that qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on a distinct methodological tradition of enquiry that explores a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyses words, reports, detailed views of information, and conducts the study in a natural setting. This study is mainly empirical in that it seeks to draw conclusions based on the data collected from the interviews. This study has, therefore, used one methodological

approach, namely, the qualitative research approach. Qualitative research is based on flexible and explorative methods because it enables the researcher to change the type of data being collected progressively so that a deeper understanding of what is being investigated can be achieved. Based on this understanding, the research instrument will take the form of interview schedules.

3.3 Target population

A population is a group of potential participants to whom a researcher wants to generalise the results of a study. The target population is the population to which the researcher ideally would like to generalise his or her results. Welman (2005:52) states that the population is the study object and consists of individuals, groups, organisations, human products and events, or the conditions to which they are exposed. A research problem, therefore, relates to a specific population. A population encompasses the total collection of all units of analysis about which the researcher wishes to make specific conclusions. Therefore, the target population selected for this study is based on the following business sectors: manufacturing, beverages and freight transport.

3.4 Sample

Sommer and Sommer (2007:237) state that the entire group of people or cases of direct interest to the investigation is called the population. The smaller group selected for the study is called the sample. It is often impossible to study the whole population. Researchers make use of a sample to select research subjects (participants) who would represent the whole research population. Swetnam (2000: 42) postulates that a sample is, therefore, the subset of a population selected to participate in a research study. This study has targeted seven corporate organisations within the greater Durban area. These organisations represent the above mentioned business sectors, and were selected on the basis of their size, influence on the South African corporate world (most are listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange) and willingness to participate in the study. The selection was also assisted by identifying current trends among these

organisations in terms of merging public relations with marketing to form one department, as well as their perspectives on the role of public relations within their organisations.

3.5 Sampling method

Polit (2006:236) maintains that a sampling method is the process of selecting the sample from a population to obtain information regarding a phenomenon that represents the population of interest. The sampling method is devised to select the population eligible for the research study. The selection of the sample is a very important stage. This research is meant to provide an insight and explore the role of public relations within an organisation. The purposive sample method was chosen as the most appropriate method for this research, as the researcher applied knowledge of the research problem to handpick the respondents from the selected organisations. Here, the researcher relied on her experience, ingenuity or previous research findings to deliberately obtain units of analysis.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 206) state that in purposive sampling, people or other units are chosen, as the name implies, for a particular purpose. For instance, we might choose people who we have decided are “typical” of a group of those who represent diverse perspectives on an issue. Sommer and Sommer (2007:241) affirm that a purposive sample targets the individuals thought to be most central to the research questions. Purposive samples are select and often small, and a particular respondent’s point of view cannot be assumed to represent the views of other group members. The advantage is obtaining an insider’s unique perspective. Creswell (2007: 125) further asserts that purposeful sampling means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 144) maintain that qualitative researchers draw their data from many sources, not only from a variety of people, but perhaps also from objects,

textual materials, and audiovisual and electronic records. The particular entities they select comprise their sample, and the process of selecting them is called sampling. More often, qualitative researchers are intentionally non random in their selection of data source. Instead, their sampling is purposeful; they select those individuals or objects that will yield the most information about the topic under investigation. Creswell (2007:125) reinforces that the concept of purposeful sampling is used in qualitative research. This means that the inquirer selects individuals and sites for study because they can purposefully inform and provide an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. Based on this, the researcher chose participants who represent and give a unique perspective on the issue of merging the public relations department with the marketing departments to form one department and the positioning of the public relations discipline within the hierarchy of the organisation.

3.6 Sample size

The researcher has targeted corporate organisations within the greater Durban area. Two individuals per organisation were interviewed for the study (head of department and one public relations practitioner). The only criterion was that the participants are practitioners who practise public relations within their organisations. The researcher found them to be directly involved with the respective areas as well as experts in their fields. Participant's levels of qualification and positions within the organisation vary; however, they all work for the public relations department or other departments under which public relations falls and are responsible for performing public relations' duties. The nature of this study pertains to public relations; therefore the researcher only chose public relations and communications managers as the unit of analysis for each company.

Table 3.1 Details of respondents

| NAME OF ORGANISATION | PORTFOLIO OF RESPONDENTS | NAME OF DEPARTMENT |
|-----------------------------|--|---------------------------|
| South African Breweries | Public Relations Officer/Tour guide | Trade Brewing |
| Transnet | Communications Manager Public Relations Officer | Communications |
| Mondi | Public Relations Officer | Marketing |
| Tiger Brands | Communications Manager | Communications |
| Tongaat Hulett's | Marketing Manager | Marketing |
| Toyota SA | Communications Manager | Communications |
| Sappi | Communications Manager Public Relations Assistant | Communications |

3.7 Data collection method

Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 85) state that research is a viable approach to a problem only when there is data to support it. The term data is plural (singular is datum) and comes from the past participle of the Latin verb dare, which means "to give". Therefore, data are those pieces of information that any particular situation gives to an observer.

Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 143) further maintain that qualitative researchers often use multiple forms of data in any single study. They might use observations, interviews, objects, written documents, electronic material (email messages and web sites), and anything that can help them answer their research questions. Furthermore, many qualitative studies are characterised by an emerging design. Polit (2006:246) suggests that regardless of the kinds of data involved, data collection in a qualitative study takes a great deal of time. The researcher should record any potentially useful data thoroughly, accurately and systematically, using field notes, audiotapes or any other suitable means. As they collect data, many qualitative researchers also begin jotting notes (sometimes called memos) about their initial interpretations of what they are

seeing and hearing. Data collection is a key feature of the research process. Data can be whatever a researcher deems necessary to address a research question. This study has used a semi-structured interview schedule as the data collection method. A semi-structured interview schedule was appropriate for this study; the researcher knew in advance exactly what needed to be known and could then frame appropriate questions to obtain the necessary information.

Welman *et al.* (2005: 69) mention that the people being studied must know the nature of the study and be willing to participate in it. This is informed consent, and any data collected should not be traceable back to particular individuals thus maintaining their right to privacy. Letters (one from the researcher's supervisor and one from the researcher) were sent out to the participants highlighting the nature of the study and requesting permission to participate in this study (see annexure 1 and 2). The purpose of this letter was to establish the legitimacy of the study, thereby ensuring the respondent's trust. As soon as permission from the companies was received, each company was emailed with an interview schedule and appointments were set up to conduct face to face interviews. Based on the literature review, core themes on the role of public relations within an organisation were identified. The literature review served as primary data in compiling the interview guide; the questions consist of open-ended questions (see annexure 3). The questions were personally administered by the researcher in the form of interviews, which were face-to-face. The respondents were briefed beforehand on the objectives of the research study. The most important advantage and reason for choosing interviews for this research is that interviews are a flexible method of data collection. The researcher could also explain and expatiate on questions, in case they were not clear to respondents. These interviews attempted to understand how individuals (participants) experience their life-world and how they make sense of their organisations. The interview questions were directed at the participant's experiences, feelings, beliefs and convictions about the topic: which is "The role of public relations within an organisation". The interviewer emphasised and focussed on the participant's first-hand experience of his or her organisation. The interviews served as a primary source of data; reports and manuscripts from the organisations served as

secondary sources for collecting the data. The data received provided a discussion of the results, allowing the researcher to analyse the responses in the next chapter.

3.8 Pilot testing

Pilot testing involves trying out a questionnaire on a small group of individuals before using it for substantive research. Pilot testing is important as it gives the researcher an idea of whether or not the questions will be effective in order to gather adequate information for the study. Welman *et al.* (2005: 148) postulate that when a new measurement instrument is developed, it is useful to “test it out” before administering it to the actual sample. This process of “testing out” is done by means of a pilot study, which entails administering the instrument to a limited number of subjects from the same population as that for which the eventual project is intended.

Welman *et al.* (2005: 148) further argue that the purpose of a pilot study can be:

- To detect possible flaws in the measurement procedure

Such as ambiguous instructions, inadequate time limits, and so forth.

- To identify unclear or ambiguously formulated items

In such a pilot study the actual questions are put to the “participants” and they are then asked to indicate how they have interpreted the formulated questions.

- An opportunity for researchers to notice non-verbal behaviour

On the part of the participants that may possibly signify discomfort or embarrassment about the content or wording of the questions. A pilot study is particularly useful if the researcher has compiled the measuring instrument specifically for the purpose of the research study. Sommer and Sommer (2007:

8) maintain that no matter how carefully you review the background literature and design the study, there is no substitute for a pilot study before the actual data is collected. A pilot study is a preliminary use of a procedure designed to identify problems and omissions before the actual study is conducted. Based on this, an interview guide was designed and a pilot test was administered to a communications manager, a public relations practitioner and a corporate affairs manager. The results of the test revealed two concerns; respondents felt that there should be consistency with certain words to avoid misunderstanding and also felt that some questions were vague and needed more clarification. The researcher was also advised to include more open ended questions, as the research aims to understand the worldview of the respondents. The respondents felt that close ended questions gave an impression of leading them in a certain direction. The researcher ensured that all the suggestions were considered when the final interview guide was formulated.

3.9 Data analysis

Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 150) argue that there is usually no single “right” way to analyse the data in qualitative study. The researcher begins with a large body of information and must, through inductive reasoning, sort and categorise it and gradually boil it down to a small set of abstract, underlying themes. The researcher often determines the specific characteristics to be studied only after carefully scrutinising the body of material in search of potentially meaningful characteristics to identify and count; this is known as content analysis. *Welman et al.* (2005: 211) note that field notes can be described as detailed notes made by hand, tape recordings, and observations, that are compiled during qualitative interviewing. In order to analyse the raw field notes, these have to be processed. This entails converting the notes into write ups which should be intelligible products that can be read, edited for accuracy, commented on, and analysed. Since raw field notes, when reviewed stimulate the researcher to remember things said at that time that were not included in the original notes, write-ups can be used to replace some of the missing content. Tape recordings and dictation

should be transcribed to text before it can be subjected to the same processing as handwritten notes. It is important that the “uhs”, “ers”, pauses, word emphasis, mispronunciation and incomplete sentences are taken into consideration in the write up.

The data analysis presents the results of the study and conclusions that were drawn from the study. It further presents a set of recommendations based on the interpretation of the results. Primary data gathered from the interviews; and secondary data gathered from the organisation’s reports and manuscripts was analysed and used to offer recommendations for the research hypothesis. Ryan and Bernard (n.d.) state that theme identification is one of the most fundamental tasks in qualitative research. Themes can be described as “umbrella” constructs which are usually identified by the researcher before, after and during data collection. Therefore, data gathered from the interviews was organised into manageable themes, analysed and presented as findings using relevant graphs and tables.

3.10 Reliability and Validity

Polit (2006:246) state that behavioural research is conducted in accordance with the scientific method. The subject matter is directly observable, or can be made so through some type of representation, for example questionnaire responses. In order to be scientific, the obtained information (data) must be valid and reliable. Validity is the degree to which a procedure produces genuine and credible information. Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 28) postulate that the validity of a measurement instrument is the extent to which the instrument measures what it is supposed to measure. Whereas reliability is the consistency with which a measuring instrument yields a certain result when the entity being measured has not changed. We can measure something accurately only when we can also measure it consistently. Yet measuring something consistently does not necessarily mean measuring it accurately. Leedy and Ormrod (2005: 28) conclude that reliability is a necessary but insufficient condition for validity. Therefore, both validity and reliability, then, reflect the degree to which we may have error in our measurements. Meanwhile Welman *et al.* (2005: 142) suggest that validity is the extent

to which the research findings accurately represent what is really happening in the situation. An effect or test is valid if it demonstrates or measures what the researcher thinks or claims it does, while reliability is concerned with the findings of the research and relates to the credibility of the findings. In determining whether our findings are reliable, we need to ask the following question: "Will the evidence and conclusions stand up to the closest scrutiny?"

Reliability of the research was ensured by making use of the research instrument, namely, the interview guide for all the respondents. The researcher also ensured that the questions were correctly asked and that respondents understood them clearly. Where necessary, the researcher repeated the answers given by the respondent to ensure that the researcher had indeed understood the response given to each question.

Swetnam (2000:30) states that validity is about carefully constructing definitions of concepts, hypotheses or propositions so that they can be translated clearly and predictably into detailed operational methods, down to the level of specific questions and observations. It is about ensuring that there are strong transparent relationships between the conceptual or theoretical part of the research, the phenomenon identified for investigation and the method a researcher intends to use to get access to that phenomenon. Validity refers to the degree to which an instrument measures what it is supposed to measure, and therefore, an unreliable instrument cannot be valid. Based on this, this study used face-to-face interviews as a valid instrument of collecting data. The researcher was able to communicate with the respondents without any problems, unlike telephonic interviews, where information and messages may be unclear or misunderstood, which could lead to wrong information being captured. In this case, there was minimal misunderstanding as both the researcher and the respondents were able to communicate clearly and solve problems or misunderstandings faced during the interviews. Content validity was also tested; this refers to the degree to which the test items reflect the domain that the test claims to cover. The instrument (interview guide) was developed after the researcher studied the literature as well as the conceptualisation which came from a rich firsthand knowledge of the researcher of the

domain. An expert in the field, the researcher's supervisor, also scrutinised the questions of the interview guide and compared them with the objectives of the study. The questions were valid as they are interlinked with the objectives and also related to the overall study.

3.11 Triangulation

Lee and Lings (2008:239) maintain that triangulation is one way in which one can try to enhance validity. Therefore, the findings will be valid as the study will use data triangulation to attempt to corroborate findings according to three different approaches. According to Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2009: 221), "reliability can be improved by the use of more than one observer. Generalisability can be improved by increasing the number of settings observed. Instead of focusing all of the attention on a single setting, several representatives' locations can be observed. If the same behaviours are seen in all the settings, then the observer can have more confidence in the findings." Bergman (2008: 23) argues that the original use of 'triangulation' within the literature of social science methodology, refers to checking the validity of an interpretation based on a single source of data by recourse to at least one further source that is of a strategically different type. The idea behind this concept of triangulation is that by drawing data from sources that have very different potential threats to validity, it is possible to reduce the chances of reaching false conclusions.

- Duffy (2007: 130) argues that triangulation is 'the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon'. Triangulation has vital strengths, encourages productivity research, enhances qualitative methods and allows the complementary use of quantitative methods. Hair, Bush, and Ortinau (2009: 221) state that triangulation is the technique that is often associated with establishing credibility in qualitative research. Triangulation requires that research inquiry be addressed from multiple perspectives. Based on this, the study, therefore, used the literature as primary data to compile the interview guide; a content analysis was conducted on the data gathered from the

interviews (primary data) and the organisation's reports and manuscripts (secondary data).

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter focuses on the research methodology employed in this study. It explains the necessary research steps, the instruments used to gather data and the procedures followed in the administration and co-ordination of the research instrument.

Based on the data gathered from the interviews, the next chapter will deal with data analysis. This will analyse and interpret the information from the interviews and use the findings to either confirm or reject the literature review.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed the research methodology employed for the study. It explained the necessary research steps, the instrument used to gather the data and the procedure followed in the administration of the research instrument. This chapter presents the results of the field work conducted amongst public relations and communications practitioners. It sets out to analyse and interpret the data gathered from the interviews. The findings of the study are then compared to the literature review as well as the systems theory model to determine the role of public relations within the selected organisations.

4.2 **Report and analysis of interview schedule administered to public relations, communications and marketing managers and practitioners**

4.2.1.1 The public relations department within an organisation

When asked whether the public relations department was a separate department, most (57%) of the respondents (depicted in figure 4.1) indicated that their organisations do not have a public relations department. The rest (43%) indicated that they do have a public relations department which has been incorporated into other interdependent departments such as communications and marketing. This confirms Davies (2004: 202) who argues that the home for public relations functions is still not clear in most organisations.

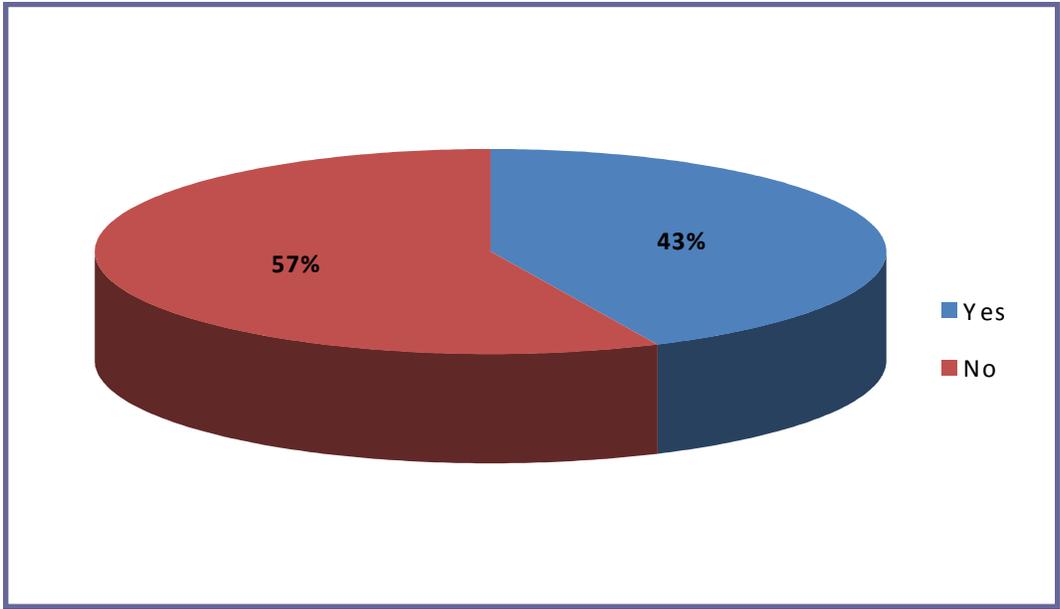


Figure 4.1: The public relations’ department within an organisation

4.2.1.2 The history of the public relations’ department

Findings indicate that there are various factors that influence the location of the public relations’ department within organisations. The responses received reveal that depending on the nature of the organisation, public relations cannot function independently of other departments such as marketing and communication. It is for this reason that 71% of the organisations (depicted in figure 4.2) have never had a public relations’ department that functioned independently from other departments such as marketing, media relations and/or communications departments. On the other hand, 29% of the organisations indicated that they have had a public relations department that functioned separately from the marketing department. Another respondent revealed that for her organisation, public relations is the ‘glue’ that holds all communication together. The respondent stated that *“the organisation previously had separate public relations and marketing departments, however, through research done the organisation came to a decision to have public relations professionals servicing other departments such as marketing, corporate social involvement and human resources”*. In this organisation, public relations is central in developing strategies and policies and further ensuring the successful implementation of such strategies and policies. Rensburg and

Cant (2009:49) confirm that public relations does not exist as a function on its own. It is an integral part of the communication function of an organisation. However, Botha (2010:95) proposes that communication programmes should be integrated or coordinated by a public relations or communications department that is separate from the marketing department.

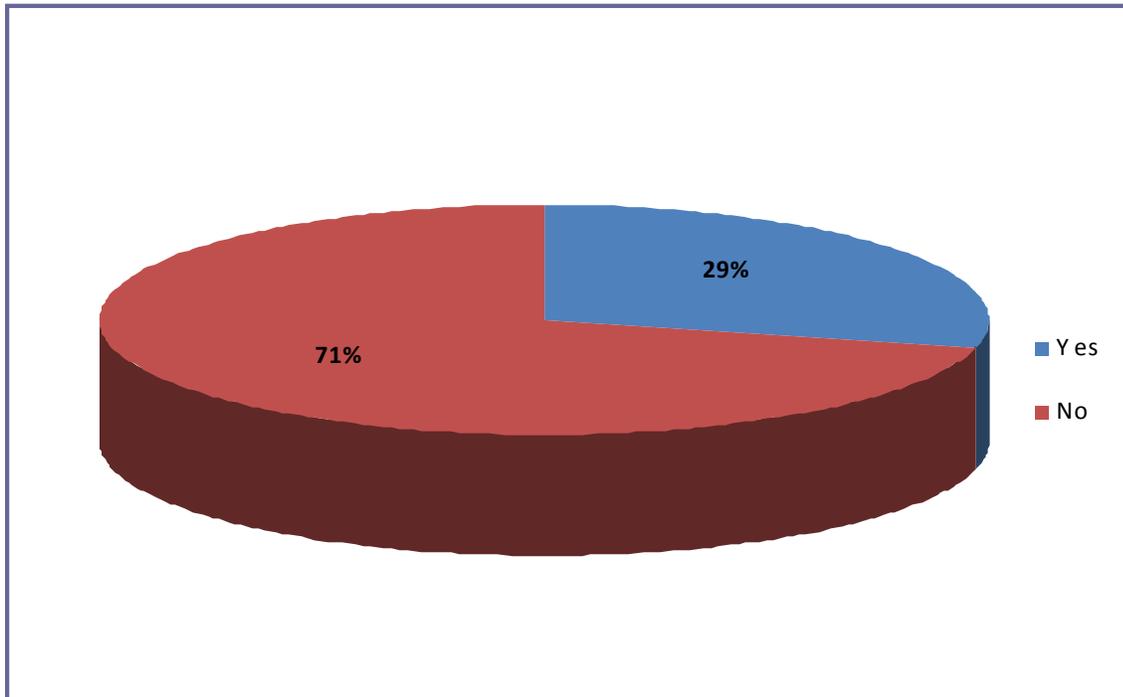


Figure 4.2: The history of the public relations' department

4.2.1.3 The location of the public relations' department

58% of the respondents indicated that within their organisations the public relations discipline is most likely to fall under the communications department. This view is supported by Stroh (2007:1) who stated that public relations should be defined as the umbrella function that manages all communication between an organisation and all its publics to build and enhance healthy relationships to benefit all parties involved. On the other hand, 14% of the respondents said public relations is housed under the marketing department. This affirms Stroh's (2007:1-15) view that marketing is one of the public relations field's cross-disciplines: hence there are many points of intersection between

the two disciplines both in a theoretical and practical sense. Other respondents (14%) revealed that public relations falls under the corporate affairs department within their organisation and a further 14% of the respondents indicated that public relations falls under a department called 'trade and brewing' and the human resources department. The respondents revealed that *"the organisation's public relations department is called the trade and brewing department. This department forms as a communicator between the brewery, marketing and the sales departments as well as all communication to stakeholders, both internal and external"*. All these responses indicate a significant dilemma that organisations face when locating the public relations department. This confirms the assertion of Cutlip *et al.* (2000: 60) that most organisations have not established or identified the role and position of public relations. Even practitioners disagree about the best structure and place for their functions in the various types of organisations. The evidence of this dilemma is illustrated by figure 4.3 below.

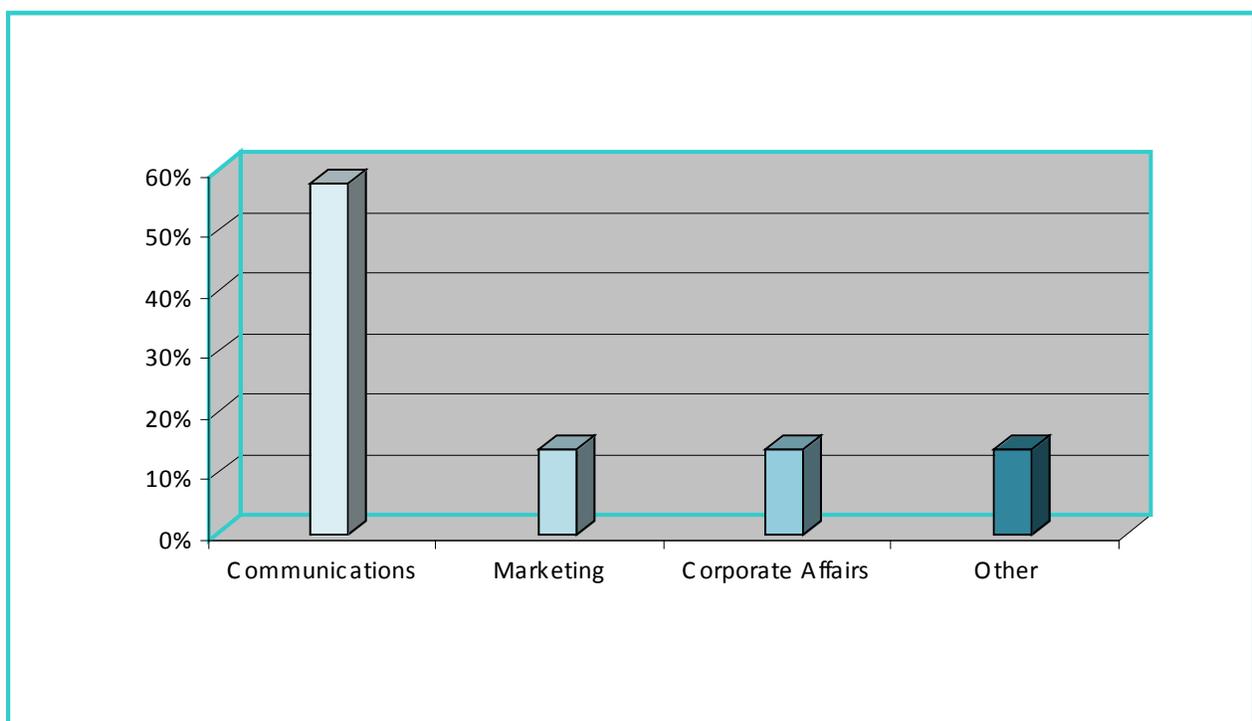


Figure 4.3: The location of the public relations' department

4.2.1.4 Staff complement within the public relations' and interdependent departments

Findings reflect various portfolios occupied by public relations professionals. Within the selected organisations, the respondents have indicated that public relations professionals are indeed called by different titles. Figure 4.4 indicates that 57% of the respondents revealed, that within their given department, the head of department is called the communications manager and there are public relations officers and assistants that work under this manager within the department. 29% indicated that the department is headed by a public relations and communications manager and has various subordinates such as marketing coordinator and corporate social investment coordinator and public relations coordinator. Other organisations (14%) revealed that the public relations department is actually called the Trade and Brewing department and the only public relations professional within the department is called the Tour Guide/Public relations officer. The above findings justifies the study by highlighting the currents trends and practices of public relations within South African corporate organisations, in terms of the portfolios held and the roles played by public relations professionals.

The results clearly show that the number of public relations' professionals working in either public relations or other departments that organisations view as interdependent to public relations, varies in size depending on the nature of the organisation. Respondents revealed that there is an overlap of job titles and description given to these professionals. This also depends on the various departments that public relations is incorporated into within an organisation. One organisation indicated that "*due to the integration of public relations with other departments, public relations practitioners may often share two functions (public relations and marketing)*". For this organisation, marketing professional provides substantial input into public relations related duties. For example, coordinating events and managing tours for the brewing department; media selection and providing press releases and brochures for the corporate

communications department; again initiating marketing campaigns, branding and publicity issues for the marketing department.

In support of this ongoing interaction between public relations and other departments, Grunig *et al.* (2002: 280) maintain that public relations functions also support other organisational functions, such as human resource management (relationships with employees and unions), lobbying (governmental communication), and financial management (investor relations and other financial relationships with stakeholders such as analysts and shareholders). It has also emerged that this interchangeable and overlapping functions between public relations', marketing and communications' departments has led to the integration and incorporation of public relations into these departments.

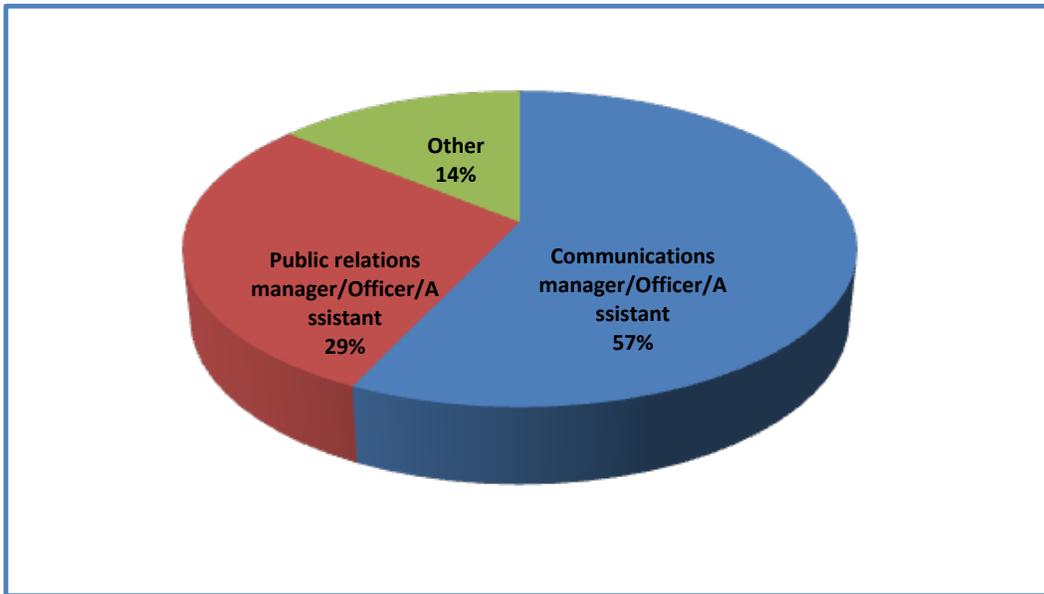


Figure 4.4: Staff complement within the public relations' and interdependent departments

4.2.2 The functions and roles of public relations within an organisation

4.2.2.1 Public relations' activities within organisations

According to figure 4.5, 80% of the organisations revealed that they were involved in public relations functions such as writing, crisis communication and events management. A further 60% indicated that they were involved in media relations and networking with the various stakeholders. 40% revealed that they were also involved in research and corporate social investment. The respondents reported that public relations plays an important part in a wide variety of ways throughout the organisations, most of these are directed towards helping the organisations to inform both internal and external public by providing information about the organisation or its products and services. Rensburg and Cant (2009:28) affirm that traditionally the role of public relations was to focus on communicating with stakeholders. It should also be noted that the various definitions of public relations revealed by Skinner *et al.* (2004:4) are important as they indicate the rapidly changing roles of public relations. Based on this, it is evident that public relations' activities may differ from organisation to organisations. The findings revealed the following information pertaining to the activities undertaken by the public relations' department:

Organisation One: revealed that public relations' professionals take care of everything that needs to be communicated to all stakeholders. This includes events management, all promotional activities and roll out of different programmes within the organisation such as weekly and monthly internal publications. Basically, the role of public relations is to ensure the smooth running of the production process and to get the information to the people and maintain a good image for the organisation.

Organisation Two: *public relations' role is to provide a service to internal customers regarding brewing training, beer appreciation and plant tours. Furthermore, provide training and presentation to internal consumer groups through ambassador training courses etc. Most importantly, public relations is there to develop and maintain*

relationships with external customers, and all relevant stakeholders. This includes hosting beer connoisseur evenings, consumer perception surveys and brewing competitions etc.

Organisation Three: *Public relations has a major role to improve visibility and positioning of the organisation and its products. This is done through various communication strategies, all of which must be formulated and implemented by the public relations department.*

Organisation Four: *stated that the functions of public relations within the organisation included the engagement and facilitation of business strategy and its implementation, to provide communication consulting and planning services to business units for integrated communication throughout the organisation and to manage internal events. Most importantly, public relations practitioners are the custodians of the brand (organisation).*

Organisation Five, Six and Seven: *added that a public relations practitioner is viewed as an ambassador of the organisation who promotes and maintains the good image of the organisation in their knowledge and by sharing valuable and required information to the relevant publics. His or her functions included putting together and ensuring correct specifications for each of the organisation's brands in order to maintain brand awareness but most importantly to manage all communication through the provision of accurate and useful information to the public.*

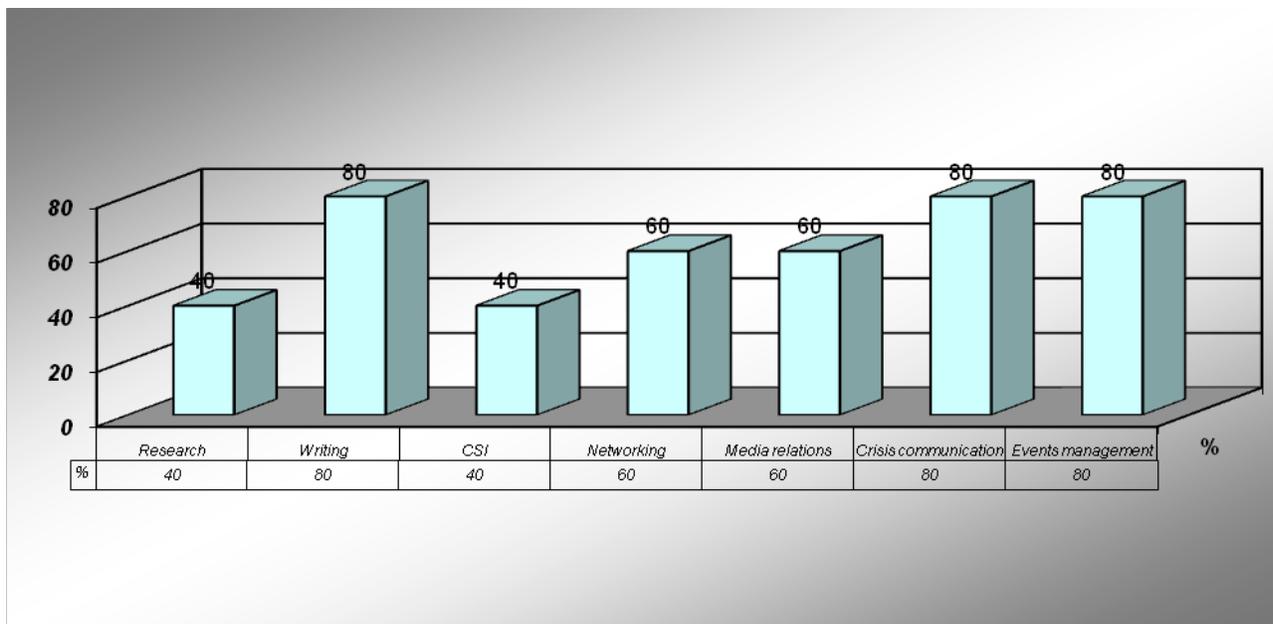


Figure 4.5: Public relations' activities within organisations

4.2.2.2 The role of a public relations practitioner within an organisation

Figure 4.6 highlights that 40% of the organisations view the role of public relations practitioners as communication technicians, whilst 60% indicated that their organisations viewed their roles as communication managers. The communication manager plans and manages public relations programmes, advises management, makes communication policy decisions and oversees their implementation. On the other hand, communication technicians are not involved in organisational decision making, but implement public relations programmes such as writing press releases, organising events or producing web content. Through critically looking at the two different roles that public relations practitioners play within the selected organisations, it can be deduced that the respondents defined a public relations practitioner as 'being a communicator, a go-between, an interpreter or communication link between the organisation and all its stakeholders. From the above, it is clear that public relations' professionals add value to an organisation. This supports Grunig *et al.* (2002:553) view that public relations professional add value to an organisation when they develop communal relationships with all publics affected by organisational behaviours not just those who give the organisation something in return.

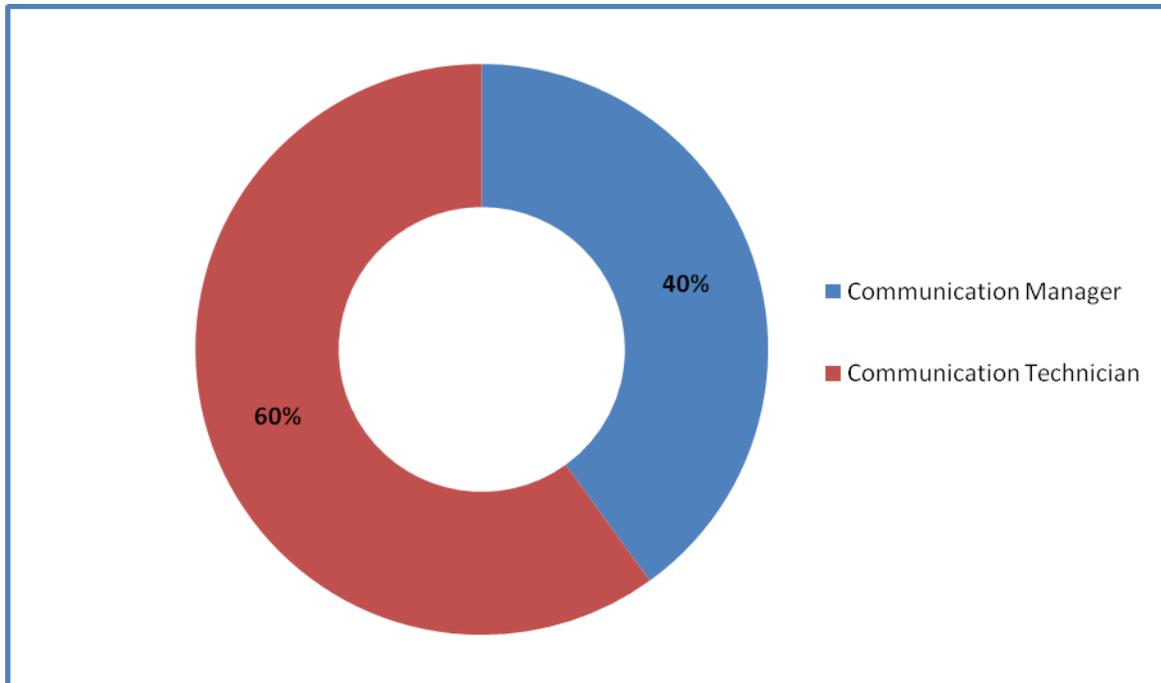


Figure 4.6: The role of public relations' practitioners within organisations

4.2.3 The location of public relations within the hierarchy of the organisation

4.2.3.1 The position of the public relations' discipline within the organisational structure

The findings have revealed that the location of the public relations department within the organisational structure depends on a variety of factors. These include the position of the most senior practitioner; the tasks allocated to the discipline; and how it is situated in relation to other disciplines. 14% of the selected organisations revealed that public relations is viewed as an interdependent department which is incorporated under the marketing division. The marketing manager has access and influence to top management and top level decision making as he has board of director status. 57% of the organisations revealed that public relations professionals work under the communications department, which is headed by the general manager for corporate communications. The general manager for corporate communications sits on the board of directors. This affirms the representation of communication at management level.

14% indicated that they do not have a public relations department. However, the public relations practitioner works under the brewing department. Here the practitioner occupies the role of being the ambassador for this department. The highest office in this department is held by the brewing master, who also has board of director status. Another 14% of the organisations indicated that it has a public relations and communications department that is also a home for other divisions such as corporate social investment. This organisation believes that public relations is a communication tool and therefore cannot be separate to a communications department. The department is headed by the public relations and communications manager. In this organisation, public relations does not sit on top level management, however, they have the head of marketing who represents the department at top level management. A further 14% revealed that their public relations department is located under the communications department. The communications department in turn reports to the Human Resources department. Therefore, to some extent, public relations is represented at top management level, as Human Resources is part of management. The respondent revealed that *“the organisation functions at a global level. Therefore, the public relations professional only services and functions at a provincial level. This means that for all the organisational divisions/plants and mills within the province, public relations is a major role player in the communication process. However, when it comes to the regional level the communications division takes over and under the human resources department reports directly to top level management.”*

It emerged that the majority of the respondents confirmed that most organisations have not established or identified the position of public relations within their organisation. This is supported by Cutlip *et al.* (2000:60) who mention that even practitioners disagree about what is the best structure and place for their functions in various types of organisations. Many organisations view public relations as being synonymous to marketing. Stroh (2007:1) reinforces that it is important to recognise that many cross-disciplines have been integrated to build theory for public relations in terms of relationships and relationship management.

However, problems are often encountered with organisations not understanding the difference between public relations as a discipline on its own, and public relations as a marketing tool. The above responses confirm that the structure of the organisation and the level where the public relations department and public relations professionals are situated within the organisation will determine to whom the head of the public relations department and the most senior public relations practitioner report. The findings revealed and responded to the first objective of this research project, which is to establish the positioning of public relations within the hierarchy of the selected organisation. The findings further indicated that the positioning of the public relations' discipline within an organisation also depends highly upon the nature and core business of an organisation.

4.2.3.2. The departmental report structure

It emerged that the majority of the respondents 29% (depicted in Fig 4.7) confirmed that the heads (marketing manager and public relations & communications manager) of their departments respectively report to the group marketing director who in turn reports to the chief executive officer. A further 14% revealed that the heads (communications manager) of their departments report to the general manager of corporate communications who then reports to the chief executive officer. 29% indicated that the head of their department (communications) reports to corporate affairs manager who in turn reports to the managing director of the organisation. 28% of the organisation revealed that their head of department reports to other senior managers such as senior trade and brewer master as well as the human resources director who then reports to the chief executive officer of the organisations. These findings point out that the majority of the respondents view public relations as being synonymous to marketing. Hutton (2001:205) argues that public relations has lost the battle for supremacy with marketing and is terminally threatened by its failure 'to define itself and to develop sophisticated and progressive theory' or develop its 'central tenet or core concept'. Grunig *et al.* (2002:262) propose for a genuine need to develop a new paradigm under which marketing and public relations can function effectively in the interest of the

organisation and the public it serves. This proposition, therefore, raises a call for a clear distinction between the marketing and public relations disciplines.

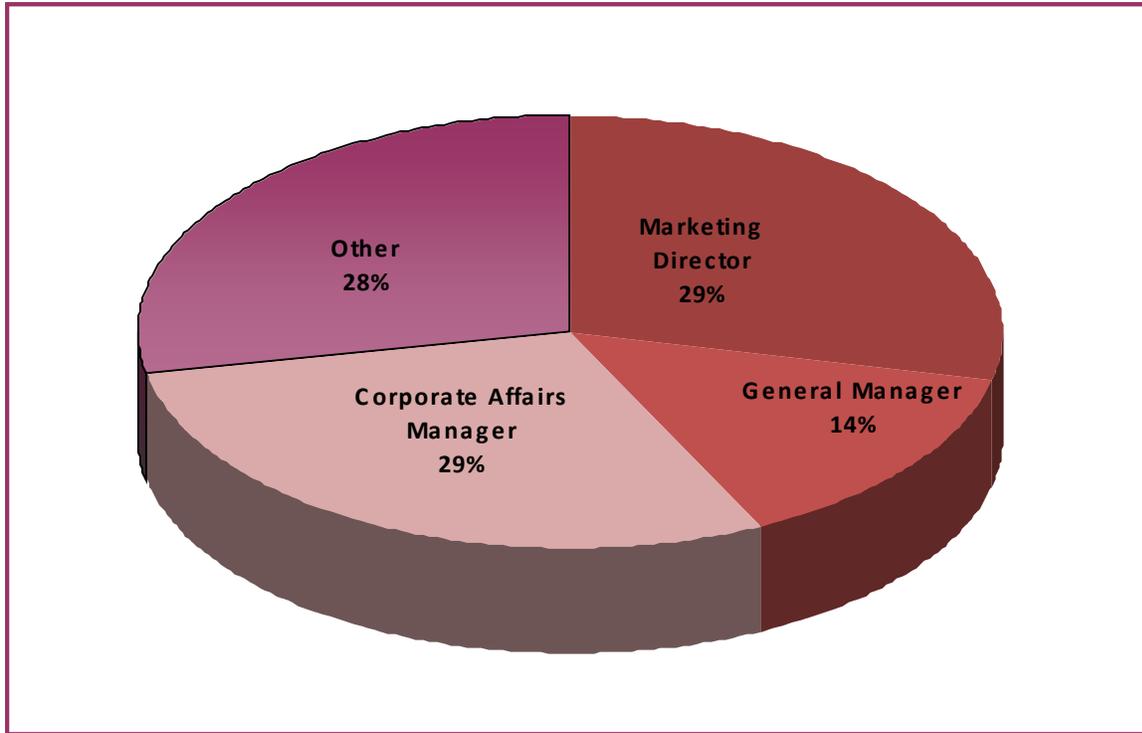


Figure 4.7: The departmental report structure

4.2.4 The distinction between public relations and marketing

4.2.4.1 The importance of a clear distinction between public relations and marketing

Findings have revealed that 57% (depicted in figure 4.8) of the organisations believe that it is very important to make a clear distinction between public relations and marketing. These organisations indicated that public relations is distinct from marketing in several ways, although, at times, their boundaries may overlap. Wilcox and Cameron's (2009: 17-18) affirm that public relations is distinct from marketing in several ways, although their boundaries may often overlap. Their functions overlap, for example, because both deal with an organisation's relationships and employ similar

communication tools to reach the public. Both have the ultimate purpose of assuring an organisation's success and economic survival. The two disciplines, however, approach this task from somewhat different perspectives or worldviews. These organisations stressed that public relations performs a much larger role within their organisations than just being a support system for other departments. Here the role of public relations involves establishing relationships and maintaining them; most importantly ensuring that communication prevails between all subsystems within the organisation. One respondent highlighted that *"In our organisation distinguishing between marketing and public relations is very important. For example, as public relations professional we do not go out to find customers. The marketing department does that. As public relations professionals we add value to the organisation by communicating effectively with all our stakeholders and ensuring that we maintain a good image for our organisation at all times. Public relations practitioners are responsible for building relationships and maintaining them for the long term benefit of the organisation. Marketing professionals on the other hand are responsible for identifying markets and ensuring that the organisation satisfies some need within the market and in turn makes profit from sales."*

29% of the respondents indicated that it was not important for their organisation to make a distinction between marketing and public relations. *This is mainly because the organisation has categorised both disciplines under the communications umbrella; therefore, the two disciplines will always complement one another in all the functions and roles performed.* 14% stated that it was important to make a clear distinction between the two disciplines. This is due to the fact that the nature of the organisation requires that one division (marketing) focuses on improving visibility of the organisation's products and positioning the different brands; this translates to basically building and maintaining markets for the organisation's products and services and satisfying customers, which is what marketing means for this particular organisation. Whilst the public relations division is responsible for building and maintaining meaningful relationships amongst all stakeholders in order to achieve the organisation's mission. In this organisation, public relations is, therefore, important because it focuses on promoting and upholding a good image for the organisation. This confirms Grunig et

al. (2007: 357) postulation that put the differences between public relations and marketing in sharp contrast by arguing that the marketing function should communicate with the markets for an organisation's goods and services. Public relations should be concerned with all the publics of the organisation.

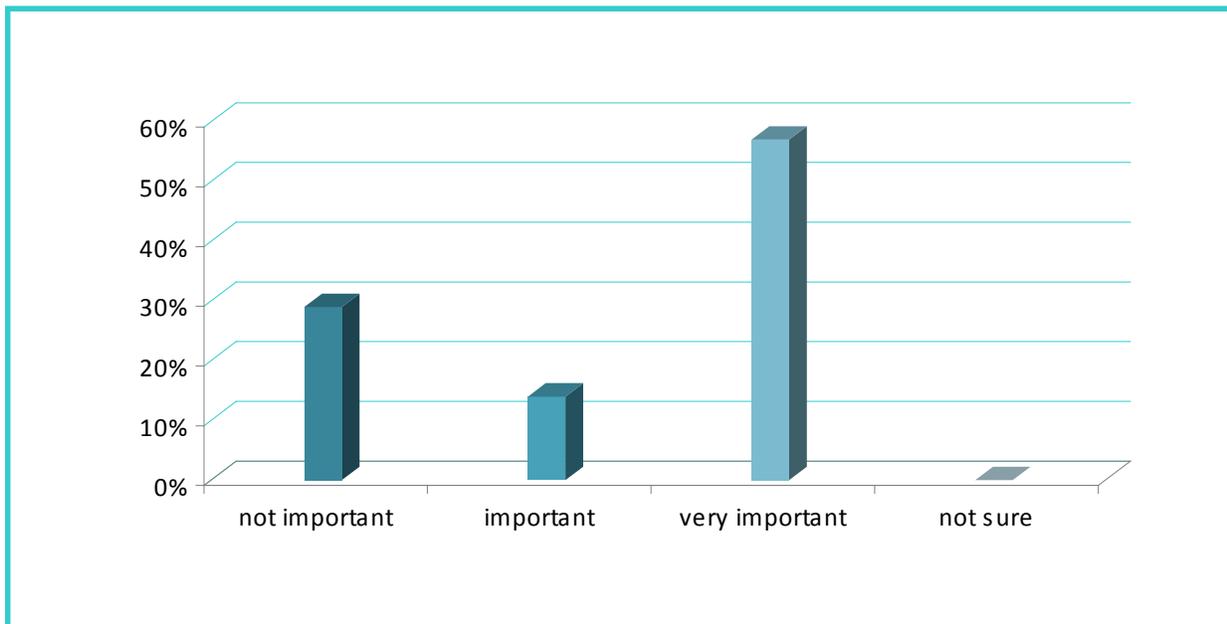


Figure 4.8: The distinction between public relations and marketing

4.2.5 The interaction between public relations and marketing

4.2.5.1 The interaction between public relations and marketing staff

Skinner *et al* (2004: 102) identified marketing and public relations as major external functions of a company. In support of the view, 70% of the respondents (depicted in figure 4.9) revealed that the two disciplines are complementary to each other. These findings confirmed that there is an ongoing relationship between the public relations and the marketing functions within these organisations. 15% of the organisations indicated that the two disciplines do interact to some extent when carrying out certain functions within the organisation, whilst, a further 15% of the organisation indicated that there is rarely any interaction between marketing and public relations. This is mainly due to the fact that public relations professionals were housed under a department that is rarely

found in most organisations. It was also revealed that this organisation is in the process of reintegrating public relations professionals either to the marketing or corporate affairs department. This means that in the future there might be some interaction between marketing and public relations within this organisation. From the responses received, it is evident that public relations provides substantial input into marketing related activities to a great extent. It is therefore perceived that public relations practitioners make a great contribution to marketing related activities, for example customer relations, branding, media selection, providing press releases, website management, marketing campaigns, event co-ordination and publicity issues.

This confirms Koekemoer's (2004:400) argument, that in practice, marketing consists of a coordinated programme of research, product design, packaging, pricing, promotion and distribution. The goal is to attract and satisfy customers on a long-term basis. Its fundamental responsibility is to build and maintain a market for an organisation's products and/or services. Product publicity is part of marketing communication. Since many think that publicity is synonymous with public relations, product publicity also contributes to the confusion between marketing and public relations. Public relations specialists do help in the marketing effort by writing product publicity stories and arranging media coverage of new products. The results clearly show that the number of public relations professionals working in other departments that organisation view as interdependent to public relations, varies in size depending on the nature of the organisation and the positioning of these professionals and their departments. Respondents also revealed that there is an overlap of job titles and descriptions given to both public relations and marketing professionals. One organisation indicated that, due to the integration of public relations with other departments, public relations practitioners may often share two functions (public relations and marketing). The respondent confirmed that *"the organisation views both public relations and marketing as communication functions. The respondents added that the interaction between the marketing and public relations professionals within their organisations has begun to develop into something much more complex and far-reaching. Marketers are now evolving and have a wider range of possible communication channels and technologies*

for getting messages across to their publics and for stimulating direct responses from their target audiences. At the same time affirmed that public relations has added value to communication processes with one of the unique aspects of public relations is that it is a two-way communication process with the aim to improve employee relations, customer relations and to educate and inform the general public about an organisation.”

The results from the above data indicate that both public relations and marketing are interdependent and share overlapping functions with regard to communication. From the findings, it appears that the level of interaction and overlapping of functions between the two disciplines has also led to the integration of both departments.

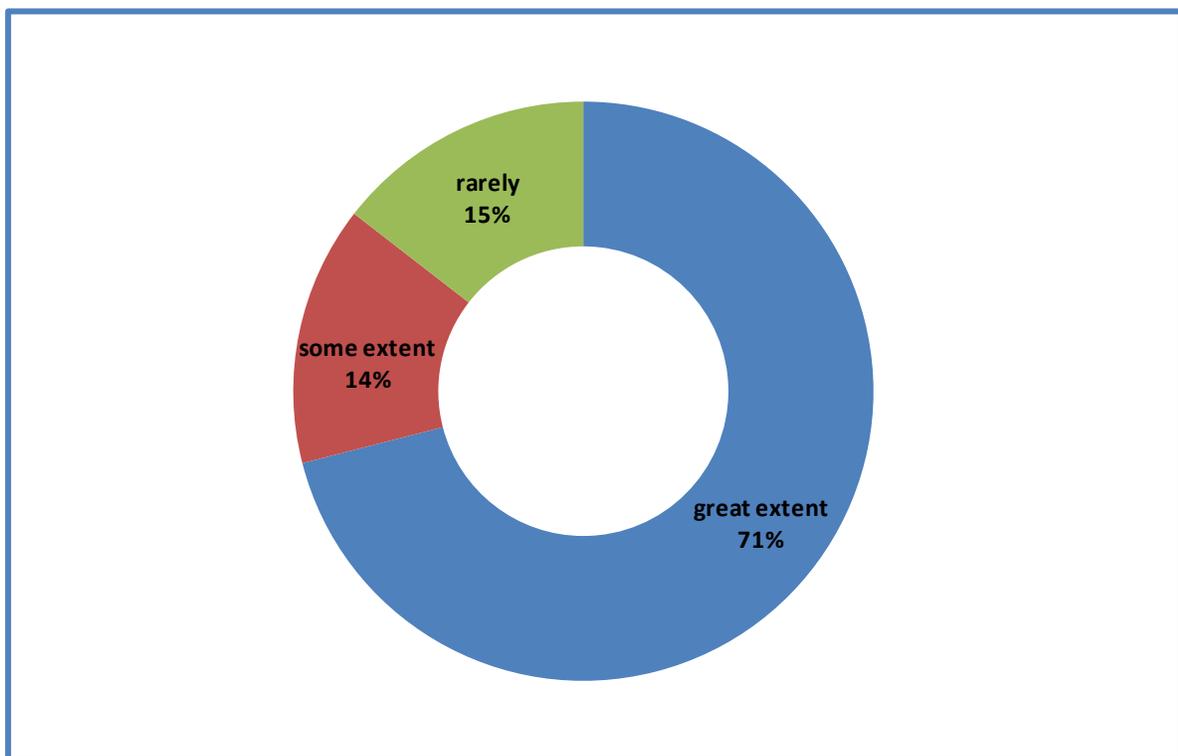


Figure 4.9: The interaction between public relations and marketing staff

4.2.6 The integration of public relations within the marketing department

4.2.6.1 Integrating public relations and marketing to form one department

Figure 4.10 indicates that 14% of the organisations agreed that public relations and marketing could operate as two separate functions, but that they should be housed under one department. 57% disagreed to the two disciplines being merged to form one department. These respondents argued that when the two departments operate as one, often there is a battle to define and clearly outline the objectives of the department since both disciplines have distinct roles that differ at times. Hutton (2001: 205) argues that ‘there remains a critical need for public relations to define its intellectual and practical domain to regain control of its own destiny’. The respondents mentioned that *“the two disciplines should be merged, especially looking at the nature of the organisation. She further highlighted that public relations refers to engaging consumers and educating them on beer appreciation and intrinsic, as well as brand appreciation. Where as the marketing department looks at branding (target market, positioning, merchandising etc). Clearly the functions of the two disciplines call for separate departments.”* Other respondents mentioned that *“the two disciplines work well independently. Even though the differences between the two may be very few, they still remain two different entities”*. 29% of the respondent revealed that within their organisation, the public relations department has been successful operating separately from marketing, but they felt that at times marketing greatly depended on public relations for various functions to help market and launch new products into the market. The respondents, therefore, felt that they could not agree nor disagree; but advised that should organisations reach the consensus to merge the two functions they should clearly redefine the roles and functions of the new department in order to ensure the overall success of the organisation which is ultimately dependent on the success of internal and external communication as well as building and maintaining relationships.

Findings have, therefore, revealed that organisations merge public relations with marketing because the two disciplines have been perceived to have overlapping

functions and share complementary characteristics. It has also emerged that for some organisations it is a matter of convenience, whereby staff members are equipped with both public relations and marketing skills which enable them to be comfortable with both disciplines. However, it should be emphasised that the integration of both disciplines to form one department may vary in different organisations depending on the focus and nature of the organisation. These findings responded to the second objective of this research project, which is to determine the reasons that prompt organisations to merge public relations and marketing departments into one department. Botha (2010:95) further reinforces that, communication studies, on the other hand, propose that communication programmes should be integrated or co-ordinated by the public relations and communications department that is separate from the marketing department, and that this department should have a matrix arrangement with the departments it serves.

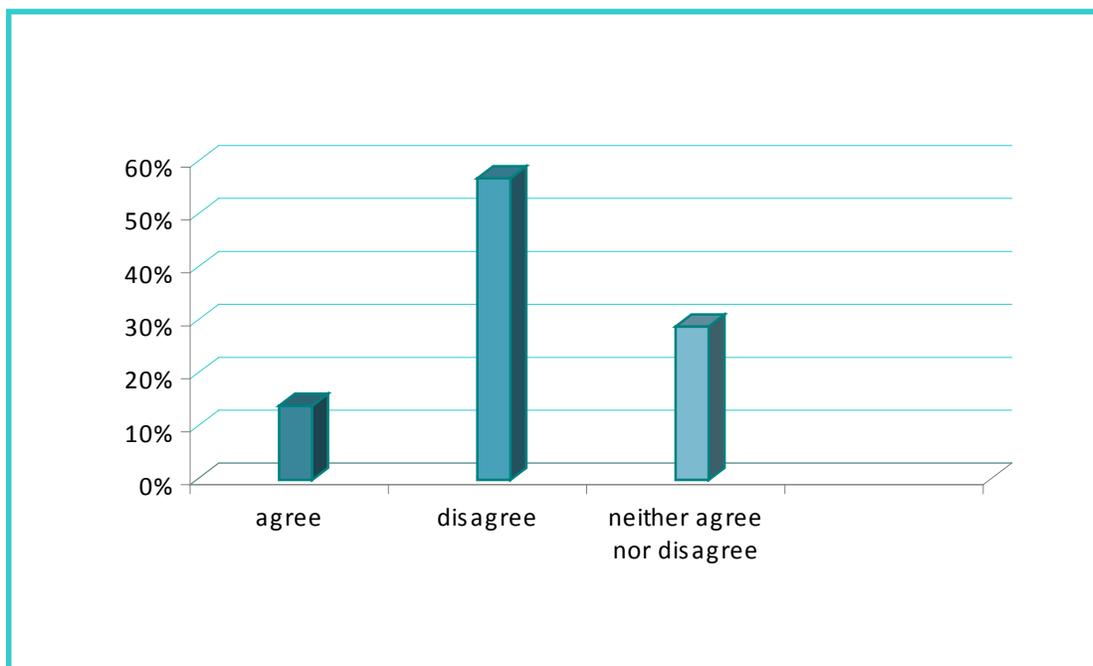


Figure 4.10: Integrating public relations and marketing to form one department

4.2.7 The role of public relations in environment scanning

4.2.7.1 Public relations helps organisation adapt to environmental changes

The findings clearly support the literature and revealed that public relations' practitioners should conduct research about any changes within the environment that may affect the organisation, both negatively and positively. Research is also conducted on target audiences and customer related needs. All queries, complaints, comments and any uncertainties from the consumers are directed to the public relations practitioner who in turn communicates these to the relevant people within the organisation. Respondents confirmed that public relations practitioners act as agents and managers of change both internally and externally. Practitioners have a duty to help the organisation adjust and adapt to environmental changes. This is achieved through open and frank communication directed to the various publics both internally and externally. This affirms Seitel (2004:87) that public relations practitioners function at the edge of an organisation as liaisons between the organisation and its internal and external public. In other words, public relations practitioners should have one foot inside the organisation and the one outside. This is also supported by Broom, Casey and Ritchey (2000: 218) who claim that public relations is a practice where the process includes the influencing of the environment. Public relations performs surveillance and information-distribution roles; in addition it has an important role to govern and maintain an organisation as an open system and ensure that an organisation is adaptable and flexible to all changes within the environment and remains stable at all times.

4.2.8 The involvement of public relations in the implementation of organisational policies and programmes

The findings revealed that one out of five organisations (14% depicted in figure 4.11) indicated that public relations is responsible for making business strategies accessible, understandable and easy to implement for all employees. Furthermore, public relations is responsible for making sure that all communication both internally and externally

prevail at all levels within the organisation. One organisation indicated that *“public relations professionals are the ones who actually roll out the different programmes within the organisation.”* Therefore, public relations has an important role to play in the interpretation and implementation of the organisations philosophy, policy and programs within the organisation to a great extent. 86% reported that public relations plays a very small role in the interpretation of philosophies, policies and programs within the organisation, purely because there are highly trained and qualified people (at a strategic level) who are responsible for this task. However, it also emerged, that when needed, the public relations practitioner is influential in the communication of any decisions made by the top decision makers.

The findings confirmed that, because most organisations have not established and defined the position of the public relations discipline, the most important functions and roles that public relations practitioners should be involved in are in fact allocated and assigned to individuals who are regarded as being strategists and highly qualified. The literature argues that public relations must be the interpreter of the organisation, its philosophy, policy and programmes. Public relations should, therefore, know the ends towards which the organisation strives. From a systems perspective, public relations may even play a role in the definition of desired objectives. The findings, therefore, point out that organisations are not holistic in defining the public relations concept and underpinning it to the systems perspective which emphasises that public relations should maintain organisations as open systems by ensuring that communication prevails at all levels within the various departments of the organisations.

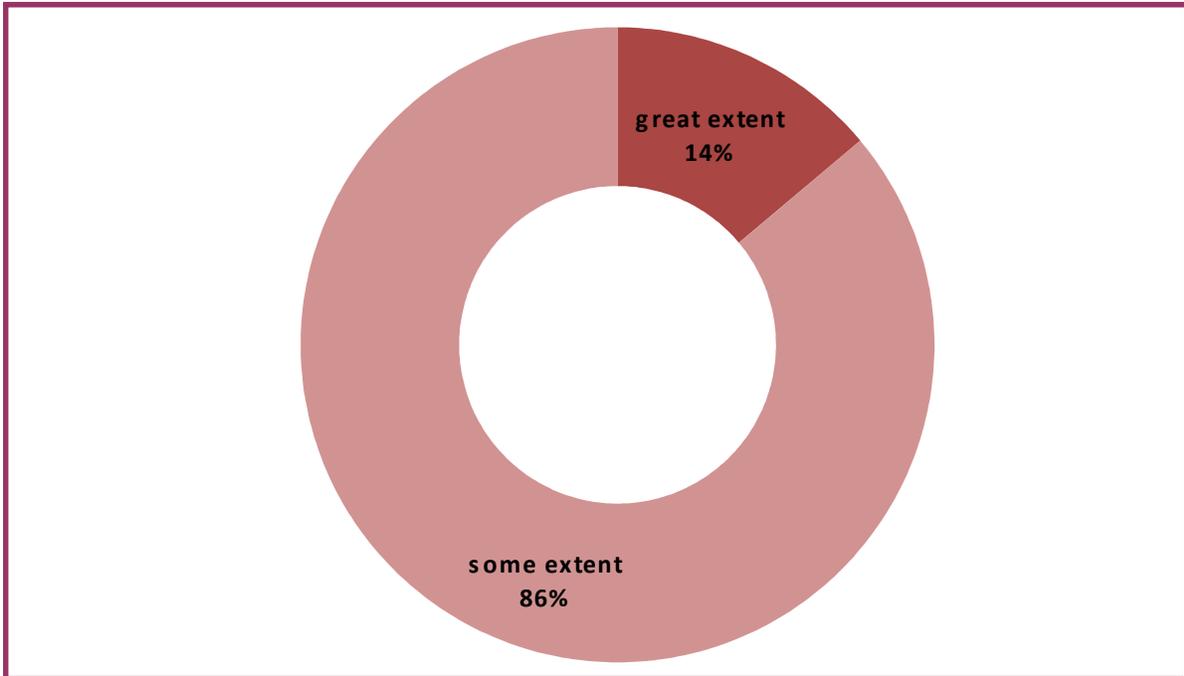


Figure 4.11: The involvement of public relations in the implementation of organisational policies and programmes

4.2.8.1 Communication tools utilised for internal communication

All respondents indicated that they use various channels for internal communication amongst the various departments within the organisation. The majority of the respondents 57% (depicted in figure 4.12) stated that communicating via staff intranets is an effective method of communicating internally for them. Whilst 29% mentioned that newsletters was the widest used method. Respondents further indicated that other methods of communication used included notice boards, bi-monthly and quarterly reports. 14% also revealed that communication days and communication boards have proven to be effective in communicating crucial information amongst the employees. It has also emerged that public relations’ practitioners play a huge role in designing and executing the above mentioned communication methods.

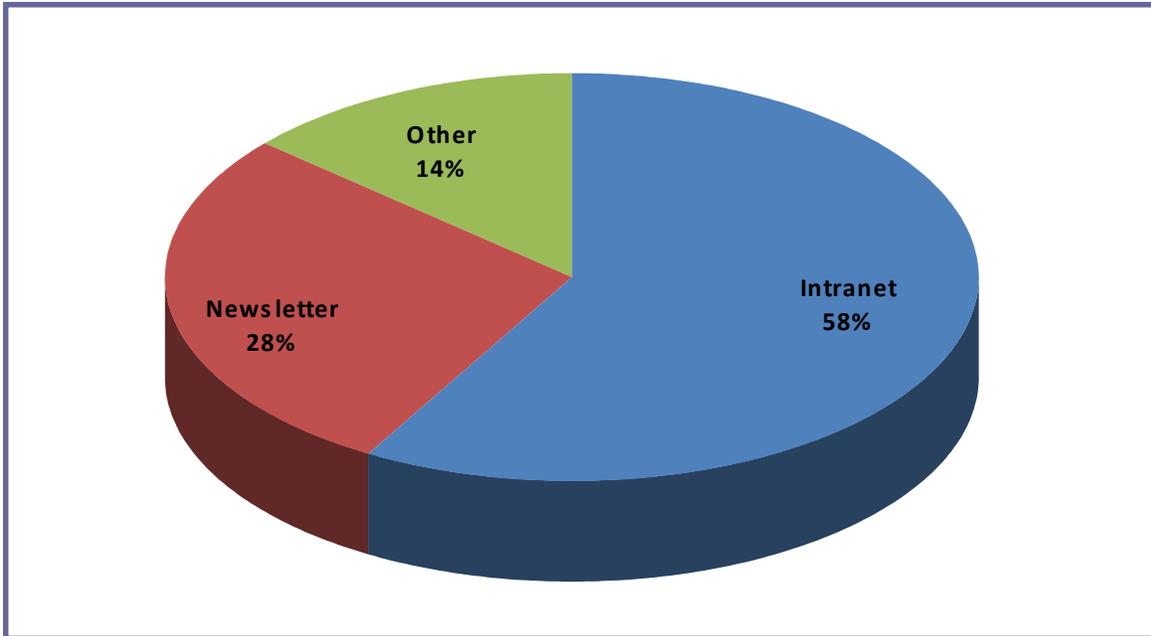


Figure 4.12: Communication tools utilised for internal communication

4.2.9 The level of participation by public relations in top level decision

The majority of respondents (72%), depicted in figure 4.13, indicated that most of their heads of department such as the general manager for corporate communications, marketing director and the general manager of corporate affairs, are indeed one of the top decision makers of the organisation. However, they emphasised the fact that they are involved in top management decision making only when there is an issue which needs their attention. This finding affirms the representation of communication, however, also confirms the failure of organisations to position the public relations discipline. 20% revealed that public relations is rarely involved in top level decision making. A further 20% revealed that because it is a global organisation, the group marketing director has a board of director status and represents both the marketing and the public relations and communications department at top-level decision making. The group marketing director is involved in top-level decision making on a daily basis. The research findings revealed that public relations is not well represented. However, it was confirmed that marketing participates to a large extent at top-level decision making. The respondent believed that with necessary qualifications and years of experience,

public relations practitioners can be afforded the opportunity to move up in the ranks and be in decision-making positions. However, the question as to whether they would be at top-level representing the public relations discipline independently or as the face of another department, still remains. These findings clearly indicate that the level of participation by public relations at top-level decision making is very minimal. The reason for the minimal involvement is a result of public relations being housed under other departments and not being regarded as a department that can stand alone independently. One organisation mentioned that *“public relations is not part of top level management. This is due to the nature of the business. However, public relations liaises occasionally with top level management when the regional office has urgent matters to communicate to the various provincial departments”*

It has emerged that in order to maintain a harmonious and balanced relationship between the organisation and its different target publics and, ultimately between the organisation and its environment, public relations should participate extensively in top-level decision making. The literature revealed that the home for public relations is with management. Skinner *et al.* (2004: 1) affirm that, as a management function, public relations is in a position to evaluate internal and external opinions, attitudes and needs on an ongoing basis, to advise management regarding their possible effect and to act as an instrument in bringing about policy changes and directing new courses of action. Cutlip *et al.* (2000: 8) also stress that in order to become involved in strategic planning, the public relations practitioner should operate at the highest level of organisational management and have access to the most senior information and decision-making systems.

These findings have responded to the third objective of this study, which is to examine whether public relations is seen as a management function within the selected organisations. It is clear that a majority of the organisations do not view public relations as a management function or rather have failed to acknowledge the role that public relations can play in top-level decision making. It has also emerged that in order for

organisations to position the public relations discipline, organisations need to redefine the discipline and clearly understand the concept of public relations.

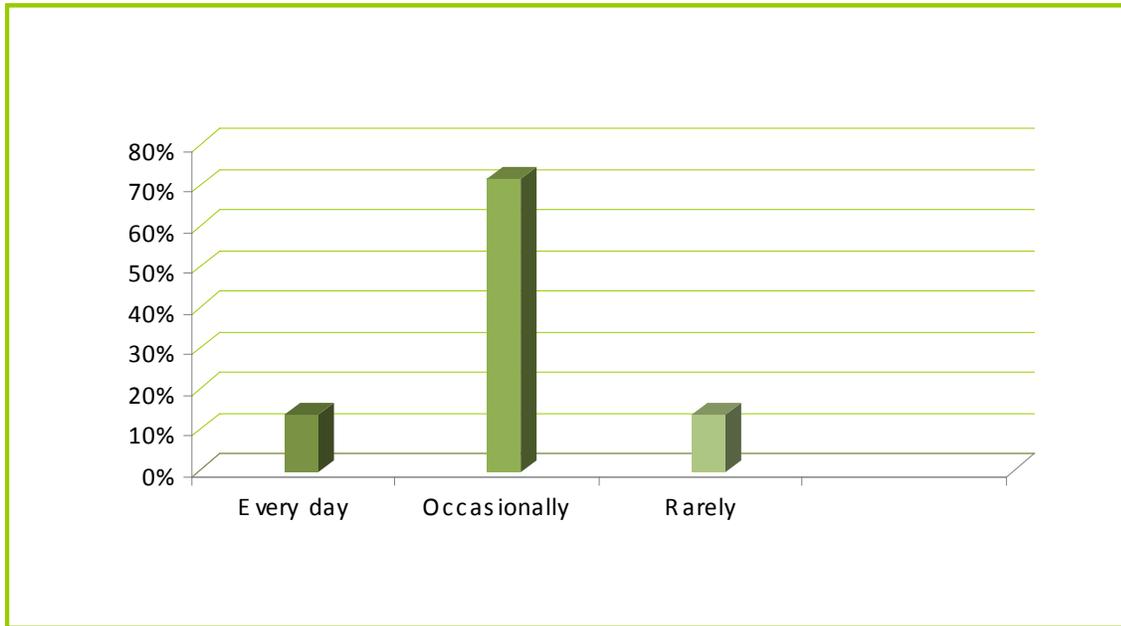


Figure 4.13: The level of participation by public relations in top level decision-making

4.2.10 The concept of public relations

The findings revealed that the respondents agree that public relations means different things to different organisations. The Public Relations Institute of Southern Africa defines public relations as the ‘management through communication of perceptions and strategic relationship between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders’. Public relations practice focuses on reputation, with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behaviour. This confirms Theaker (2004:6) that public relations, as a discipline, is concerned with the reputation of organisations (or product, services or individuals) with the aim of creating understanding and support. Public relations practitioners serve as an intermediary between the organisation and all the publics that exist in the organisation. The majority of the organisations 86% (depicted in figure 4.14) indicated that they have a great understanding of what public relations is all about. The respondents confirmed that public relations is indeed about building and maintaining mutual lines of communication

and co-operation between an organisation and all its stakeholders. 14%, however, revealed that because of the nature of their business, for them, public relations has taken a whole new meaning. *Here public relations is most importantly there to provide a professional tour guide service to the region in which the organisation operates.* Again, the respondent also indicated that to some extent public relations is responsible for engaging various stakeholder groups, and through functions, events, communication activities and other appropriate tools to build a positive image for the organisation.

The findings have revealed that there are a number of factors that influence how organisations view the public relations discipline. Most organisations have structures that accommodate public relations and public relations practitioners. It has also emerged that in some instances organisations have a good understanding of the public relations concept. Yet again, some organisations still battle to clearly define and position the discipline. The findings, therefore, call for organisations to use the systems theory as a baseline for studying the public relations' concept. Lubbe and Puth (2002:41) affirm that the systems approach offers a framework which places and positions the public relations process logically within the ambit of the organisation's operations. The systems approach is an abstract perceptual framework which is an exceptionally good aid to understanding and practising public relations. Based on the finding, it is crucial to have an understanding of the core business of the selected organisation and to conduct a clear scrutiny on their vision and mission, to better understand the many factors that influence the role and location of the public relations discipline within the organisation.

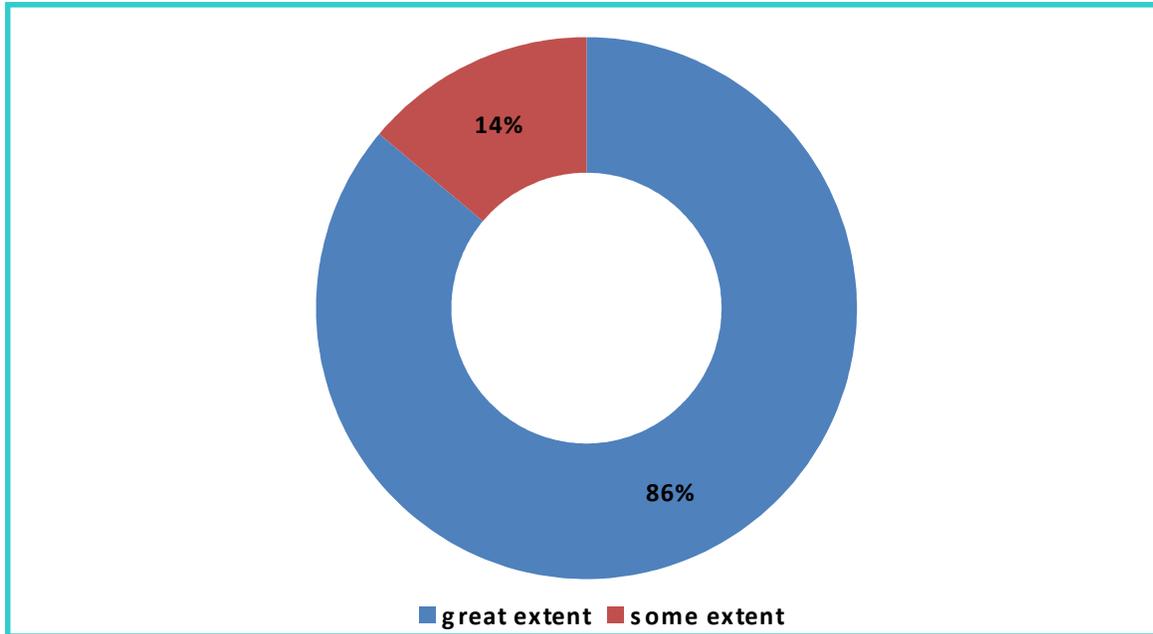


Figure 4.14: The concept of public relations

4.2.11 The core business, vision and mission of the selected organisation

Organisation 1: The South African Breweries Ltd (SAB) is the South African subsidiary and historical birthplace of SAB Miller, one of the world’s largest brewers by volume with more than 200 brands and brewing interests and distribution agreements in over 60 countries across six continents. SAB is the second largest listed company on the JSE Securities Exchange, South Africa’s leading producer and distributor of alcoholic and non-alcoholic beverages and one of the nation’s largest manufacturing firms. The company operates seven breweries and 42 depots in South Africa with an annual brewing capacity of 3.1 billion litres. The portfolio of beer brands meets the needs of a wide range of consumers and includes brands rich in heritage such as Castle Lager, Hansa Pilsener, Carling Black Label and the iconic Dutch beer brand Grolsch.

Vision and Mission

SAB’s vision is “to be the most admired company in South Africa; a partner of choice; an investment of choice and an employer of choice”. The mission is to own and nurture local and international brands which are the consumer’s first choice.

Organisation 2: Transnet is the custodian of major rail, port and pipeline assets in South Africa. With more than R77 billion in assets and employing more than 48 000 people, Transnet provides seamless and integrated bulk freight services through five interdependent operating divisions, namely: Freight Rail; Rail Engineering; National Ports Authority; Port Terminals; and Pipelines. Transnet Ltd.'s only shareholder is the state. Transnet Port Terminals (previously South African Port Operations) is responsible for cargo handling and logistics management solutions. Its port operations service customers across a broad spectrum of the economy, including the shipping industry, vehicle manufacturers, agriculture, steel and the mining industry. The division operates 17 terminals across six South African ports.

Vision and Mission

Transnet is a focused freight transport company delivering integrated, efficient, safe, reliable and cost effective services to promote economic growth in South Africa.

“One Company, One Vision”

- Focused intent
- Consistent face to customers
- Consolidated employee energies, resources
- Maximising economies of scale as Transnet gears itself for sustainable growth

Transnet seeks to achieve this by increasing our market share, providing productivity and profitability, and by providing appropriate capacity to our customers ahead of demand.

Organisation 3: Mondi's area of specialisation is pulp and paper. The company is one of the world's leading paper and packaging producers.

Vision and Mission

The vision is straightforward – “to be a leading business with the highest ethical standards, that delivers exceptional value for customers, employees, communities and

shareholders". As one of the world's leading paper and packaging producers, this means Mondi is committed to meeting and exceeding customers' requirements for product and service quality as well as cost competitiveness providing a secure working environment in which people can fulfil their ambitions and aspire to continually improve their circumstances, acting as a responsible employer and citizen in the communities and managing natural resources with care, sensitivity and expertise achieving sustainable, profitable growth through a focus on business excellence and strategic expansion in some of the world's most exciting markets.

Organisation 4: Listed on the JSE, Tiger Brands Limited is a branded fast-moving consumer packaged goods company that operates mainly in South Africa and selected emerging markets. The Domestic foods division is a leading manufacturer, distributor and marketer of major food brands. The Consumer healthcare division is a leading manufacturer, distributor and marketer of personal care, baby care and homecare brands. Sea Harvest Corporation is involved in deep-sea fishing, fresh and frozen fish and processing and marketing of fish products. Oceana is involved in the fishing, processing, marketing and trading of a wide variety of marine species. It also has interests in cold storage operations.

Vision and Mission

"To be the world's most admired branded consumer packaged goods company in emerging markets."

The company aims to achieve sustainable and profitable top line growth by:

- Transforming the organisation;
- Optimising our business portfolio;
- Pursuing organic growth; and
- Making acquisitions in selected markets

Organisation 5: Tongaat Hulett is an independent agri-processing business which includes integrated components of land management, property development and

agriculture. Through its sugar and starch operations in Southern Africa, Tongaat Hulett produces a range of refined carbohydrate products from sugar cane and maize. It has considerable expertise in downstream agricultural products, biofuel production and electricity cogeneration. The integrated business model involves land and water management, agriculture, agri-processing and the transition to property development and other uses at the appropriate times. Tongaat Hulett is able to maximise value through the various phases of land usage, from acquisition, agriculture and agri-processing to the transition to property development. Tongaat Hulett's wet-milling operation is the major producer of starch and glucose on the African continent. Operating five wet-milling plants, Tongaat Hulett converts more than 600 000 tons of maize per annum into starch and starch-based products. It manufactures a wide range of products, from unmodified maize starch to highly refined glucose products, which are key ingredients for local manufacturers of foodstuffs, beverages and a variety of industrial products.

Vision and Mission

Tongaat Hulett conducts its business operations in a manner that seeks to create value for all stakeholders, is sustainable and contributes meaningfully to the social and physical environment in which it operates. A high priority is placed on all aspects of safety, health and environment.

Organisation 6: Located in Isipingo, Prospecton, Toyota Motor Corporation engages in the production and sale of automobiles worldwide. Its Automotive Operations segment includes the design, manufacture, assembly, and sale of subcompact and compact cars, mini vehicles, hybrid, midsize, luxury, sports, and specialty cars; recreational and sport utility vehicles; pickup trucks, minivans, trucks, and commercial vehicles; and related parts and accessories.

In addition to its automotive operations and financial services operations, Toyota is involved in other operations, such as information technology and telecommunication, including certain intelligent transport systems, Gazoo.com, and prefabricated housing.

Intelligent transport systems include information technology-based systems encompassing car multimedia systems, onboard intelligent systems, advanced transportation systems and transportation infrastructure, and logistics systems.

Vision

Toyota's vision is to gain prosperity for all stakeholders through world competitiveness and continuous growth. The company is also focused on innovation into the future; and a passion to create a better society.

Mission

- Toyota South Africa is a company dedicated and committed to ensuring that products are of outstanding quality, value for money and instill pride of ownership.
- The company is devoted to developing and maintaining a dealer network which will provide superior service and excellence in customer care.
- Fair and progressive employment practices and the development, in accordance with the company's requirements of the skills and potential of all its employees.
- Keeping abreast of international best practices relating to vehicle manufacturing, distribution and information technologies.

Organisation 7: Sappi Limited's core business is the manufacturing of pulp and paper. The organisation is a leading producer of coated fine paper widely used in books, brochures, magazines, catalogues and many other print applications. Sappi is the world's largest producer of chemical cellulose, used primarily in the manufacture of viscose fibre, acetate tow and consumer and pharmaceutical products. In addition, we produce newsprint, uncoated graphic and business papers, premium quality packaging papers, a range of coated speciality papers and a range of paper grade pulp. The products are widely specified due to the unwavering commitment of 17,400 employees to serve our customers the best we can. Continued focus on innovation and excellence

underlies our growth and competitive advantage in the paper and pulp industry. Sappi is extremely proud of our history of paper technology 'firsts' and continue to drive our technical competence and innovative flair for the benefit of our customers through our research and development programmes at Sappi's technology centres in Europe, North America and South Africa.

Vision and Mission

As a global paper and pulp company, Sappi aims to create value and grow faster than the market in a sustainable way, to benefit shareholders, customers, employees, suppliers and the communities in which the organisation operates.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

The aim of this study is to investigate the role of public relations within an organisation. This aim will be accomplished through the following objectives:

- To establish the positioning of public relations within the hierarchy of the selected organisations;
- To determine the reasons that prompt organisations to merge public relations and marketing departments into one department; and
- To examine whether public relations is seen as a management function within the selected organisations.

The findings have, therefore revealed that the core business of selected organisations, their vision and mission are the main contributing factor to how the public relations discipline is located within the organisation. It has also emerged that these organisations have come a long way to get to where the public relations' discipline is positioned within their organisations. This therefore reflects the evolution of the role of public relations in organisations and society. However, the findings also indicated the battle that public relations practitioners are fighting to gain their rightful positions in organisations. Koekemoer (2004: 397) affirms this by arguing that differing concepts of public relations reflect the evolution of this maturing function in organisations and

society. They also indicate the struggle of an emerging profession seeking its unique identity.

4.4 Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the majority of the sample supports the theoretical underpinning relating to the current practices in organisations relating to the role of public relations within an organisation. It is evident that the current trend amongst certain organisations is for public relations to be incorporated under marketing or communications departments to function as a single department. The majority of the respondents also indicated that public relations departments that previously functioned separate to marketing or communications have now merged to form departments now called public relations and communication, corporate affairs and corporate communication. These departments have incorporated marketing, public relations and communication functions. Some organisations revealed that public relations is part of the marketing department. Although the two disciplines may work best when they are treated as distinct functions, they are able also to produce amazing results when working together for the aim of communication with the various stakeholders of the organisation. Research also revealed that marketing and public relations should be recognised as top-level decision making functions as both functions greatly impact on the organisation's overall aims and objectives.

This chapter presents the results of the field work conducted amongst public relations and communications practitioners. It analysed and interpreted the data gathered from the interviews. The findings of the study were then compared to the literature review as well as the systems theory model to determine the role of public relations within the selected organisations. Based on this, the next chapter will present the conclusions that are drawn from the study. It will further highlight the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study and offer recommendations based on the interpretation of the results. These recommendations may be used for further studies.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter presented the results of the study. It analysed and interpreted the data gathered from the interviews. The findings of the study were then compared to the literature review as well as the systems theory model to determine the role of public relations within the selected organisations. This chapter, therefore, presents conclusions that were drawn from the study. It further presents a set of recommendations based on the interpretation of the results. It will also highlight the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study and offer recommendations based on the interpretation of the results.

5.2 Summary of the study

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of public relations within an organisation. This aim will be accomplished through the following objectives:

- To establish the positioning of public relations within the hierarchy of the selected organisations;
- To determine the reasons that prompt organisations to merge public relations and marketing departments into one department; and
- To examine whether public relations is seen as a management function within the selected organisations.

The theoretical approach of the systems theory was investigated as well as its application to public relations. The literature review revealed that whilst some organisations may view public relations and marketing as two separate entities, others see these two functions as falling under a common umbrella. The study also revealed that public relations is an important if not integral part of an organisation. The data analysis revealed that the majority of the sample supports the theoretical underpinning relating to the current practices of organisations in relation to the merging of the public

relations and marketing departments, as well as the positioning of public relations within the hierarchy of the organisation. One of the significant results emerging from this study is that public relations is the most important ingredient for an effective organisation. This perspective puts public relations on the level of strategic management.

5.3 Conclusions

The purpose of the study was to investigate the role of public relations within an organisation and whether organisations viewed public relations as an integral part of their organisation, furthermore to establish the positioning of the discipline within the organisational structure. A sample of five organisations representing different industries was used in this study. Based on this, the following section presents the conclusions to the study based on the objectives set out in chapter 1.

5.3.1 Current trends pertaining to public relations

The findings indicate that in most organisations the role of public relations is not clearly defined. It was found that public relations operates as an independent department in certain organisations, however, the findings also indicated that in most cases it is merged with other departments like communications and marketing as organisations view them as interrelated and interdependent. Respondents indicated that one of the key reasons for this integration of public relations, marketing and communication functions is due to the need to downsize, do more with less with the hope of reducing costs. It is believed that the main objective is to gain effective communication results by integrating all departments that are viewed as performing one function, and that is 'communication'.

5.3.2 The role of public relations within an organisation

The findings clearly indicate that public relations has a key role to play in developing understanding and support for a particular cause or event. Public relations helps to

define and explain relations of mutual benefit between an organisation and its key stakeholders both internally and externally (amongst employees and clients). These relations must be managed rather than allowed to develop on their own. Based on this, public relations is a management discipline that must exist within an organisation in order to communicate effectively with the aim of developing understanding and support. Public relations can be involved in research, planning, executing and evaluation or to remain open for new input /output.

Public relations' professionals add value to an organisation when they develop communal relationships with all publics. Apart from all the other activities of the public relations function, such as community relations, fundraising, crisis communication, corporate social responsibility etc, public relations also plays a societal role in that it helps organisation survive in their social environments by working on relationships in order to bring about social and economic change and development. Viewed in this perspective, public relations' essential role is to help organisations adjust and adapt to changes in their environment.

5.3.3 The location of Public relations within an organisation

The research has revealed that the location of public relations within an organisation depends on a variety of factors: such as the nature of the business; the position of the most senior practitioner; the tasks allocated to the discipline; and how it is situated in relation to other disciplines. It has also emerged that the position of the senior public relations practitioner provides a good indication of how the function is regarded within the organisation. The findings have further revealed that public relations should report to those who run the organisations. However, in many organisations, this reporting relationship has not always been the case. But, it has emerged that the strongest public relations department is the one led by a communications executive who in turn reports directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO).

5.3.4 Public relations as a management function

The findings have revealed that in most organisations public relations as an independent department is not seen as a management function and does not contribute to top-level decision making within the organisation. However, as a function under the marketing department, public relations professionals participate in decision-making. This depends on the structure of the organisation. Even though public relations may be a management function, it is important that organisations acknowledge the importance of public relations at top-level decision-making processes.

5.3.5 The integration of public relations with interdependent departments

The integration of public relations into other departments is a trend that organisations have adopted. However the researcher concludes that it is a trend that is not necessary as public relations is capable of functioning independently. It is also imperative to note that 'no formal organisation is an island'. An organisation is composed of an internal system of social networks, and each exists within a framework of interrelated systems. Therefore, it is not to say that public relations must not be afforded the interaction with other systems within an organisation. All sub-systems must work together to achieve the overall objectives and goals of the organisation. It is, therefore, evident that there is a genuine need for organisations to develop a new paradigm under which marketing and public relations can function effectively in the interest of the organisation and the publics it serves.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

The researcher experienced the following problems:

- Lack of co-operation by some of the respondents from the organisations that the researcher had initially selected. This led the researcher to approach new organisations that were willing to participate and be co-operative.

- Due to the size of the selected organisations, the study was limited to divisions/departments situated within the greater Durban area. The group of respondents from the selected organisations were thus sufficient to draw valid conclusions regarding the problem stated.
- The study was confined to the greater Durban area, which limited the researcher from investigating current trends and practices in other regions
- Due to time constraints, responses during the interviews were not always substantial.
- The interview questions were limited by the design and nature of this method of research. However, the researcher attempted to achieve the most accurate results possible.

5.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations, arising out of the study, are made:

- Maintaining relationships of mutual benefit between an organisation and its key publics is essential. The management of such relationships may determine the overall success of an organisation. Public relations is a management function and has a role in strategic management. It is therefore recommended that public relations should be given an equal status as other functions at the top management level within an organisation.
- In order to be involved in strategic planning, public relations practitioners should operate at the highest level of organisational management and have access to most senior information and decision-making systems. This will enable practitioners to evaluate internal and external opinions, attitudes and needs on an ongoing basis, to advise management regarding possible effects. It should

also be noted that public relations departments can operate at different levels and the levels where this department is situated determines or will have a significant effect on the workload and the way practitioners operate.

- Public relations must be the interpreter of the organisation, its policy, philosophy and programmes. Practitioners should be afforded the opportunity to act as agents and instruments in bringing about policy changes and directing new courses of action within an organisation.
- For communication to be effective, public relations' managers should be positioned to serve all departments of the organisation. Ideally, he or she should have board of director status, as happens in the world's most successful companies.
- Public relations should be the 'glue' which holds organisational systems together, and promote a free flow of information throughout the organisation, both internally and externally. Virtually all actions and activities of an organisation have public relations ramification.

5.6 Concluding remarks

The increasing interdependence between an organisation and its environment and stakeholders has placed an emphasis on the role of communication for the survival of the organisation. For organisations to create mutual understanding and maintain balanced relationships between the organisation and all its publics it is crucial that two-way communication channels and communication strategies be formulated. Public relations has a crucial role to play in acknowledging the importance of relationship building. It can, therefore, be concluded that public relations is as important as a communication process within an organisation. It emerges from the results of the study that some organisation are consciously merging public relations and marketing departments into one unit. While on the other hand, some organisations may persist on

doing away with public relations completely. The literature revealed that applying the open systems approach to public relations first and foremost calls for purposeful sensing of the environment to anticipate and detect changes that affect organisational relationships with publics. Public relations must be selectively sensitive to specifically defined publics that are mutually affected or involved by organisational policies, procedures and actions. Furthermore, open systems public relations have the capacity to initiate corrective actions within organisations and direct programmes to affect knowledge, predisposition and behaviour of both internal and external publics. The outcomes sought are maintenance or achievement of goals that reflect the mutual interest of organisations and their public. Thus, organisations employing open systems public relations maintain their relationships by adjusting and adapting themselves and their publics to ever changing social, political and economic environments.

Therefore, the open systems approach gives public relations the role to recognise changes in the organisation's social settings and advise clients or employees how the organisation should change itself and respond so as to establish a "common meeting ground". Public relations professionals are **agents** and **managers of change**, both inside and outside their organisation. They plan and facilitate organisational and social adjustments and adaptation using communication. Public relations has an important management role to play, through communication of perceptions and strategic relationships between an organisation and its internal and external stakeholders. Public relations is a broad and complex activity although its basic objective is simply to communicate in order to achieve understanding through knowledge. Consequently, public relations exists, and all modern organisations regardless of size, complexity and needs should be concerned with public relations. It should be emphasised that good public relations is the conscious effort to inform and be informed, provides knowledge, understanding, goodwill and good reputation.

Based on the literature review and empirical research, this study recommends that public relations works in harmony with other disciplines in order to work towards achieving mutual and overall organisation goals. However, the researcher believes that

public relations should not be integrated into marketing. Public relations deserves to be acknowledged as an independent department and needs to be represented at the management table.

5.7 Conclusion

This chapter has presented conclusions that were drawn from the study. It has highlighted the summary, conclusions and limitations of the study and offered recommendations based on the interpretation of the results. These recommendations may be used for further studies.

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23 March 2009

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: M-Tech Public Relations Management: Z. Gqamane (Student number – 20356654)

The above student is currently registered for an M-tech at the Durban University of Technology in the Department of Marketing, Retail and Public Relations. Her research topic is *"The role of public relations within selected organizations in the greater Durban area"*. Her supervisor and co-supervisor is Dr VP Rawjee (Snr. Lecturer in the PR programme) and Ms D. Veerasamy (Lecturer in the Marketing Programme) respectively. Her study sets out to explore the role of public relations in selected organizations.

To complete this study she requires \pm 45 minutes of your time to participate in a face-to-face interview. Your responses will assist her to obtain the relevant information for the synthesis of her research and it will further assist in arriving at useful conclusions and recommendations. You are given the assurance that your responses will be confined to the use of the study and confidentiality will be strictly observed. In case of any queries, contact me on the above telephone/e-mail details. I would like to thank you for your invaluable time and information.

Yours sincerely

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20 February 2009

Dear Sir / Madam

RE: MTECH: PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGEMENT

I am a registered student at the Durban University of Technology, (registration number 20356654). I am currently studying towards an M-Tech Degree in Public Relations Management. My research topic is "*The role of public relations within an organisation*". My supervisor is Dr Veena Rawjee, a lecturer in the Department of Marketing, Retail and Public Relations Management.

I require \pm 45 minutes of your time for an interview. You are given the assurance by the researcher that your responses will be confined to the use of the study and confidentiality will be strictly observed at all times. Should you have any queries, kindly contact me on 072 200 4141. I would like to thank you for your invaluable time and information.

Yours sincerely

Zukiswa Gqamane

Annexure 3

INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. What is the core business of your organisation (area of specialisation)?
2. What is the vision and mission statement of your organisation?
3. Please state your position within the organisation.
4. To whom do you report?
5. Do you have a public relations' department in your organisation? If not, please specify which department undertakes public relations' functions.
6. How big is this department and what are its functions?
7. Has your organisation ever had a public relations' department that functioned independently?
8. If yes, please highlight some of the reasons that resulted in this department being combined with another.
9. If your organisation has separate public relations' and marketing departments, is there any interaction between the two departments? Please specify.
10. What does the public relations' concept mean for your organisation?
11. What does the marketing concept mean for your organisation?
12. What does the strategic role of public relations' practitioners mean to you?
13. Provide a hierarchy structure stating where the public relations' department or any other department responsible for public relations functions is situated within your organisation.
14. How does your organisation maintain open and frank communication amongst the various departments?

15. Which of the following PR functions are you most likely to be involved in within your department?

- Research
- Writing
- Corporate Social Investment
- Networking
- Media relations
- Crisis communication
- Events management
- Relationship building

16. Public relations exists to keep institutions alert to an ever shifting environment of circumstances and public opinion. How does the organisation engage public relations' professionals as agents and managers of change both internally and externally, to help the organisation adjust and adapt to environmental changes?

17. Public relations has been described as being synonymous to marketing. In your experience, what sets these two disciplines apart and, as a public relations professional, what value do you add to your organisation?

18. Do you think that organisations should integrate public relations with marketing to form one department?

19. Public relations must be the interpreter of the organisation, its philosophy, policy and programmes. How involved is public relations in implementing these within your organisation?

20. Philosophies, policies and programmes emanate from top management. Does the public relations' discipline form part of the responsibilities of top management within your organisation?

21. To what extent is public relations involved in top decision making?

- Everyday
- Only when there is an issue which needs the attention of a public relations' practitioner.
- Rarely
- Not at all