Organizational Politicking:

An Empirical Study on its Application to Communication Practitioners

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Abstract

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Organizational politicking (OP), otherwise known as workplace politics has for many decades been a deeply subverted topic in the management literature due to its widely negative credo. This study aims to investigate OP and its uncharted utilization within the communication profession drawing upon the empirical foundation of 15 qualitative in-depth interviews with communication practitioners in varying roles. More specifically, it aims to investigate how communication practitioners situate themselves in the management of others over which they have limited formal authority, which tactics they use, and what values and assets are derived from the employment of these tactics to shape strategic ends. The study is guided by the theoretical framework of a tactic typology of influence tactics, communication as a second-order management function, and impression management. The findings reveal organizational politicking to be a frequent and ongoing process among practitioners' line of work, characterized by subtler and softer shades of tactical enactments to maintain synergistic relationships within and across departments. The analysis also finds that in order for the tactics to produce their intended outcomes, communication practitioners leverage the use of (i.a): tactical timing, boundary spanning, institutional memory, fait accomplis and interpersonal acumen. The study concludes by suggesting that a key function of the communicator role, involves practitioners attuning themselves to the various processes of OP. Further emphasis on incorporating OP into mainstream discussions on the work of communication professionals will provide us with a more robust understanding of how interactions unfold in the workspace.

Keywords: *Organizational Politics, Communication management, Tactics, Impression Management, Second-order management, Influence*

Word Count: 21,912

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1. Introduction

1.1 Problematization

Extensive research in the past decades has been conducted on the complexities attached to communication practitioners' roles (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014; Zerfass & Franke, 2013; Reber & Berger, 2006). Within public relations (PR) and organizational communication, as Dozier (2013) puts it, there is argued to be "a lack of strong professional role expectations" (p. 328). He adds that "function seems similar to other 'semi-professions' characterized by bureaucratic control patterns, a lack of personal autonomy, structured hierarchy, routinized tasks, and little supervisor responsibility" (Dozier, 2013, p. 328). Spicer (1997) has also observed this phenomenon and adds that, more often than not, roles of communication practitioners are laden with 'unstructured situations' and unpredictable happenings (Spicer, 1997, p. 124). Furthermore, Falkheimer et al. (2017) in their large-scale study of 6,486 communication professionals found that despite acknowledging the importance of communication professionals in supporting and facilitating internal and external communication in organizations, a large majority of their respondents (42 percent) were, in actuality, unaware of the core role expectations of communication practitioners (p. 98). The complexity also becomes inherent in the precarious position of communication practitioners frequently having to manage diverging interests, often without formal authority (Spicer, 1997; Morgan, 2006). This is also addressed by Nothhaft (2010) who coined communication management as a second-order management function which encompasses communication professionals working in settings where they are expected to influence the management of others over which they have no, —or functional— authority over (p. 133). Herein lies a discrepancy between the high expectations placed on communicators to wield influence, and far more responsibility than often granted power by organizations. This gap has to be addressed somehow by exploring *how* communication practitioners then manage the management of others.

In conjunction with this, organizational politicking, also known as workplace politics or micro-politics within organizations, is a topic that has fascinated many for decades and has been a matter of scholarly debate for over 40 years (Madison, Allen, Porter & Renwick & Mayes,

1970; Landells & Albrecht, 2015; Ferris and Treadway, 2012). Among the many circulating definitions, organizational politicking (hereafter referred to as OP) has been defined as "informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind-the-scenes efforts to sell ideas, influence an organization, increase power, or achieve other targeted objectives" (Brandon & Seldman, 2004, p. 2). Over the years, several scholars have attempted to classify OP into typology sets of behaviours (Ferris, Russ & Fandt, 1989; Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980; Yukl, Seifert & Chavez, 2008) yet the problematic aspect here is that none of these inventories have been made specific to any occupational professions. Furthermore, the connotations imbued in OP are generally negative among publics, more so intensified by mainstream literature condemning its use within organizations, associating it with the mentality of 'dirty' 'ruthless' 'self-serving' 'toxic' and 'to be avoided at all costs' (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991; Malik, Danish, & Ghafoor, 2009; Mintzberg, 1983). This, coupled with the sensitive nature of the topic and wide-held reluctance of audiences to partake in studies of OP, has largely contributed to a relative lack of research in the field (Buchanan 2008; Grunig, 2013). To bridge this gap, scholars throughout the years have been revisiting the narratives assigned to OP by recognizing its 'inevitable' presence within most organizations (Buchanan & Badham, 1999; Morgan, 2006; Pfeffer, 1981; Spicer, 1997). These studies cast a more constructive and optimistic light on foregrounding the beneficial aspects that OP may serve for organizational professionals in achieving goal-oriented strategic outcomes. Thus, the problematization of the current study lies in this often contested and unchartered territory of OP, by approaching it within a new context of communication practitioners to ask to which extent this concept can or cannot be harnessed as a strategic tool to carry out tasks and perform role expectations of communication practitioners. To this end, I adopt Zerfass, Verčič, Nothhaft and Werder's (2018) definition of strategic communication, a term which: "encompasses all communication that is substantial for the survival and sustained success of an entity…[and] is the purposeful use of communication by an organization or other entity to engage in conversations of strategic significance to its goals" (p. 493). This definition allows a distinction to be made between 'strategic communication' and 'communication management' where the latter attempts to steer and influence how organizations engage in strategic communication. Similarly, the use of OP in this regard, is *not* strategic communication itself, rather a tool to steer discourse.

1.2 Significance of Study

The studies that have addressed OP mainly concern upper-managerial and CEO accounts (Fleming & Spicer, 2014). Research remains extremely scarce on OP and its application to communication practitioners, a profession which is argued to yield a more complicated landscape of operating within organizations due to varying role expectations, role ambiguity, and handling of multiple interests (Reber & Berger, 2006; Falkheimer & Heide, 2014; Spicer, 1997). Certainly, there have been critical scholars who have addressed power and influence within organizations (Dozier, 2013; Morgan, 2006; Spicer, 1997; Tengblad, 2012). However, the contextualization of this thesis concerns politicking on the micro-level of individual acts. This is rooted in the ideology that organizations are made up of pluralist interests (Morgan, 2006) meaning power is *not* only reserved for those in the upper echelons. Thus, the gap in the existing state of knowledge this study aims to contribute to is approaching an old theme with a new angle where it becomes crucial to explore OP and its boundaries within the communication profession to better understand how these practitioners navigate the complex waters of organizational life. From a practical point of view, the implications of this study for communication professionals in their day-to day work is that on the one hand, it may enable them to harness the tactics and add them to their repertoire in order to become politically savvy thereby increasing efficiency. On the other hand, for those who reject the concept of OP, it will enable them to at least become aware of how others construct their organizational realities as well as to recognize some of the tactical strategies communication professionals craft to advance one or more of their strategic objectives.

From a strategic communication point of view, Hallahan, Holtzhausen, Verčič, and Sriramesh (2007) argue, it is disquieting that many disciplines curtail the importance of persuasion (p. 25). They hold that influence and persuasion are indeed central to the tenets of strategic communications in using communication to promote the acceptance of ideas. This so, because the field itself is characterized by "informational, persuasive, discursive, as well as relational communication" (Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 17) in the attainment of organizational goals. Thus, this renders the current study relevant because it investigates an arena that has largely been neglected in the classical management literature thus far (Grunig, 2013; Spicer, 1997; Tengblad, 2012). Moreover, the methodological significance of conducting qualitative interviews lies in the understanding that thus far, most studies have employed quantitative approaches to studying

OP through self-administered questionnaires (Buchanan, 2008; Kacmar & Carlson, 1997; Kipnis, Schmidt & Wilkinson, 1980; Mcfarland, Iddekinge & Ployhart 2012, p. 106). While some strengths of this include higher levels of generalizability to populations and more respondent privacy, I argue that qualitative in-depth interviews will do more justice to practitioner perceptions and allow deeper insight into the complexity behind their motives and intentions behind the facets of this concept. Lastly to add to this, Holtzhausen and Zerfass (2015) further contend that in the field of strategic communication, the employment of qualitative methods will pave a path for a more contextualized approach to the functions of communication practitioners and their departments (p. 240).

1.3 Aims and Research Question

This research seeks to attain a deeper understanding of how communication practitioners gain influence and traction from persons over which they have no, or just functional authority over within organizations. The aim is twofold. Firstly, to attain a better understanding of how ingrained OP tactics are in the work life of communication practitioners in their pursuits for reaching strategic ends. This will be accomplished by categorizing informants' behavior into an existing theoretical framework of influence tactics advocated by Yukl et al. (2008). Secondly, to capture the communicators' specific skills and expertise instilled within and around these tactics in order to see how practitioners reach desired ends. All in all, the purpose is to gain a more pragmatic understanding of how communication functions are really carried out in practice. In order to investigate these matters, the following research questions have been formulated:

RQ 1: How do communication practitioners use organizational politicking tactics to exert influence and achieve strategic outcomes within organizations?

RQ 2: What kinds of expertise, values, and assets are invoked by the communication practitioners in and around employing the different tactics?

To clarify, the first RQ is more descriptive in the sense that I am *not* interested in quantifying the tactics, but rather in how these existing tactics may look and correspond in the context of a communication practitioner. Further, the phrasing of 'how' is not to be mistaken for assuming the tactics are already the case of employment. The second RQ on the other hand, treads more

deeply into the pertinent assets and expertise encircling the tactics by these communication practitioners allowing for new tactical insights to emerge. In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, this exploratory research constitutes 15 in-depth qualitative interviews with practitioners in various communicative roles. Finally, it is *not* the intention of this thesis to lift OP on a pedestal and advocate its use, rather to show the multi-faceted nature of this phenomena by incorporating a novice angle of communication practitioners.

1.4 Demarcations

The focus of the study is situated in a micro-approach to politicking constituting individuals in contrast to a macro-scale study concerning structural bases of organizational power per se. Due to the methodology of conducting in-depth qualitative interviews, the external validity and generalizability of the findings to a wider population cannot claim to be representative. Therefore, it must be understood that each interviewee voice is a reflection of their subjective reality of their interpretations of what OP constitutes at this particular point in time and context. Further, the systematic bias that may be present in their accounts is not within the scope of this paper to address. Intent is notoriously hard to prove, and I refrain from my own speculations of such intentions, departing solely from their perceptions. Equally important, this thesis only analyzes the empirical material of what is said and discussed, and this does not divorce from reality the possibility of other tactics outside the tactical framework being the case of employment. Finally, given the study's focal point in a novice domain of communication practitioner relation to OP, the sample participants constitute a variety of communication practitioner roles, in various organizations, and upper-managerial positions as well as junior level roles within Europe, a decision which will be further justified in the methodology section.

1.5 Disposition

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. First, in chapter 2, the literature review scans previous research in the field of OP and communicator roles, identifying areas of contribution for the current research throughout. The review ends with a synthesis. Chapter 3 presents the theoretical framework, elaborating first on pluralism, the organizational power perspective maintained in the overarching structure of this thesis before delving into the core theories of communication as a second-order management function, the typology of influence

tactics, and impression management theory. Chapter 4 traces the methodology touching upon the research strategy, the process of gathering the empirical material, ethical considerations and how the analysis is undertaken. Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the empirical material where findings are discussed. Chapter 6 ends with a discussion on the results and contributions of the study, followed by avenues for future research and concluding remarks.

2. Literature Review

The aim of this chapter is to provide a comprehensive overview of the state of research concerning OP and to fuse it with previous research concerning the roles of communication practitioners. First it addresses definitional elements of OP as well as studies that have been conducted on the functional and dysfunctional aspects of it as well as influence tactics in order to provide a nuanced understanding of how the concept has developed over time. This is followed by a section on antecedents of politicking. The second part of the literature review addresses communication practitioner roles, beginning with scholars' traditional conceptualizations of the role. Thereafter, studies on role ambiguity and uncertainty within the profession is addressed, followed by a section on the few existing studies linking OP to communication roles, finally ending with research on the dominant coalition. The chapter closes with a synthesis.

2.1 Organizational Politicking

Previous studies on OP can largely be categorized into two strands of research. The first focuses on the political behavior and intentions of the tactics employed by members at various levels of the hierarchy within organizations. The second concerns perceptions of OP by individual organizational members. While the two categories certainly overlap in research, with the latter (perceptions) it is important to understand that these are subjective perceptions and not necessarily reflections of an objective reality (Gandz and Murray, 1980; Ferris & Treadway, 2012). Before delving into previous studies in the field of OP, it is first statutory to display a series of contrasting definitions to illuminate the stark differences in how the term has been conceptualized over time by different scholars.

2.1.1 Definitions of OP

A survey of the literature indicates that OP entered the organizational behavior literature in the 1960's with just a handful of studies on the theoretical and conceptual levels of workplace politics, although none of those constituted empirical studies (Gandz & Murray, 1980). In the 1980's an influx of research began empirically exploring OP's conduct within organizations in the hope to better explicate the term (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Mintzberg, 1983; Pfeffer, 1981).

Scholar	Definitions of Organizational Politicking
Pfeffer, 1981 p. 7	"Those activities taken within organizations to acquire, develop, and use power and other resources to obtain one's preferred outcomes in a situation in which there is uncertainty or dissensus about choices"
Mintzberg, 1983, p. 172	"Individual or group behavior that is informal, ostensibly parochial, typically divisive, and above all in a technical sense, illegitimate-sanctioned neither by formal author, accepted ideology, nor certified expertise"
Kacmar & Baron, 1999, p. 4	"Actions by individuals that are directed toward the goal of furthering their own self-interests without regard for the well-being of others within the organization
Vigoda, 2003, p. 31	"Intra-organizational influence tactics used by organization members to promote self-interests or organizational goals in different ways"
Kurchner-Hawkins & Miller, 2006, p. 331	"Influence tactics designed to further self-and/or organizational interests, and its basic aim is to reconcile and effectively manage such potentially competing interests''

Figure 1: Varying Definitions of OP   *(Source: see authors in left column)*

As can be seen from the few extracted definitions shown in figure 1, one must take into account the different standpoints in previous conceptions of OP for this bears certain implications on the findings of these studies. Many scholars have argued that the definitional imbalances are the main impediment to contemporary research on OP (Buchanan, 2008; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010; Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Spicer, 1997). It becomes clear that there is an evident divide between the various definitions with the more radical views defining it as 'negative' 'divisive' 'self-serving' and exploiting at the 'expense of others' thereby hindering the attainment of organizational goals (Mintzberg, 1983; Kacmar & Baron, 1999). The more positive conceptualizations highlight OP as 'furthering organizational interests' and 'reconciling competing interests' in a pluralist organization of multiple interests (Kurchner et al., 2006; Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010; Pfeffer, 1981). The third viewpoint and what is most in line with this thesis stance, sees OP as a multi-faceted construct (Gotsis & Kortezi, 2010; Madison et al., 1980; Vigoda, 2003), capable of producing both positive and negative behaviors, and working towards and against organizational goals. The problematic aspects of these conceptualizations become inherent when juxtaposing the words 'influence' with 'politicking' for the simple

reason that it is difficult to discern what influence attempts are political in nature or not. Furthermore, it can be argued that those adept at employing OP will naturally disguise the self-serving features because part of their political skill constitutes "an interpersonal style construct that combines social astuteness with the ability to relate well, and otherwise demonstrate situationally appropriate behavior in a disarmingly charming and engaging manner that inspires confidence, trust, sincerity, and genuineness" (Ferris, Perrewé, Anthony & Gilmore, 2000, p. 30). These factors warrant more attention and show why qualitative in-depth insight is needed to investigate the topic further to explore participants' knowledge based reasonings of the behaviors and contexts behind certain actions. Finally, the common attributes shared among all definitions acknowledge OP as carrying self-serving behavior and informal means of achieving these acts of influence. Delineating positive from negative politicking is still a large debate among scholars. To flesh out these differences, we now turn to previous research pertaining to the dysfunctional and functional aspects of OP.

2.1.2 Dysfunctional Politicking

A substantial body of work has linked OP to negative effects on employee job performance, reduced employee job satisfaction (Kacmar & Baron, 1999; Landells & Albrecht, 2015; Mintzberg, 1983) as well as a decreasing amount of organizational commitment by members (Ferris et al., 1989). This has further been strengthened by research linking stress and anxiety at the workplace to politicking (Ferris et al., 1989; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002). Poon (2003) in a quantitative study concerning organizational politics perceptions of 208 Malaysian employees across multiple organizations and different occupations, related perceptions of organizational politics to "psychological and attitudinal consequences for employees in the form of job stress, job satisfaction and turnover intention" (p. 150). Complicit in his stance, is the idea that OP is seen more as disruptive and dysfunctional to organizational undertakings. A major shortcoming in his research however, is that it fails to take into account the political orientation of the subjects. I argue that people who consider themselves politically savvy enough to maneuver the organizations will manifestly have different perceptions on the consequences and outcomes of OP than those who are not predisposed to engage in such means. Furthermore, if role ambiguity and vague job responsibilities is one of the main predictors of OP, then it becomes relevant for my research to situate OP within the frameworks of the communication profession, seeing as previous research indicates that role expectations are sometimes unclear among communication professionals (Falkheimer et al., 2017). Other research posits OP may lead to the exclusion of certain persons or groups of individuals through the formation of coalitions (Landells &

Albrecht, 2015, p. 52). A large majority of the above quoted studies, with the exception of Landells and Albrecht (2015), are informed by a widely used instrument called the Perception of Organizational Politics Scale (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991) analyzing perceptions of OP across three dimensions of 'go along to get ahead', pay and promotions' and 'general political behavior' (Kacmar & Ferris, 1991, p. 204) in 31 scale items. The problem or rather impediment to this model however, is that the scale itself reflects a predominantly negative bias. An example in one of the scale items lists "people in this organization attempt to build themselves up by tearing others down" (p. 198). I see this as very problematic because the formulation of strongly worded expressions from the researchers such as 'tearing down others' undoubtedly influence the responses of participants and bears implications on the findings of these studies. I also observed this trend in other quantitative enquiries of OP (Mcfarland, et al., 2012, p. 106) yet this realization did resonate with Ferris et al. (2000) and Ferris and Treadway (2012) in their later works leading to additional studies' incorporation on the positive facets of this phenomena. As a result, careful consideration in the construction and wording of my own questioning style in this thesis of the semi-structured interviews is taken into account so as not to eject an inherent formulation bias to elicit one response kind over another. The mere fact that I take a qualitative approach further allows the freedom of the respondents to express their individual thoughts more, rather than using a quantitative voting procedure to tick off boxes in pre-disposed sentence structures. As a response to the prevailing negative conceptualizations of OP, the focus on more positive aspects of OP have been gaining momentum. It is this we now turn to.

2.1.3 Functional Politicking

Tracing back to the roots of Ancient Greece, Aristotle viewed politicking as a means of reconciling differences among members in the *polis* 'city state' organization. To him, politicking served to facilitate creating order out of diverse interests (Morgan, 2006, p. 150; Spicer, 1997). In an attempt to show the multifaceted nature of OP, many scholars depart from this Aristotelian perspective to produce studies emphasizing the beneficial aspects OP may instigate. Helping to advance employee careers has regularly been noted (Gandz & Murray, 1980; Landells & Albrecht, 2015). Buchanan (2008) too arrived at this result, in surveying 252 British managers across 107 organizations to capture their perceptions of OP, observing that 67% saw political behavior as something necessary, and most attributed politicking as a valuable tool to building up networks of contacts, supporting initiatives through the use of 'key players' and cutting organizational red tapes to achieve organizational or personal objectives

(p. 56). Contrariwise to the studies mentioned in the previous section, a link between OP and greater job satisfaction and higher productivity has also been noted (Eldor, 2017; Hoschwater, 2012; Landells & Albrecht, 2015). This piece of evidence serves as one of many examples in this thesis that highlight the complexity in exploring the wide array of discrepant studies concerning OP's conduct, thus validating the need to constantly reflect it as a subjective phenomenon in the methodological orientation of this study. Eldor (2017) in his study of 253 employees from different departments (communications and marketing being included) of a high-tech company in Israel found that when employees perceive their work environment to be political, it launches them into more proactive, creative, and adaptive modes of thinking with more knowledge sharing (p. 250). But the question remains, what are these political techniques? I now turn to specific influence tactics to better our understanding of how OP materializes in action.

2.1.4 Influence Tactics

The specific behaviors, activities, and tactics individuals employ has been subject to much research and resulted in a series of typologies over the years. The influence tactics can be called downward, lateral, or upward depending on the position of the target being influenced. Among the most well-known is Kipnis et al. (1980) who spearheaded a quantitative study which surveyed 165 graduate business students and resulted in the development of eight dimensions of influence tactics commonly used in OP, that is: *assertiveness, ingratiation, rationality, sanctions, exchange of benefits, upward appeals, blocking, coalitions* (Kipnis et al., 1980, p. 248). Examples included *ingratiation* "made him or her feel important, by saying only you have the brains, talent to do this." *Exchange* "reminded him or her of past favors that I did for them." *Assertiveness* "had a showdown in which I confronted him or her face to face." *Blocking* "engaged in a work slowdown until he or she did what I wanted" and finally *coalition* "obtained the support of co-workers to back up my request" (Kipnis et al., 1980, p. 445-446). Yukl and Tracey (1992) refined and extended the typology of Kipnis et al. (1980) to create their own typology retaining five of the original: *rational persuasion, exchange, ingratiation, pressure, coalition* tactics and added *inspirational appeal* and *consultation* tactics. Yukl and Seifert (2002) later added two more: *apprising* and *collaboration*. After years of refining and merging tactics and testing the construct validities, the result was 11 influence tactics (Yukl et al., 2008) all of which will be elaborated and further discussed in the theoretical framework section of this paper. Yukl et al. (2008) have argued that more research however is needed on the use of tactics to influence people outside of the organization including "joint-venture partners, clients,

government officials" (p. 618). That is something this research intends to include, given that many communication practitioner roles entail dealing with the external public, journalists, outside clients and so forth. All in all, these studies do much for this research in providing frameworks that makes it clearer to categorize certain types of behavior of individual tactics mentioned in the interviews. However, I would argue some of the tactics, such as *rational persuasion* which includes the use of logical arguments and facts to show the feasibility of a task in persuading a person, do *not* necessarily have political undertones to them. In this regard, it will be interesting to see what the participants make of this framework and their perceptions as to the boundaries they set for which tactics constitute more politicking or not.

2.1.5 Antecedents of Organizational Politicking

Antecedents or rather triggers of OP have been explored by looking at a combination of both individual and organizational factors that cause people to engage in such means. There are conflicting studies that on the one hand, deduce that higher ranking individuals in organizations are predisposed to engage more in politicking, as in the case of (Ferris et al. 1989; Gandz & Murray, 1980), whereas other studies, such as DuBrin (2001) have revealed the tendency of junior-ranked workers to engage more in OP due to having less formal control and lower positions necessitating it (p. 204). The contrasting research in attributing higher levels of politicking to people in higher versus lower positions within organizations is where my research can prove to be useful in investigating this divide through my interviewing of practitioners in both the upper and lower echelons of communicator roles. Poon (2003) found that job ambiguity, scarcity of resources and trust climate were the main predictors that led employees to perceive their work environment as being politically charged. Job ambiguity and unclear roles it was found, provide a clear platform and opportunity for politicking to take place because, "when goals, roles and performance criteria are nebulous, employees have more latitude to safeguard their interests using the political route" (Poon, 2013, p. 141). This ambiguity and uncertainty of working conditions as a prime antecedent to OP has been realized by a multitude of scholars (Buchanan, 2008; Pfeffer, 1981; Spicer, 1997; Tengblad, 2012). As has scarcity of resources at the organizational level which leads to conflict due to competition to secure resources (Pfeffer, 1981). With these studies in mind, there is still a need to understand how communication practitioners intersperse with the concept of OP. First however, a discussion on the traditional conceptualizations of the role is warranted in order to take us further.

2.2 Communication Practitioner Roles

2.2.1 Traditional Conceptualizations of the Role

One cannot enter a conversation of communication practitioner roles without first referring to Broom and Smith's (1979) typology of four different types of practitioners, namely: *expert prescriber, communication facilitator, problem solver, and communication technician*. These roles were later reconfigured into two commonly cited roles in the literature: the *communication technician* and the *communication manager* coined by Broom and Dozier (1986, p. 37). Technicians have the role of developing communication material, writing press releases, coordinating events and disseminating information and the manager role is seen more as the function assisting in the strategic planning of the organization's communication efforts, working tightly as council with the upper level management of the organization (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Johansson & Larsson, 2015; Reber & Berger, 2006). In these roles lies the knowing that technicians are more inferior to the managers and do not have as much influence or power as them in the larger strategic decisions surrounding the organization. Amassed critics of the technician and manager dichotomy and of Brooms and Dozier's (1986) former typology however, argue these models reflect a static and oversimplified perspective of the actual roles enacted by communication practitioners. Instead it is posited the technician and manager functions overlap, fluctuating constantly between roles and no focus is on 'how' these roles are assumed (DeSanto & Moss, 2011; Johansson & Larsson, 2015). Moss, Newman and DeSanto (2005) in recognizing this incongruity, conducted a study of UK based communication practitioners that led to the creation of a five-dimensional model of practitioner role enactment to offer a more robust understanding of the key responsibilities communication practitioners undertake in managerial roles. Labelled as *monitor and evaluator, key policy and strategy advisor, issue management expert, troubleshooting/problem-solver, and the communication technician dimension* (p. 874). Still, we see here in the beginning there were crude attempts to 'pigeon-hole' (Christensen, Moring, & Cheney, 2008, p. 172) role typologies of communication practitioner operations yet gradually, the scholarly field has begun to realize there is no one monolithic classification type. Roles are *not* static and can be enacted differently which is why there is a need for a more political and dynamic understanding of the roles enacted by these practitioners.

2.2.2 Role Ambiguity and Uncertainty within the Profession

A plethora of research has been dedicated to the shifting landscape of the communication professional roles in the past few decades. The onset of new media and the Internet has drastically changed the traditional conceptualizations of communicator roles, from the past to present for the reason that there is now an overabundance of information to process from both internal and external voices (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, p. 135; Hallahan et al., 2007, p. 27). This, alongside the fact that all the employees and co-workers can now also avail themselves to the tools and resources of communication, something which once mainly lay in the hands and expertise of communication professionals (Heide & Simonsson, 2011, p. 206). It also has to do with the shift from more formal hierarchical structures in organizations to horizontal communication and this means that lower-level members of the organization now have more influence in decisions that prior upper level management used to have exclusive rights to. This shift in power, brings tension and paves an unprecedented path for communicators to manage the management of others, with the core challenge of enabling the organization's communication skills on all levels (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Zerfass & Franke, 2013; Nothhaft, 2010). Heide and Simonsson (2011) firmly believe that in order to ameliorate these organizational changes, "both practitioners and scholars should focus on informal relationships between coworkers and colleagues to produce more and better knowledge about organizational life" (Heide & Simonsson, 2011, p. 210). Yet the two authors provide little suggestion as to what this 'informal' communication constitutes and this is something that this research can contribute to the discussion with, by exploring the informal tactics communicators use. Christensen et al. (2010) further attribute uncertainty within the profession to the fact that "communication activities are rarely organized into a single department" (p. 148). Other research links the source of confusion to the disparity between how communications and management is taught versus how it is practiced (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, p. 127; Johansson & Larsson, 2015). Tengblad (2012) materializes this line of thinking by arguing that often-times work is not conducted "according to the book', and when formalized management methods are strived for, they become either too time consuming or difficult to execute (Tengblad, 2012, p. 350). Faced with equivocality, it is within this context that practitioners may be exposed to other informal means necessary to carrying out their functions.

2.2.3 Conducted Research Connecting Organizational Politicking to communication roles

There are two authors who have come closest to exploring the connection between OP and communicative roles. Reber and Berger (2006) in their seminal work interviewed 162 PR practitioners to find out how participants defined influence. Their findings revealed that PR practitioners' definitions of influence varied with some emphasizing on the ability to persuade others to do things without having formal authority, others claiming being listened to and having one's voice sought out, and finally others defining it as helping shape decisions in organizations (Reber & Berger, 2006, p. 239-242). Reber and Berger's (2006) study lightly treads the surface of arguing that political skill is an important force in gaining influence as well as acknowledge that "identifying many diverse sources of influence in public relations, including those that may be underutilized or underdeveloped, may be an important step in increasing the overall influence and social legitimacy of the profession" (Reber & Berger, 2006, p. 245). This further reinforces the need to conduct the current research, because I explore this uncharted terrain of political skill and problematize the word 'influence' to see if it can be synchronized with OP in some regards. Where my research further differs from Reber and Berger's is that their study primarily takes into account senior PR executive perceptions with the average years of experience amounting to 21 years. My sample is more diverse in that I not only consider the voices of PR practitioners, but instead take into account a more diverse range of communication practitioners in different positions who range from junior-level, mid-level and upper managerial positions with the years of experience varying between three and 37 years, in both public and private sector jobs. This allows the investigation to explore the broader extent of politicking within communications.

The second author is Spicer (1997). Furthering Gandz and Murray's (1980) research on OP among managers with different organizational functions and organization types, Spicer (1994) developed a similar survey, to compare politicking to PR practitioners (As cited in Spicer, 1997, p.131). His findings provided a stark boost in figural differences between the two groups. For example, a 21.3% response variance to the statement 'only organizationally weak people play politics' where 68.5% of the managers in Gandz and Murray's (1980) disagreed, yet a hefty 89.9% of the PR practitioners in Spicer's (1994) study strongly disagreed (As cited in Spicer, 1997, p.131). What this suggests, and as Spicer (1997) elaborates in his subsequent book, is that the reasoning behind the different responses might have to do with the PR role being more susceptible to OP. He infers, "given the nature of the public relations function (a

communication function of management that seeks to align the organization with various stakeholders), PR practitioners may often find themselves in situations demanding the use of influence, that is, situations that are political in nature" (p. 132). The major drawback with these two studies is that they are extremely timeworn, and much technological advancement has taken place since their publication, altering conceptualizations of the PR function and communication practitioner roles. Nonetheless the information is still valuable in the sense that it justifies the current research, by recognizing an arena where OP may be more prevalent than others. At the same time, it is puzzling given the findings, that not more research has been directed towards studying OP and its application to communication practitioners.

2.2.4 The Dominant Coalition

Much of the classical PR literature postulates that for communication practitioners to gain influence and power, it requires entrance into the 'dominant coalition' (Berger, 2005; Broom & Dozier, 1985; Grunig, 1992). Having a seat at the big table in this regard comprises of persons who are present in the decision-making circle and have a major say in key strategic decisions of the organization. Yet studies have shown that these communication practitioners seldom make it into the inner circle, leading to additional research on pre-requisites needed for communication practitioners to do so, with the argument that *not* being in it inhibits their chances of elevating their profession and having influence on organizational choices and practices (Grunig, 1992; Grunig, 2013). Kanihan, Hansen, Blair, Shore and Myers (2013) in their study on communication managers in the dominant coalition attributed informal power as a prerequisite to getting in. In particular, they emphasized the need to cultivate informal relationships with upper members already in the circle to gain social capital and influence (p. 143). "Informally, the communication manager must fit in to the social and after-work culture of the top executives in the organization" (p. 153). In contrast, Reber and Berger's (2006) sample of 162 PR practitioners found that only 6.4 percent of the PR practitioners associated gaining influence with being seated at the big table (p. 240). Participants voiced that being seated in the dominant coalition did not necessarily equate to influence seeing as influence depended on levels of involvement and some may simply be seated there as 'honorific notion' (p. 241). Berger (2005) in his sharp vivisection of the dominant coalition found that "the existence of a single, all-prevailing dominant coalition is a myth: power relations occur in multiple dominant coalitions in large organizations (p. 9). So, on the one hand, one school of thought says we have to institutionalize the communication profession into the dominant coalition, and the other school sees it more as a normative aspiration and *not* a precondition or

ticket way to gaining influence. Whether or not practitioners need to be in this dominant coalition is beyond the scope of this paper, however both sides of the debate concede that political astuteness is vital to becoming a successful player in the political infrastructure that constitutes the organization (Kanihan et al., 2013, p. 143; Spicer, 1997). Simultaneously, this is in large a major void in the literature because these scholars recognize the importance of politicking yet fail to go beyond simply stating that politicking is necessary, to actually examining the nature and functions of OP in full depth. Thus, this study attempts to explore this gap.

2.3 Synthesis

Five things become clear in streamlining the literature on OP and the roles of communication practitioners. Firstly, the existing studies that *do* touch upon OP's relationship to communication practitioners only scratch the surface of these informal mechanisms and requirement of political astuteness deemed important for communication practitioners to gain influence from within organizations. There is clear evidence to suspect that communication practitioner roles may be laden with activities of politicking due to the constant emphasis on informality and handling of multiple interests. Secondly, a clear paradox is revealed between static role configurations of communication practitioners and the reality of those roles that transpire within organizations. I believe a more political and dynamic understanding of these roles can reduce this knowledge gap. Thirdly, most of the conducted studies on OP are quantitative, using self-reported questionnaires, making it difficult to unravel the interpretations behind certain tactical intentions as well as avoid source bias in findings. This validates the need for this current research to integrate a qualitative approach to the subjective experiences of communication practitioners. Fourthly, the literature review has also shown that sample participants from the majority of existing studies of OP constitute a variation of occupational professions in the same studies (Eldor, 2017; Poon, 2003; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002). This reaffirms the notion that there is a lack of research focusing on communication professional specificity. Finally, the studies on OP appear extremely fragmented as to what effect it has (functional or dysfunctional) in different contexts and this requires casting a heedful eye to the methodological considerations of the current research, such as remaining impartial and formulating open-ended questions in the interview guide (see methodology). In spite of their shortcomings, overall the studies remain insightful for the reason that they elucidate the complexity of dealing with OP within organizations. Now we turn to the theoretical framework to elaborate on some key concepts briefly mentioned in this literature review.

3. Theoretical Framework

This chapter covers three theoretical frameworks to address the purpose of the study and guide the analysis. The first, is Nothhaft's (2010) theoretical construct of communication management as a second-order management function which holds that communication practitioners are often confronted with the challenge of having to influence others beyond their formal authority. The second theoretical framework applies Yukl et al. (2008) 11-set typology of influence tactics, used by employees to achieve goals and objectives. The final framework draws upon Goffman's (1959) impression management theory which concerns the processes individuals adopt to influence how others perceive them in social interactions. It should be noted this last framework was incorporated as a result of the insights harnessed from conducting the interviews, thereby illustrating the exploratory and often-times iterative features of this study. Before continuing however, it is necessary to elaborate, there are different perspectives to contemplate when talking about power and politics in organizations. These three are: *unitary, pluralist* or *radical* organizations (Morgan, 2006). The holdings of this thesis could have been framed in line with unitary (alignment of common objectives among employees with managerial prerogatives guiding organizations) or radical (contradictory class divisional views of organizations as battlefields) (Morgan, 2006, p. 196). However, the micro-politics I overarchingly contextualize in this study, departs from the power perspective of *pluralism.* This marks organizations as constituting different groups of individuals with a diversity of interests. Power can thus be drawn from "a plurality of sources" (Morgan, 2006, p. 196). In line with this ideology, I maintain that power can be exercised in a variety of ways by individuals regardless of their formal authority, something which underpins the main reason for conducting this research of communication practitioners. Moreover, pluralism stresses that politicking can serve both positive and negative outcomes within organizations (Morgan, 2006, p. 198), a vital stance if I am to explore this phenomenon from the practitioner viewpoints without prioritizing one side over another. Hence the radical frame of reference would be ill-suited for the current study because of its extremity, as would the unitary one which largely ignores the power dimensions of organizational life.

3.1 Communication Management as a Second-Order Management Function

Nothhaft's (2010) theory of *Communication Management as a Second-Order Management Function* proposes that there is a distinction between first and second-order management functions for communication professionals. He postulates that first-order management is the more classical conceptualization in communication management which involves influencing the work of subordinates through managing by means of planning, organizing and controlling for instance. Second-order management on the other hand, concerns "influencing the management process of your peers over which you have no, or at best functional authority" (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 133). Figure 2 illustrates how first order management can be seen, with CM (communication management) representing second-order management that permeates all stages of input, throughput, and output.
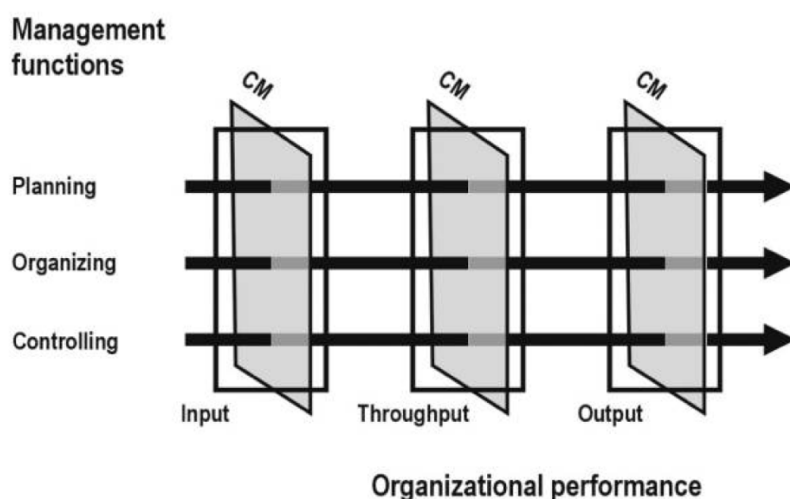
Figure 2: Second-Order Management   (Source, Nothhaft, 2010)

These two order managements types are not mutually exclusive, and the communication manager may partake in both management styles with the understanding that "communication executives do also manage departments and subordinates which are under their formal authority and directly handle affairs" (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 134). However, Nothhaft proceeds to argue that second-order management concerns a higher and more subtle level of communication management than the former (p. 134). This is for the reason that the foremost function of this

communication role is to institutionalize certain concerns (of particular stakeholders, general public, society etc.) within the organization. This is also where things take an interesting turn in his theory seeing as he articulates that thus far second-order management appears to gravely neighbor OP. The differentiation between the two he suggests, "lies in the fact that politicking is done primarily with a view to serving the interests of those engaging in it; second-order management is done primarily with a view to serving the company's interest by institutionalizing the respective concern" (p. 133). The juxtaposition between these two concepts of second-order management and OP is one of the prime interests of this thesis. To see whether managing and influencing the management of others *can* in fact be coupled with OP for communication practitioner purposes of achieving the same outcome of institutionalizing concerns. Nothhaft himself admits his distinction is a "naïve criterion, and those adept at playing the game of politicking will always make it look as if it is played in the interest of the company" (p. 133-134). Still, it could be argued it need not matter that self-interest is satisfied if the actions noticeably do benefit the organization without harming individuals to help achieve strategic outcomes.

3.2 Yukl et al. (2008) Influence Tactics Framework

In this study, I employ the Yukl et al. (2008) typology of 11 influence tactics as a basis for the OP behaviors being explored among the communication practitioners. Names and descriptions of each tactic is outlined in figure 2. It is crucial to mention here that the perceptions as to what constitutes a tactic may be perceived and enacted differently depending on the person in question. Hence, the tactics in figure 2 are by no means static and may overlap. Deeper insight into these tactics and additional tactics pertaining to communication practitioners specifically may very well be revealed beyond this framework.

Influence Tactic	Description
Rational Persuasion	The agent uses logical arguments and factual evidence to show that the request or proposal is feasible and relevant for important task objectives
Apprising	The agent explains how carrying out a request or supporting a proposal will benefit the target personally or will help to advance the target's career
Inspirational Appeal	The agent appeals to the target's values and ideals or seeks to arouse the target person's emotions to gain commitment for a request or proposal
Consultation	The agent asks the target to suggest improvements or help plan a proposed activity or change for which the target person's support is desired
Collaboration	The agent offers to provide relevant resources or assistance if the target will carry out a request or approve a proposed change
Ingratiation	The agent uses praise and flattery when attempting to influence the target person to carry out a request or support a proposal
Personal Appeals	The agent asks the target to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship, or asks for a personal favor before saying what it is
Exchange	The agent offers something the target person wants, or offers to reciprocate at a later time, if the target will do what the agent requests
Coalition Tactics	The agent enlists the aid of others, or uses the support of others, as a way to influence the target to do something
Legitimating Tactics	The agent seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request or to verify that he/she has the authority to make it.
Pressure	The agent uses demands, threats, frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence the target to do something

Figure 3: Influence Tactics *(Source: Yukl, et al., 2008, p. 610)*

The reason for prioritizing this specific typology over existing ones can be summarized in three distinct points. Firstly, this framework stems from the originally developed tactics of Kipnis et al. (1980) and has been refined over the course of several years (Yukl & Tracey, 1992; Yukl & Seifert, 2002; Yukl, et al., 2008). As such, it is the most comprehensive taxonomy of its kind and has been widely tested by many scholars throughout the years (Douglas & Gardner, 2004; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002). This gives the research a sound basis to depart from. Secondly, these tactics are argued to be "especially important in situations where the agent has little authority over target persons" (Yukl et al., 2008, p. 609). This makes it relevant to the context of this study seeing as a prime concern is how communication practitioners get their way and influence the attitudes and behaviors of upper management members to attain their goals. That being said, influence tactics enable all persons with or without formal power to influence others, and this

is also of interest to this study, including downward (subordinate), lateral (same level), and upward (superior) influence attempts. Lastly, and most importantly is that the influence tactics in figure 3, while prominent in the OP literature, provide a more nuanced understanding in that some of the behaviors may carry more political undertones than others, or some not at all, depending on what the participants make of it. An important aspect in my research concerns impartiality during the interviews. Seeing as I make it clear I take a non-judgmental stance, this too has to be conveyed in the presentation of these tactics. In my view, the fact that the tactics are *not* slanted in particular directions of bias may enable my participants to be more forthcoming.

In addition, there have been attempts to distinguish between hard versus soft tactics in the framework (Yukl & Seifert, 2002). Hard tactics are considered more forceful and authoritative whereas soft tactics are as the name implies, softer, less authoritative, appealing more to impressions. In my research, while I do *not* directly endeavor into this hard versus soft form, I do remain open to distinctions made by participants themselves. The reason for not making this a priority can be reflected in a problematic feature I observed within the tactic of *pressure*. The phrase, 'the agent uses demands and threats' could be interpreted as a hard tactic, yet in the same description 'frequent checking and persistent reminders' could contrariwise be considered a softer tactic (Yukl et al., 2008, p. 610). Finally, Yukl et al. (2008) articulate that a wide array of research methods can be employed to study these influence tactics including, qualitative descriptions, lab controlled exercised settings, and quantitative surveys, the latter of which has received the most amount of attention (Yukl et al., 2008, p. 609). I maintain in this research, that harnessing qualitative interview accounts allow the tactics to be approached from a different angle. For instance, where an experience is first drawn out, followed by the attribution to a specific or series of tactics, as opposed to being served the tactic in a questionnaire with no room to elaborate.

3.3 Impression Management Theory

Coined by Symbolic Interactionist Erving Goffman (1959) in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life,* the concept of impression management is rooted in the dramaturgical tradition. It details how individuals emit self-presentations of themselves in social interactions in order to influence the perceptions of others. All to conjure a desired image of something in the eyes of that select person (Goffman, 1959, p. 203). Social actors may take

on different roles depending on whom the interactant is and this is usually done with an alignment to the actor's goals through controlling and regulating mannerisms, appearance, or speech acts in such given interactions. What renders impression management a relevant lens in this study is that it can be seen as a vehicle for interpersonal insight into the hidden dynamics behind communication practitioner performances. Prasad (2018) articulates, "Goffman believes that individuals frequently orchestrate their own public performances by tinkering with the scene" (Prasad, 2018, p. 48) which further reinforces the frameworks' relevance for the topic at hand. Impression management moreover coincides with some of the influence tactics articulated in the prior section, for example, the tactic of *ingratiation* where *"the agent uses praise and flattery when attempting to influence the target person to carry out a request or support a proposal"* (Yukl et al., 2008). The processes of impression management can manifest as either conscious strategic acts, or subconscious and habitual ones, emitted through verbal or non-verbal cues. Here is where it becomes difficult to discern whether an impressionist act is subconsciously reflected in a tendency for someone to compliment others as with *ingratiation* or if it is a conscious strategic act to obtain a desired outcome. And this necessitates an intimate discussion with my informants to see whether these mechanisms are foreplanned or not. Goffman argues that these performances are enacted in the *front-stage* arena of the public eye, whereas *back-stage* represents a more private realm where the more authentic self-presides and one can step out of character to prepare and orchestrate his or her performance for the front stage (Goffman, 1959, p. 22-24). Goffman (1959) also introduces the concept of dramaturgical discipline which entails that actors need to exercise their roles in disciplined ways, with the ability to disassociate themselves from their self-presentations in order to adapt to unexpected contingencies that may occur (p. 137). Snyder (1974) was the first to label this ability to regulate one's behavior in accordance to the social situation as *self-monitoring*. Goffman referred to it as self-control and further alluded to the disciplined performer as "someone with sufficient poise to move from private places of informality to public ones... without allowing such changes to confuse him" (Goffman, 1959, p. 138). Given that I am *not* doing participant observation, I am unable to observe these social interactions of impression management in the front-stage as such, however I am able through the interviews to gain access to my informants' understandings of perceived levels of involvement with this concept.

3. Methodology

Qualitative in-depth interviews are what constitute the empirical foundation of this thesis. It is *exploratory* given the relatively few studies that have been conducted on the phenomena of OP in its relation to communication practitioners. The decision for a qualitative enquiry reflects my ambition to gain access to the subjective and "intimate aspects of people's life worlds" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005, p. 157). It is also salient here to stress that critics of qualitative studies commonly cite concerns of not being able to generalize findings to wider populations. However, in agreement with Flyvbjerg (2006), I argue we need *not* disregard the generalizability of contextual knowledge completely (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 237). The discoveries made here, do have the ability of inferring key insights and conceptual building blocks into the dynamic work processes of communication practitioners. This chapter begins with an overview of the research strategy, followed by the epistemological and ontological perspective that shape this thesis. Next, it delves into sections on data collection, sampling techniques and selection and criteria of interviewees. Interview proceedings are then addressed, followed by reflections on ethical considerations. The chapter closes with an outline of the analytical procedure.

4.1 Overview of Research Strategy

This thesis adopts an *abductive approach* incorporating elements from both deductive and inductive logic. In abduction, the research process "alternates between (previous) theory and empirical facts (or clues) whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other" (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2018, p. 5). Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) argue that the straight boxes of purely inductive and deductive approaches are often one-sided and impractical in terms of how research is really carried out (p. 5). In my research, I am deductively guided by the theory typology of influence tactics, to analyze which tactics are employed by the interviewees. Thereafter, in order to understand how exactly the tactics are employed by communication practitioners I use the empirical material to reanalyze and refine the generic OP categories and adapt them to the specific setting of communication professionals (inductive). Here I also remain open to the addition of new theory (impression management) as well as

remain flexible to the modification, or emergence of new categories that arise from the interviews (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). Figure 4 depicts an inward spiral motion, where I go from theory to empirical data, to analysis and back to theory again.
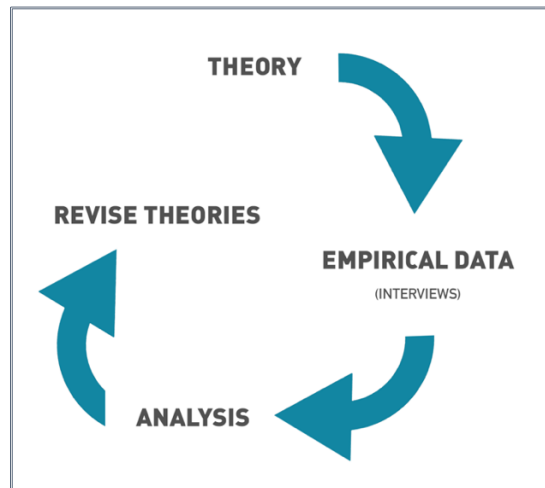

Figure 4: Abductive Approach   *Source: Own Conceptualization*

4.2 Epistemological and Ontological Framework

The epistemological and ontological standpoint of this thesis is based on a *social constructionist* understanding of the empirical material (Berger & Luckmann, 1991). Situated in the post-positivist paradigm, social constructionism holds that meaning is created and recreated through social interactions and relational practices (Burr, 2003; Patton, 2002). The standpoint makes no confirmation as to the truth or rejection of universal understandings (Burr, 2003; Gergen, 1999) making this approach relevant to the current study given previous research indicating the broad range of perceived realities of OP. The stance urges researchers to question their basic assumptions of things taken for granted of persons and processes in this world (Burr, 2003; Berger & Luckmann, 1991, p. 81). What my inquiry does, is take these commonly held assumption of OP and contrast it to what the practitioners' perceptions are around it. As such politicking itself is considered the socially constructed phenomenon. So too are the communicator relationships forged within organizations. This comes with the understanding that even if I were to enter an organization to find a misconstrued representation of how things are portrayed, the knowledge captured of the practitioners' local realities in this particular time and context remain befitting seeing as this is what guides their behavioral and cognitive train of responses (Ferris et al., 2000). Simply put, their social constructs constitute the object of

this study and refuting their claims would be paradoxical to the tenets of this philosophy. Moreover, this framework particularly bodes well with the theoretical orientations of this thesis in that scholars of this philosophy see organizations not as stable structures but as complex ongoing coordinations (Gergen, 1999). This resonates with pluralism - a recognition of multiple realities and interests. Impression management too becomes an appropriate lens in observing social interactions and how practitioners co-create realities and tweak impressions. I furthermore treat the tactic typology as a social construct, built up and constituted in and through interaction. Finally, adopting the social constructionist perspective also means reflecting on the interview process itself as a social construction (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 6; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 219). The language used by the participants and myself to make sense of the phenomena is instrumental to this interactive process (Burr, 2003). I by no means claim to airbrush myself out of the picture of the research process, but I do take precautionary steps to remain impartial, and minimize bias through formulating open-ended questions and informing my participants there are no right or wrong answers (Burr, 2003). This will be elaborated more in a forthcoming section entitled 'Interview Proceedings'.

4.3 Data Collection

The primary data was obtained in the form of qualitative interviews. 15 individual *semi-structured interviews* were conducted over the course of a month between February and March. The semi-structured format allowed the participants and I the flexibility to follow other trajectories in the conversations and for myself to ask impromptu questions that arose from their experiences (Alvesson & Sköldberg 2018; Patton, 2002). Two pilot studies were conducted in preparation for the main interviews. This was to source out practical flaws in the interview design so that I could make the necessary modifications, refine some of the research questions and better prepare for unforeseen contingencies (Bryman, 2012, p. 474; Patton, 2002) The two participants who matched the criteria of the main topic were not included in the empirical material of the analysis. They were however instrumental to this study in that their feedback identified ambiguities and difficult questions that were later reworded or deleted with the addition of four new questions to the guide. The two participants also identified information they would like to be provided with beforehand, such as the framework of influence tactics and particulars in the introduction to the topic with my aims bolded. Moreover, a better understanding of the time-frame for sessions was apprehended deeming the addition of the four questions feasible.

4.4 Sampling

A *purposive sampling* technique was used to identify communication practitioners, and this was narrowed down to *criterion sampling* method (Patton, 2002 p. 239) due to the predetermined criteria surrounding the research question (Bryman, 2012, p. 419). The platform of LinkedIn, Gmail, and Facebook groups were used to identify and make initial contact with participants. Four of the 15 communication practitioners were identified from a *snowball sampling technique* where the participant suggested someone in their network to reach out to (Patton, 2002). This technique was useful in this research context considering participants were extremely hard to recruit due to the sensitive medium of the topic. This technique is not without its limitations, one of which includes the risk of a predominant sampling bias. To minimize this, particular attention was paid to the heterogeneous nature of the initial contact. The aim of the research was *not* to simply interview like-minded people and colleagues as this would yield biased results on perceptions of OP. I made an active effort to track down diverse samples by reaching out and choosing interviewees in different organizations to avoid any inherent bias or connections of departmental affiliations.

4.5 Selection and Criteria of Interviewees

The reason behind 15 informants in this study is a combination of the time constraint and resources available for the investigation, primarily concerning accessing issues. As previously stated, tracking down participants was one of the most challenging tasks of this thesis in itself. In many cases, I was referred to people who never answered the enquiry or who responded after the second or third time of trying to establish contact. Others did not have time in between jobs, and some did not want to engage in the study due the risks associated with producing information that could compromise their own organizational integrity- all despite anonymity being ensured. Nonetheless, this hurdle was overcome, resulting in the inclusion of the following participants displayed in figure 6. Please note, all titles and organization types were approved by each practitioner beforehand. Some organizations are more specific due to informant approval.

Job title	Organization type	Referred to in text	Experience in role
Communications and Advocacy Consultant	United Nations (UN) Multilateral Organization	Comm_1	5 years
Head of Communications and investor relations	State-owned oil and natural gas corporation	Comm_2	10 years
Media correspondent and reporter	Public Broadcasting Service (PBS)	Comm_3	37 years
Digital Media Strategist and Coordinator	Digital Media Agency	Comm_4	5 years
Head of Media Department	International (NGO)in Hospital and Health Care	Comm_5	10 years
Digital Content Strategist	Financial Institution (FI)	Comm_6	8 years
Senior Communications Advisor	International Business Organization (IBO)	Comm_7	16 years
Media Executive	Publishing House	Comm_8	3 years
Communications Director	Nordic Digital Infrastructure	Comm_9	30 years
Communications Manager	International Environmental (NGO)	Comm_10	6 years
Head of Communications	Political Party	Comm_11	6 years
External Communication Expert	International Environmental (NGO)	Comm_12	6 years
Assistant Strategist	Advertising and Media Agency	Comm_13	3 years
EU NGO Secretariat Manager	Public Affairs Association for a European Health Organization	Comm_14	8 years
Marketing Director	University Primary Leadership Development Centre	Comm_15	4 years

Figure 6: Overview of Interviewees   *(Source: own compilation)*

Please note the selection of a media executive and media reporter could be construed as a different professionalization from communicators, however these two persons do work with the planning and implementation of communication material in their respective organizations as well as have held separate communication titles in the past. The practitioners consist of various

organizations and persons with different communication positions within Europe. I made this choice for several reasons. Firstly, the exploration of OP from a communication practitioner's perspective has scarcely been researched before, so the decision had to do with the novice angle this research departs from to maintain an eclectic sample of communication roles. Secondly, pulling participants from any of the same organizations was not an option for the reason that it could compromise their identity and interfere with departmental affiliations. Thirdly, in order to make the study more feasible in terms of ensuring greater access to interviewees, less rigid categorizations of roles were opted for. The disadvantages with this diverse mix include the difficulty of generalizing findings and patterns across different contexts given that organizational cultures are so different, and roles vary. I argue however, that as long as this is kept in mind, my participants are still bound by the commonality of working within the communication profession and this criterion alone together with the above-mentioned reasons justify the means of the sample participants.

Criteria for the participants was separated into two distinct phases. For the first, two criteria were developed for involvement namely: (1) actively works as communication practitioners for an organization/company seeing as it is their accounts, that constitute the object of the study and (2) requirement of a minimum time of three or more years working years in that position. Reason being for the latter, that the person will most probably be more established in the organization and somewhat more knowledgeable about its inner workings as well as accumulated experience of the job function compared to someone who was newer (Bryman, 2012, p. 473). In amassing more interviewees throughout the process, the second stage of the sampling process reflected a need to conjure samples with some semblance of diversity (Bryman, 2012, p. 428). This yielded (3) strive for as much of a fair distribution of female to males. Due to the added difficulty of recruiting participants for this study, the outcome is slightly skewed with six males and nine females. (4) Participants in both top managerial communication positions, as well as junior-level positions. Finally (5) persons in organizations made up of more rigid and bureaucratic structures, versus others that are more decentralized.

It is germane to mention here, that the 'communication manager' I refer to sometimes in the text, particularly within Nothhaft's framework (2010) is the Anglo-American sense of 'communication manager'. This denotes practitioners to having an area of responsibility in which they contribute to the planning, implementation and monitoring of relevant channels of communication within the organization be it internally or externally (Nothhaft, 2010). As such,

the term does not necessarily imply a manager being the top superior in that department and I use the term interchangeably with 'communication practitioner'.

4.6 Interview Proceedings

Five of the interviews were conducted in person at their office or in coffee shops and 10 through Skype. The Skype interviews were recorded using the software Evaer audio to capture the original audio and video and everyone was informed when recordings commenced and ended. In using this technology there is always the fear of technical glitches disturbing the interview as well as a loss of intimacy due to the lack of physical presence (Seitz, 2015). However, it was not felt that the interviews were compromised due to the strong Internet signal with the exception of two cases when the connection broke, but shortly resumed t to pick up where we left off. In some cases, it was expressed by participants that Skype added convenience to both their time preference (Seitz, 2015) and the fact that the interviews took place from the comfort of their own chosen milieu allowing them to be more forthcoming. For example, in a few face-to-face meetings arranged at offices, I noticed participants would look around to see if the room was soundproof first or lean in close to my own recording device and lower their voices when addressing particularly sensitive topics to ensure no other colleagues were listening. Copies of the final transcript were cross-checked with each participant so as to clear up any salient misrepresentations in the text. This respondent validation (Bryman, 2012, p. 391) is crucial in order to make sure experiences are accurately understood. In this study, alterations consisted of masking certain project names or other mentioned employees, thus it was not felt the material itself was compromised in meaning.

Each interview approximated between 45 minutes to an hour and an interview guide was used to steer the conversation (see appendix). Certain cases went over time due to probing on follow-up questions and allowing interviewees to finish their trains of thought. For example, I often found it helpful to repeat notable words and phrases they had said as a technique to stimulate further elaboration from their end. Broader and more general questions were first asked about their communication roles, the people under or over their authority so as to allow the interviewee the chance to warm up and talk about things they know. This was followed by more specific questions concerning the challenges encountered in their given role, ways of dealing with these hardships, before moving onto to the core questions of how they get their way in the organization and the use of OP. Rather than directly inserting fully laden questions about OP, I

would first ask them to describe examples of incidents in which they took informal routes to reach certain outcomes. In this way, their examples gave way to the said tactics more naturally. If certain things were said, I could sometimes add that a previous interviewee said something similar (without indicating who) to make them feel more at ease and substantiate their claim. Towards the end of the interviews, participants were asked to look at the influence tactic typology and identify and elaborate which ones they did or did not interact with. This often resulted in more examples being described, disregarding some, or referral back to a previously discussed example. In line with the social constructionist stance, where the interview itself is treated as a social interaction, my interviews took on elements of *the active interview* (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005), first coined by Bellah et al. (1996). This "creates the possibility of public conversation and argument" (p. 305) and allows for the object of the study to object. That is, in my interviews, in order to gain more insight, I would sometimes reiterate a previous description in which they contradicted themselves to gain more specification from their end (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2005). An example being in one instance, if they said they did not engage in this form of behavior but later provided an example of such, I could inquire "earlier you were saying you dislike routine because it makes you predictable, but you just mentioned consistency is key? Could you elaborate on that?". Similarly, if they articulated one standpoint, I would sometimes ask for their thoughts on an opposing viewpoint. The overall technique is also something which Alvesson (2003) refers to as *reflexive pragmatism* to gather more angular insights whilst still detaching myself from a certain prejudice through nuancing the different sides and *not* indicating agreement or disagreement with one certain perspective (p. 25). I would argue in whole, employing these techniques strengthened the quality of the dialogues substantially.

4.7 Ethical Considerations

The integrity of this thesis is contingent upon ethical considerations due to the sensitive nature of the topic. Herein lies the understanding that participants may feel as if their own character is being put into question when associating politicking with their own maneuvering as well as the added ramifications it may have for their organization's integrity. Thus, these were the steps I took to foster an environment of trust, accountability and mutual respect among my participants. I would set the interview stage at the beginning by using a colloquial tone and introduce my topic, ambitions and on which platform my study would be published. Almost all the conversations began with informal light-hearted discussions before recordings commenced.

This allowed me and the participant to get to know things about each other's lives before jumping in. In further establishing this trust, I would throughout reiterate the importance of protecting the anonymity and confidentiality of their material and respective organizational identities (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 20). It was made clear that their audio files would be deleted after transcriptions. In line with the ethical review act in Swedish Law and International guidelines, informed consent forms were distributed before each interview (see appendix). Madison et al. (1980) have earlier suggested eschewing the phrase 'OP' and replacing it with a relevant euphemism in the investigation. While the word 'influence' was often used, the decision was made to *not* cloak the term OP by any means so as to remain translucent and generate findings that were true to the original term. Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) elaborate that becoming an ethically capable researcher involves initiating one's phronetic thinking and contextualizing acts (p. 177). For example, in my interviews when a politicking act was being described, particulars relating to that context were asked for, paying specific attention to temporal conditions to understand why and how they acted so under certain conditions. Finally, as a researcher entering into these conversations, in order to avoid a certain source bias, it requires constant examination on my own reflexivity and positionality throughout the research process. The fact that I am a half-Swedish half-Australian female student not only produces certain biases on my part but could also influence the communication practitioners' interaction with me. To manage these research relationships, I first shared with informants part of my background history of having grown up abroad in various countries, as well as what lead me to pursue a Bachelors and Masters in Sweden, to put my undertakings more into context. I also wanted to make them aware of the appreciation I had for their profession and thanked them for taking the time to speak with a research student. This included sharing my opinion on the significance of merging practical and theoretical knowledge together with their help in order to make genuine contributions to the field of strategic communications. In retrospect, it was my general feeling that their trust was gained through a reciprocal process of opening up.

4.8 Analytical Process

The data analysis was undertaken as a *thematic analysis (TA)* as expounded by Braun and Clarke (2006). This method emphasizes the identification, organizing, and analysis of themes and patterns that arise from the interview data. It was chosen for my study due to its flexible technique in granting a certain level of theoretical freedom allowing for both deductive and inductive analyses of themes to surface (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 12). This was useful because

to reiterate from earlier, my coding embodied an abductive process with preliminary theoretical categories constructed beforehand based on the influence tactics, but I actively maintained the flexibility for new categories and unforeseen themes to emerge from the empirical material based on communication practitioner specificities (Eksell & Thelander, 2014). The last section of the analysis takes on elements of a *discursive approach*. It should be borne in mind, this section is not meant to incorporate a fully sophisticated discourse analysis and so there is *no* need to derive a heavy theoretical apparatus from it as such. Rather I use the method to analyze the discursive level of how meaning and certain opinions were altered during the interchange to produce new insights and understandings from the interviewees themselves in the totality of discussions. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) articulate this as 'the discursive production of a social episode' (p. 262).

The interviews were first transcribed manually. I argue that transcribing them myself as opposed to using a computer-generated software, ensured words were transcribed more thoroughly. It brought me closer to the data at an earlier stage allowing for the derivation of key concepts to surface prematurely (the tactics employed). The transcripts were thereafter imported to the software Nvivo12 for *open coding* and textual analysis (Patton, 2002) to alleviate the task of sorting, classifying, and arranging the data. Once harnessed, a more elaborate coding scheme was developed based on re-readings. The goal of this next step was to unearth themes and patterns that had to do with specific values and assets that communication practitioners employ in their tactics. This took on a rather recursive process going back and forth, looking for similar patterns across texts. But also, from my part, taking active steps in trying to disprove myself from the created themes to look for other interviewees who contradicted a given pet theory in question. The subsequent analysis is the result of the themes that were developed for the following sections which will shortly be described. Ultimately, the overall analysis of material, coding and creation of sub-categories is a reflection of my own interpretation of other people's assertions (Eksell & Thelander, 2014, p. 2).

5. Analysis

This chapter constitutes the analysis of how communication practitioners use OP tactics to exert influence and achieve strategic outcomes within organizations and what other values, assets, and expertise they use to their advantage when invoking these tactics. The first section maps out the practitioners' understanding of the term OP. Thereafter the analysis is divided into four distinct parts. The first part concerns the tactical aptness of the existing Yukl et al. (2008) typology to communication practitioners. Here I have grouped together tactics thematically into three subsections based on their similar characteristics. The second part of the analysis delves into the expertise put on the table by the practitioners and is divided up into four identified themes of: boundary spanning and institutional memory, a fait accompli strategy, tactical timing and time cultivation, and interpersonal acumen. The third part of the analysis features the revised and extended version of the Yukl et al. (2008) tactic typology tailored to communication practitioners. The final part of the chapter concludes with a brief meta-analysis on the discourse level of discussion with participants.

5.1 Conceptualizations of OP

Several similarities abounded across the communication practitioner accounts when they were asked to define OP. Many saw the term itself as inordinately infused with negative connotations by society at large, yet, at the same time, identified OP as extremely omnipresent in their organizational lives. What became clear, was most of their understandings of OP were intrinsically linked to the enactment of subtler forms of human interactions that take place between actors. Here, OP was assigned as a fundamental requisite in how one goes about in persuading the decision-making process to attain desired ends. One practitioner described it as:

> *It's just the unofficial way in how things get done. Even using conversation and conversing is in the micro-sense organizational politicking. It's never going to be written in your job description. The fact of the matter is it's reality. You must factor that into every equation and consider how to use everything to your advantage. (Comm_8)*

Concomitantly, what also surfaced was the need for communicators to understand the political landscape of their organization, so that they themselves can navigate and map out the power dynamics of who wields influence, who the core players are in the organization, and what resources are needed to mobilized traction from certain constituents. Comm_9 conveyed OP as:

> *You just need to know the chess board so to speak. How is it played, how can you play it, but I always want to play it in a good way. What signal from this area would trigger something over there? (Comm_9)*

By relating the organizational arena to a game of chess, OP is depicted here as a way for practitioners to gauge out the value assets and positioning of other chess pieces (employees) to decide the best course of action in reaching a strategic objective. The repeated use of the metaphor throughout accounts suggests a recognition that organizations are made up of a plurality of interests by various stakeholders and OP's aim is to reconcile interdependencies between signals from various departments. Equally important in this excerpt, is the desire to exercise prudent political behavior. The most recurring statement from the interviewee responses when considering OP's negative or positive nature was "it depends on your intentions" and the foundations of these intentions were premised on whether OP was motivated by self-interest or by organizational concerns. What was strongly disliked by most practitioners were people who engaged in OP solely out of self-interest instead of organizational interests (Comm_1; Comm_5; Comm_3; Comm_4; Comm_7; Comm_9; Comm_12). Most informants were in unison that it *should be* and *usually is* for them an alignment of the two, with the latter being predominant. It was also brought to light that engaging in OP could easily backfire and have negative effects on employee relations and should sometimes be refrained from or exercised diligently. One practitioner in particular held a very strong viewpoint in their abhorrence towards OP. "*I don't accept it [OP]... everybody should be ready to tuck up their sleeves and do the dirty work. I don't have talk about… I have talk to and talk with*" (Comm_7). Here, OP was conceptualized as office gossip or the rounding of others as an 'easy' route people take to work directly against the organizational values of openness, transparency and honesty. In its most extreme form, harming or backstabbing a person, all practitioners agreed it was detrimental, yet in lieu of this, the vast majority of practitioners still viewed OP as a symptom of social influence processes manifested in the informal 'talk-tos and talk-withs'. Another communications practitioner defined OP as:

The approach used in an organization to befriend colleagues and superiors and
subtly influence them in the desired direction. It is also the individual positioning
towards co-workers and superiors in order to create an own image. (Comm_14)

Like multiple other practitioners' statements, intellections of OP very often drifted into the topic of impression management as seen in the quote above (Goffman, 1959) i.e. the art of framing self-presentations of one's self to control how one is perceived by others. This will be discussed more prominently in the coming sections. For now, however, it bears mentioning that this theoretical construct is connected to OP for the reason that a) there is a self-interest motif involved, and b) through these interactions "the performer may be engaged in a profitable form of activity that is concealed from the audience" (Goffman, 1959, p. 27). Unsurprisingly, the majority of the practitioners found it quite difficult to arrive at an exact definition of such a complex phenomenon. Most of their conceptualizations arose in the later portion of discussions, after reflecting upon their own experiences in intricate detail. This suggests that some practitioners at first are not fully reflective that the tactics they turn to constitute OP and this will be analyzed more deeply in the final meta-analysis of this chapter. To dig deeper, we now turn to the tactics.

5.2 Tactic Typology Aptness to Communication Practitioners

5.2.1 Rational Persuasion, Pressure and Legitimating Tactics

Rational persuasion uses "logical arguments and factual evidence to show that a request or proposal is feasible and relevant for important task objectives" (Yukl et al.*,* 2008). What was particularly noteworthy was a large proportion of informants' referral to this tactic as grounded in 'science' (Comm_3; Comm_5; Comm_9; Comm_11 Comm_13). This so, because of their ability to utilize analytical tools to collate measurable and tangible evidence of facts and figures including what works or what has not been received well among publics to dictate the next course of action. As such, it was very often described as a prime asset among communication practitioners' when influencing superiors. One practitioner pointed out:

We can measure exactly who watched an ad and other response rates. I think a
lot of my especially higher-level supervisors think in terms of data and numbers,

even though people think of this field as very soft like communications, which it certainly is an art, but part of what we do now is a science. And if I am convincing my director of something, I absolutely bring data to back it up. (Comm_13)

Every interviewee was asked to reflect on what the most challenging part of their role was, and one theme that constantly resurfaced was the often-invisible nature of their work and the effort that goes into strategizing and planning. For instance, Comm_6 stated others "do not see 60 percent of my job, and that is probably where most communication professionals live". To this end, measuring impact, as stated by Comm_13 in the previous excerpt, can be seen as one of the many ways communication professionals see their work materialize and a way of dominating discourse to 'uppers' who are driven by facts and figures (Comm_9). Often however, *rational persuasion* alone was not said to suffice. When it comes to the tactic *pressure,* which "uses demands, threats, frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence the target to do something" (Yukl et al., 2008), most interviewees were quick to remark that they engage in softer forms of pressuring as opposed to demands and threats. *"I wouldn't walk over bodies, but I can lightly tread on toes when things need to get rolling" (Comm_3)* was one practitioner's remark. This can be allocated to Nothhaft's (2010) second-order management framework because of its emphasis on operating tactics softly and diplomatically (p. 137). Hence with *pressure,* the simplest explanation would be that the harder moulds of demands and threats may not fall under their authority. But the more revealing explanation as the communicators themselves expressed is that they need to maintain good working relations with everyone in order to work across departments. Thus, the use of demands and threats could, in actuality, harm these relationships (Comm_4; Comm_6; Comm_12; Comm_14). In certain instances, however, after exhaustive attempts and as a last resort, some interviewees indicated that pressure is sought from upper management members to intervene as exemplified in the following excerpt:

This document needed to be processed. It was constantly being delayed. So, what I did was I approached the person 3 times, gently reminding them, via email as well and still did not succeed. The next level I took it too was the higher level, chief of communications, I notified her about the situation, she said she would follow up. (Comm_1)

In order to be able to appeal to upper management, be it the CEO or chief of communications, it helped the practitioners to 'have the ear' of this said person (Comm_5). When probed further, Comm_1 shortly after described how certain field missions on long travel trips with this person had led to conversating, talking about their values and personal lives and this in turn created a close-knit relationship, so that thereafter when Comm_1 had work that needed to be pushed for, s/he knew they had the deputy country director's likely support. Considering *legitimating* tactics, "the agent seeks to establish the legitimacy of a task or to verify that s/he has the authority to make it" (Yukl et al., 2008) rather than basing requests on their own authority, more often than not this tactic is imposed by communication practitioners through warranted support from superiors (Comm_1; Comm_2; Com_3; Com_6; Comm_15; Comm_11; Comm_12; Comm_13). As such, the tactic as it is defined in the Yukl et al. (2008) typology is rarely employed by the practitioners. By picking and choosing—and in some cases, completely redefining—elements of the tactic, this is one example of how my interviewees highlighted how tactics can be reclaimed and adapted to cater to specific strategic purposes.

5.2.2 The Three C's: Collaboration, Coalition Consultation and Exchange Tactics

In what was referred to as "The three C's of communication" by one informant after seeing the tactic typology (Comm_8), *collaboration*, *consultation*, and *coalition* tactics resonated with a large proportion of the communication practitioners. *Collaboration* is where "the agent offers to provide assistance...if the target will carry out the request" (Yukl et al., 2008) and *consultation* solicits input from the target person in the planning process to attain an objective and get them onboard (Yukl et al., 2008). By and large, I argue *collaboration* and *consultation* tactics may be considered vital keys to implementing second-order communication management for the reason that the tactics are 'softer' and more 'diplomatic' (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 137) working to advise, counsel and ingrain the input of others' feedback in order to attain desired needs. Also, because Nothhaft (2010) cautions "in second-order managing one has to be very careful not to steal the limelight from others" (p. 137) the usage of *consultation, collaboration* and *coalition* tactics may in fact work to decentralize the self-serving intent of practitioners and share the limelight by involving others' participation in proposed tasks or directions.

Moreover, a core challenge often brought up in the roles of the communication practitioners involved the constant need to educate and enable other members of the organization to become communication savvy individuals themselves. It was said that *consultation* and *collaboration* tactics naturally fit in as an expectation in their line of work in being able to coach and train employees in undemanding ways all whilst retaining control of task objectives to shape issues and directions (Comm_1; Comm_4; Comm_6; Comm_9; Comm_12; Comm_13; Comm_14). The same notion of retaining control of tasks and using these tactics on external partners was stated when one practitioner was intent on having a well-executed cover story published by a journalist, and offered to supply them with *"graphs, graphic material, photos, whatever you can give them to support the story to make it easier for them to get something good out"* (Comm_9). Interestingly, employing *collaboration* tactics were mentioned as often paving the way for an *Exchange* where a reward or resource is given in return for dispatching a request (Yukl et al., 2008). Although some practitioners argued, the rule of reciprocity does not always directly translate, and the benefit may come later. As Comm_6 was describing *"The nature of what we do is collaboration. It's not verbally exchanged if you do this, I will do that, but it's subtly implied and your own benefit might materialize later"* (Comm_6). Comm_2 added that an exchange of favors can be seen as a 'social investment' with colleagues where support is given, and later reciprocated. When further probed about these exchange tactics, it became clear that some of the practitioners were critical to the type of favors being asked of them. One stressed that an exchange does *not* come with a promise of helping out no matter what it is (Comm_12). It does matter what is being asked, and whether it falls within communicators' personal purview to support a request, making every exchange context dependent.

Coalition tactics were also deemed important to impact organizational outcomes. Per definition, this involves building an alliance of supporters to support a common cause as a way to influence the target (Yukl et al., 2008). In one example, one participant wanted to confront senior staff about how the expected level and quality of work did not translate into their long working hours and paychecks – a concern said to be reflected by most of the communicator co-workers there and this is what they did:

> *We enlisted the support of senior staff members from other [organization] offices and because we created a quasi-informal community of respected institutional leaders around the issue, I felt that our senior staff were much more receptive, accepting and open to the idea towards the end.* (Comm_15)

It was explicitly pointed out by numerous informants (Comm_1; Comm_5; Comm_11; Comm_13) including this one, however, that repercussions of building coalitions could easily fuel a tense environment where some bosses or coworkers might feel uncomfortable with others 'banding up' (Comm_8). Comm_3 added it was important to be aware of this, and not just tie yourself repeatedly to one particular coalition group. Regardless, in the former example, the end-result from this *coalition* tactic ultimately led to an increased pay rise and promise from upper-management to address the larger office culture that was deemed 'paternalistic'. In terms of OP, the self-interest motive was evident – increased pay-rise and adjusted work hours, yet through this coalition directive the action was made impersonal, legitimized and approachable by building up an alliance of supporters. More importantly it could be argued it was institutionalized to 'serve the company's interest' (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 133). In this case the result was negative employee morale which was lowering workplace efficiency and the risk of turnover intention. At the same time, the very notion of various coalitions existing adheres to the pluralistic mindset of organizations. One practitioner discussed how *coalition* tactics can help garner 'useful' friends: *"sometimes you know you can find friends, sort of people who would think like you, maybe false friends, but they'll be friends and back-ups in that situation"* (Comm_3). Two things are worth noting here. Firstly, the inclusion of the word 'false' certainly classifies this instance as an impression management process taking place (Goffman, 1959, p. 27) from which the practitioner displays friendly characteristics to warrant support for their own interests. The other, is that while the word 'false' seemingly carries a harsher-undertone, this excerpt could also be interpreted as someone who sets aside their personal differences to unite for a common cause. But what mechanisms then are needed to cultivate these office friendships? It is this we now turn to.

5.2.3 Ingratiation, Inspirational Appeals, Apprising and Personal Appeal Tactics

Ingratiation and *inspirational appeals* are, according to many of the informants, connected to the procurement of 'social capital' to build good rapport and foster relationships. Ingratiation "uses praise and flattery before or during an attempt to influence the target person to carry out a request" (Yukl et al., 2008) and *inspirational appeals* "appeals to the target's values and ideals or seeks to arouse the target person's emotions to gain commitment" (Yukl et al., 2008). Both tactics were seen as moves to increase amiability when influencing and as such are not

always encroached with manipulative undertones. One practitioner underscored, that as a communications professional:

> *The human interaction element makes it inevitable. You're expected to work more closely with the internals or across departments, that's your role. So, I think Ingratiation and Inspirational appeals are extremely beneficial in these contexts. (Comm_2)*

From the transcripts, it was also noted that eliciting *ingratiatory* and *inspirational* behavior is often "combined with other tactics" (Comm_12). For example, when referring to *consultation* tactics which solicits others' input, Comm_15's example included sometimes inserting a compliment of the admirable work done by the person before proceeding to ask their advice. What was raised by a large number of communication practitioners was that a drawback with *ingratiation* was its fragility in becoming overbearing, and ability to backfire if perceived as disingenuous on the receiving end. This is a clear instance necessitating *dramaturgical discipline* within impression management theory where the disciplined performer, must "be effectively disassociated from his presentation in a way that leaves him free to cope with dramaturgical contingencies as they arise" (Goffman, 1959, p. 137). This next quote captures one communicator's direct efforts at diffusing and altering such an impression.

> *I don't want to agree with everything [the director] says religiously. He might become suspicious if I always conform to saying yes, correct, I completely agree and see me as kissing up to him. What sometimes works is if you argue or challenge his judgment a little in the beginning, and then yield. It then comes across as more authentic from my side and makes him feel more knowledgeable because he believes he's managed to convince me. (Comm_8)*

This suggests that in challenging first and then performing a more supportive role, this practitioner gains credibility by appearing as informed by good judgement and not simply ingratiating to please the other. They infer dramaturgical discipline to readjust their image based on what they think the other person may speculate (Goffman, 1959). This is in holding with the other findings thus far pointing to communication practitioners as being extremely attentive to social cues and displaying qualities of high self-monitoring to mold the impressions held by others (Comm_3; Comm_4; Comm_6; Comm_12; Comm_14). Concerning *inspirational*

appeals i.e. arousing a person's emotions and ideals to gain commitment for an action, this was seen as indispensable to communication practitioners' line of work. This will be discussed at large in the second part of the analysis under 'interpersonal acumen'. Nonetheless this tactic was often said to be combined with *rational persuasion*, with many practitioners emphasizing that human beings rarely make exclusively rational decisions. Often attached to this process is a high amount of "emotional seepage into most decisions" (Comm_6) making it necessary to imbue messages with inspiring frames of reference tailored to what that person values. This is also where *apprising* tactics comes to play, where the requestor explains how supporting a proposal can personally benefit the target and their career too. This was especially evoked by practitioners when dealing with external partners to levy the partner's disposition first and foremost and from there draw in the common interest. Advancing these ideas, Comm_12 stated in a discussion with a business partner:

> *I would never start my conversation with 'you know, these [commodities] are in danger because there's this going on'. No one listens to that. Instead I go 'hey do you know we are fighting so your business can grow… well you know you're losing a lot of profit because there are illegal products on the market'* etc. *(Comm_12)*

Most distinctly however within *apprising* tactics, internally within the organization *none* of the practitioners referenced voicing the benefit of directly "help[ing] to advance the target's career" (Yukl et al., 2008). This was seen as a rather exaggerated promise that again often does not lie within their purview of guarantee. Nonetheless, the communicators emphasized how certain actions could benefit this person's job standing and alleviate future problems that that person might have to deal with within the scope of their responsibilities. What is further telling, is that *personal appeal* tactics were *not* said to be employed by any of the practitioners where "the agent asks the target person to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship" (Yukl et al., 2008). Many of the practitioners' explanations as stated before with *exchange* tactics, had to do with communication practitioners actively working to create and maintain these relationships. Hence, the attempt goes to foster conditions from the other to 'want to help' on their own without the demand of 'do this out of friendship' having to be verbalized (Comm_6; Comm_9; Comm_12). It is as such subtly implied from the created bond. Moreover, verbalizing it could further give away the tactical motive and breed skepticism among the constituents which infers practicing dramaturgical discipline (Goffman, 1959).

5.3 Communication Practitioner Expertise, Values, and Assets

5.3.1 Boundary Spanning and Institutional Memory

It comes down to leveraging your social voice and grasping the noise outside the company. To make the management more aware of stakeholder concerns, and what agenda can be set up. That's our expertise as practitioners. We know the outside external voices. (Comm_2)

Captured in the quote above, when engaging in various tactics and primarily in *rational persuasion* the most cited expertise from the communication practitioners themselves, was their extensive knowledge on the needs of external stakeholders. As *boundary spanners*, they utilize their links with external sources of information, as support frames in their influence attempts with organizational members. Part of this prowess hinges on the ability to effectively paint a picture of potential ominous threats that could transpire for the organization if a particular direction is not taken (Comm_4; Comm_8; Comm_11). What the communication practitioners bring to the table here is their image reputation management expertise through their constant monitoring of media coverage and other external events. This is also addressed in Nothhaft's (2010) communication role as a second-order management function where instead of challenging the opinion of the boss so as to not infringe on their authority, communication practitioners instead elevate the PR question "think about how it will look to outsiders of the organization! Think about what the media will make of this" (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 135). One practitioner emulated this exact line, *"I often find myself reminding [upper-management member], look what happened last time when we didn't follow up and the media storm that arose from that"* (Comm_15). On the one hand, the practitioner voiced that this argument helps frame unforeseeable risks and consequences to the target. But on the other hand, they noted it as particularly useful for elevating this apprehension on the target's behalf so as to concretize their own planned direction. Media especially can become so volatile, hence an advantage for communication practitioners is their ability to invoke mystical ominous threats that could arise from public discourse into the discussions. Another recurring pattern among communication practitioners involved fueling the competitive mindset of the person being influenced. As one communicator working for a political party remarked:

You can always speak to people's vanity. The need and want for an organization to want to be best at things. So if you can show someone else is better, you can always trigger someone's competitive mindset so to speak. (Comm_11)

Both the media example and competitive benchmarking certainly comes into play for *rational persuasion*, to incentivize and show the viability of a given proposal. But they can also be attributed to the tactic of *apprising* "the agent explains how carrying out a request will benefit the target personally" (Yukl et al., 2008). Only for communication practitioners, 'personally' denotes to explaining how carrying out the request will alleviate the targets job function and mitigate concerns that would otherwise likely have an impact on the organization and thus their job. One example that reflects this understanding was provided by Comm_9 when trying to convince their CEO that the company's presence at a media event was vital through communicating "*who else is there, what's the competitive edge for us [...] what the benefits are of us being there, but largely what are the disadvantages if we're not there*" (Comm_9*).*

Inversely, another pattern that surfaced from discussions in getting one's way was the practitioners' avail of internal expertise, drawing upon their *institutional memory*. This was especially the case for those based in larger organizations working with information from different departments, premised on the foundation of intra-organizational social relationships (Comm_1; Comm_2; Comm_3; Comm_8; Comm_11;). Over time, the practitioners encode memory on who does what, what projects were a success, and which actors are reliable for such and such internally. One communicator avidly expressed, that upper management could look to them when further information was being sought on the organization itself, employees, or past strategic successes and failures (Comm_1). To this degree, one advantage of their rich *institutional memory* we see here is they get consulted more from colleagues or upper management. Second-order management helps explain why this is the case, because communicator practitioners perform "the highly important function to give assurance to others, that they have covered their backs here" (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 135). Another informant even described how s/he was able to forge a new role for themselves using institutional memory to identify a loophole in the organizational structure that no other role was currently overseeing (Comm_3). Thus, both external expertise on how this function continued to persist in the media and their institutional knowledge on the resources currently lacking helped support the role's feasibility for this person.

5.3.2 A Fait Accompli Strategy

One of the most remarkable findings of this investigation was that in many endeavors, a handful of communication practitioners' resort to executing tasks before negotiating or getting approval from upper-management to test the waters. The arguments behind this *fait accompli* approach as I refer to it, or accomplished fact, was that it enabled practitioners to be efficient, save on time, and generate tangible results through bypassing chains of approval. It was emphasized that implementing a *fait accompli* is generally done in combination with 'low-risk actions' (Comm_3; Comm_15). The problem however with 'low-risk' as a concept is that it is highly relative. Nonetheless, one practitioner described a bold move of spontaneously testing the waters during a management team meeting on the subject of customer relation orientation and future growth:

> *The meeting went on for hours, so I got tired. And said, 'gentlemen please excuse me.' I went out the room, took my phone, and called the customers, and asked them 'what do you think about this, what should we do there, by the way, if I paid for it, would it be possible for you to get here in ten minutes' and they said, 'yeah sure.' So, I got 5 different customers, rounded them together outside the boardroom and gave them short briefs, and I said, 'let's go in and tell the guys.' And we did. The [management] was very happy at the end, but in the beginning when I entered the room with all the customers following me, they were shocked. (Comm_7)*

The novelty in this approach was *not* that it was the first time customer feedback had been incorporated into communication reports, but rather it was the first instance, in real- time where interaction took place between the management team and customers themselves, made possible in a spur of the moment action. If we apply this experience to communication management as a second-order management function (Nothhaft, 2010), the practitioner in their role was able to influence the board by confronting them with face-to-face alternative views of the organization, pressing issues of the customer stakeholders and as such s/he institutionalized the concern which in turn set in motion, the creation of a future advisory board made up of their most demanding customers. A key principle in employing the theory of second-order management involves communication practitioners, "institutionalizing the concerns of the general public, of society, or of particular stakeholders" (Nothhaft, 2010, p. 134). Through using the tactics *coalition* "enlisting the aid of others", and *consultation* "asking the target person to suggest

improvements or changes" (Yukl et al., 2008), this practitioner was able to mobilize the voices of the customer stakeholders into the meeting agenda, and as such the organization as a whole. All in a very audacious and informal manner. A similar experience of enacting a *fait accompli* was addressed by another practitioner, although his/her communication role comprised of a more junior level position and their experience in the role was three years whereas the former had a 13-year upper hand. This was their example:

> *We used to send a weekly report of client's competitors and I realized, we don't need this to be weekly... It's not efficient because the changes in between are so miniscule. So, I decided to hold on sending it and sort of tested it myself. In the end it was fine, and eventually I talked to my director about it and he agreed because he saw the results. I think it all comes down to figuring what you can get around to be more efficient. But yeah, I'm still on the newer side of the spectrum here so I'm more wary of what I do. (Comm_13).*

Interestingly the accounts suggest the more experience one accumulates in an organization, the more intuitive one becomes in knowing what is and is not acceptable, and this plays a role in the risks they take. It might derive from the fact that what would be considered 'high risk' to a junior employee is considered a part of the job for a more experienced member in a higher role. Comm_7 made it clear why s/he deemed it necessary in certain cases to perform the *fait accompli* strategy because "*talking the walk takes a lot of time and effort and it's not as efficient as just doing it. Action speaks louder than words. So the action imperative is outstanding*" (Comm_7). Elevated here, is this idea of 'progress over stagnation' (Comm_1) and this next excerpt may be an explanation as to why a *fait accompli* approach is sometimes necessitated to generate direct action for communication practitioners. "*The thing about communications, is that it is a 24/7 job. You may turn off your computer, but the internet isn't stopping [...] You have a strategy in place, all of a sudden thing are different the next day*" (Comm_4). It connects to a challenge a lot of the informants brought up in their day-to-day roles where communication is constantly in motion and ever-changing, so this requires constant adaptation and fast thinking (Comm_4; Comm_8; Comm_11). The impetus is thus to act on the window of opportunity for *fait accomplis*.

5.3.3 Tactical Timing and Time Cultivation

When the communication practitioners were asked about what assets they deemed to be most important in getting their way, the reference to 'timing' kept re-emerging as a theme. One aspect had to do with tactical timing when deploying activities, to a) deliver arguments concisely and b) find the most opportune moment of approaching someone. The other aspect entailed a longer process that I will refer to as *time cultivation* involving the active effort on the communicator's behalf in shaping the mindscape of said person over a long period of time in order to achieve task objectives. First, we turn to the former tactical timing:

> *My boss is somebody who has a short attention span, and when I come to him, I have to come with the facts, because after 5 minutes you've lost him, so you need to be quick and find him at a good time. Usually rational persuasion helps [...] but you can sort of tell by looking at him, sometimes he's got his feet on the table, he's relaxed, that could be a good time to approach him. If he's looking into his computer and frowning, it's probably best to walk away and find another time. (Comm_5)*

Two important points are captured in this excerpt that multiple communicators unveiled. Firstly, the necessity of delivering *rationally persuasive* arguments in a prompt and straight to the point manner, emphasizing on key messages in order to get into the heads of decision makers (Comm_1; Comm:11; Comm_12;). This may be because as many communicators expressed, and in synch with previous research, today's working landscape entails dealing with information overload due to technological advancements (Grunig, 2013; Hallahan et al., 2007). Another interviewee referred to this timely importance as a complexity reduction technique with the knowing that otherwise the boss might get "*inundated and decision fatigue*" (Comm_8). Time conciseness thus appears crucial within the tactic of *rational persuasion* for the practitioners to filter out the 'nice to knows' and instead insert 'need to knows' in their persuasion as Comm_7, Comm_8, and Comm_10 described it. The second point noted within tactical timing, involved concerted efforts on the communicator's behalf to anticipate when conditions will be most favorable to do the approaching. As another informant emphasized *"this is communication 101. You can have a great idea, but if the timing is off, the influence tactic will suffer"* (Comm_15). This is analogous to impression management theory which also touches upon this fragility of timing in considering the mood of other social stimuli before enacting a performance (Goffman, 1959, p. 36). Based on the above, my take on these

statements is that functions of the communicator role – establishing key messages and considering time dissemination in deliverables can largely be seen to cross over into informant work interactions when influencing other organizational members. While this finding may appear evident, nowhere in the tactic typology put forth by Yukl et al. (2008) is tactical timing addressed. As such, it may be considered a meta-tactic that transcends all levels of other influence tactics. For example, in *inspirational appeals* seeking "to arouse the person's emotions to gain commitment for a proposal" (Yukl et al., 2008) – the strategic timing in approaching one's boss as demonstrated by Comm_5, plays a pivotal role in optimizing chances of success if the influencee's current emotive state is deemed to be satisfiable by the communication practitioner.

The second major theme drawn from the accounts is what I conceptualize as *time cultivation* that of which serves as a long-term strategic goal in building up relationships with co-workers, superiors, and external stakeholders over a period. Comm_7 stressed that:

> *It's not just about having a network. You have to feed useful information into that*
> *network constantly. Otherwise you will not be the top of mind. People forget very*
> *fast, and loyalty only lies in the next 10 seconds. (Comm_7)*

Implicit in this person's stance, is the significance of keeping actors of a network in the loop over a long period so as when the time comes to implement a project, the practitioner will be at the forefront of the person's mind and have a secured positioning of involvement. The act of constant contact can also be juxtaposed with the tactic *pressure,* "frequent checking and persistent reminders to influence the target to do something" *(*Yukl et al., 2008) but a much milder and softer form of such which entails nurturing contact to lightly pressure one's way into an agenda.

 While it was stressed earlier that delivering persuasive arguments needs to be done briskly, on the other hand, for different contexts and larger scale projects on the horizon, practitioners stressed that arguments need to be built up slowly over time internally so as to trigger small actions of support along the way. This was Comm_14's example in persuading their boss:

> *I built up his curiosity and interest step by step in various conversations before*
> *presenting the entire concept. We had several informal discussions, I knew I*

wanted to present this project at some point. But I wanted to test the waters a bit, and also, insert somehow into the conversations, things that would relate to the project[...] it was much easier to convince him later that it was worth pursuing. (Comm_14)

What we gain from this quote is that these are the behind-the-scenes and informal means taken by the practitioner aimed at gradually infiltrating the mindset of the given actor and to a larger extent this embodies the subtler forms of OP when competing against other organization interests in order to leverage that suggested idea. It all comes down to "keeping actors warm", as Comm_9 expressed it.

5.3.4 Interpersonal Acumen

A lot of my tactics, involve, if I can meet someone in person, I'll be more successful. Because I'd like to think I have a charismatic personality. (Comm_4)

One of the distinct assets highlighted by a majority of the interviewees, was their interpersonal skill-set as communicators and how this played to their advantage in acts of persuasion and facilitating daily work activities. Given the nature of the communication role, this attribute of being socially astute and aware of how others form different interpretations as well as being able to tailor messages accordingly might not come as a surprise considering practitioners are expected to manage relationships with colleagues within and across departments, partners, and other clients. However, this notion warrants attention because it is within this interpersonal realm, that it becomes difficult to discern whether this adapting and maneuvering is simply human interaction, politicking or part of the job. The analysis points to a combination of all three, with higher emphasis on 'it's part of the job' for these professionals. This is because, as one informant expressed:

I think a lot of it in the communications field is going to be personality driven. You know, it is appealing to the other person's individuality. And the stronger your informal relationship, the more likely people are to help you out in whatever it is you need. You find common ground in things [...] For me I like to use a lot of humor, making people laugh, joking around as it allows people to want to help me more. Humor is a huge ally in that sense. (Comm_6)

Comm_6 uses humor *not* only to build cohesion and augment a favorable impression upon the target, but with the affiliative motive of using this humor as a toolkit and aid in achieving a specific strategic outcome in the workplace- this case being to get persons on board with a given idea. Humor thus serves as an impression management tool to breed congeniality and could essentially be enacted in any of the given tactics, although *inspirational appeal* "arousing the person's emotions" might be the most befitting if we are to go by the definitional elements of the tactics. Interestingly, both Comm_15 and Comm_8 saw humor as a useful attribute in lowering the defense of a constituent and making him or her more receptive to their message, but were quick to emphasize it could backfire, be misunderstood and as such must be employed cautiously. This goes for all communications, *"as a communicator you must have the competence to respond to their responses, and not be too reactive and impulsive with response if they're not pleasing you"* (Comm_2)*.* From an impression management perspective, what Comm_2 seems to be pointing at is their ability to be a high *self-monitor* (Snyder, 1974), the act of being able to assess social situations and modify ones behaviours accordingly to meet the demands of the circumstance. However, this is not limited to behavior alone. Within Goffman's (1959) conceptualization of impression management he emphasizes that persons use symbolically laden devices such as props or settings to impart information in social interactions (Goffman, 1959, p. 19). Clothing attire, as stated by Comm_2 below can be seen as one of these props that assists in instilling an impression of confidence and dependability of the self. "*Nice or neat attire, to instill some kind of confidence. It's signaling, not only for me but for the boss, to know that you represent the company to others as well" (Comm_2)*. However, when it comes to setting, a majority of the communicators underscored the importance of building informal relationships as a means to gaining commitment and desired ends among co-workers, superiors, and external stakeholders in the organization. In particular, they emphasized the need for a lot of these interactions to take place outside official work channels. Setting is indeed a prime feature in the dramaturgical tradition (Goffman, 1959, p. 58-60), and what was often quoted by the practitioners was the informal settings of coffee houses, restaurants, and bars serving as milieus to evolve these performances with colleagues and upper-management. On one side of the coin these interactions could be argued to manifest as 'behind-the-scenes efforts' 'informal and unofficial' acts in order to obtain preferred outcomes as explicated in one of the many definitions of OP (Brandon & Seldman, 2004, p. 2) But on the other side, the practitioners themselves brought to light that these informal settings and relationship building was integral to gaining the trust and support of said person (Comm_1; Comm_13):

It's not a matter of corrupting people. It's creating relationships and trust. When you meet face to face, or you have a chat over a drink or over a dinner or coffee, that changes the tone completely and the kind of relationship that you may have with this person. And depending on the culture, you may end up talking about personal issues, or family [...] Personal relationships, empathy or lack of empathy, connections, lack of synergy is really what dictates the success of a project. (Comm_10)

On the topic of informal contexts changing the 'tone', another practitioner cited how formal meetings often serve as a basis to address already existing concerns, whereas informal ones could lay the foundations for "new ideas to emerge and the sharing of tacit knowledge" (Comm_1). Whether it be to run something by someone or scope out new possibilities for a new project, informal contexts and interpersonal relationships appear to be integral to the communication profession in gaining traction for objectives.

5.4 Refined Tactic Typology for Communication Practitioners

Combining all the insight harnessed from the analysis, figure 7 depicts a revised and extended version of the Yukl et al. (2008) tactic typology tailored to communication practitioners of my study. I elaborate *only* on the key differences found in the analysis, thus tactics with green check boxes can be understood as largely remaining unchanged. The categories have been arranged more structurally according to common themes as divided in the subsections. Alterations include the addition of two meta-tactics, *tactical timing* and *time cultivation* as well as an additional tactic of *fait accompli*. Changes to the other tactics are summarized in the second column.

META-TACTICS
Tactical Timing- The practitioner delivers their request to the target concisely by inserting key messages of 'need to knows' rather than 'nice to knows' as well as finds the most opportune moment to approach the target to gain commitment for a request
Time Cultivation -The practitioner builds up a relationship or idea over a period of time to shape the mindscape of said person before presenting the entire concept

Original Tactic Definitions	Applied to Communication Practitioners
Rational Persuasion -The practitioner uses logical arguments and factual evidence to show that a request or proposal is feasible and relevant for important task objectives	Practitioners act as boundary spanners, utilizing their external expertise on the public as well as competitive benchmarking as logical support for arguments. Internally, Institutional memory is also used to encode memory of persons across departments and of past strategic successes and failures
Pressure- The practitioner uses demands, threats frequent checking, or persistent reminders to influence the target to do something	Practitioners rarely resort to demands and threats in their tactics and instead exert pressure more subtly
Legitimating Tactics- The practitioner seeks to establish the legitimacy of a request or to verify that he/she has the authority to make it	Legitimacy of requests are often done, *not* by verifying they have the authority to make it, but through enlisting the aid of upper management or coalitions as means of legitimation
Collaboration- The practitioner offers to provide assistance or necessary resources if the target will carry out a request or approve a proposed change	☑
Consultation -The practitioner asks the target person to suggest improvements or help plan a proposed activity or change for which the target person's support is desired	☑
Coalition -The practitioner enlists the aid of others, or uses the support of others, as a way to influence the target to do something	☑
Exchange- The practitioner offers something the target person wants, or offers to reciprocate at a later time, if the target will do what the agent requests	☑
Apprising- The practitioner explains how carrying out a request or support a proposal will benefit the target personally or help to advance the target's career	Explanations *rarely* include mention of advancing the targets careers as this does not fall within practitioners' purview of guarantee. Instead practitioners elevate how the task will alleviate the targets job standing or future problems the target may have to deal with in the scope of their responsibilities

Ingratiation- The practitioner uses praise and flattery before or during an attempt to influence the target person to carry out a request or support a proposal	☑
Personal appeals- The agent asks the target to carry out a request or support a proposal out of friendship, or asks for a personal favor before saying what it is	Not an employed tactic. Verbalizing 'out of friendship' could give away the tactical motive and practitioners instead work to enable the conditions for someone to want to help out, distinctly by their own choice due to the created bond
Inspirational appeals- The practitioner appeals to the target's values and ideals or seeks to arouse the target person's emotions to gain commitment for a request or proposal	☑
-	**Fait Accompli tactic-** The practitioner performs a task without being given authority or clearance, and uses the accomplished results to show the favorable outcome in the aftermath

Figure 7: **Refined Tactic Typology** (*Source: Own Conceptualization & Yukl et al., 2008*)

In sum, this table should *not* be seen as a complete and comprehensive picture of OP tactics. Instead, it is more for the understanding of the position of a communication practitioner, against the framework of known micro-politicking tactics and can be seen as conceptual building blocks from which future studies can depart.

5.5 Meta-Analysis on the Discourse Level

One of the most elucidating findings in this study eventuated on the discourse level of discussions with interviewees and it therefore felt important to incorporate an analytical discussion on how new understandings surfaced in the course of some conversations insofar as they saw "new meanings in what they experience and [did] so on the basis of their spontaneous descriptions" (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 221). The topic of OP is fraught with negative connotations and a recurring pattern among many of the interviewee responses indicated that as they began opening up, the reflection dawned upon them that many of their actions that were initially taken for granted could in fact be construed as politicking (Comm_2; Comm_3; Comm_4; Comm_12; Comm_14). Following this realization, participants attached more nuanced understandings to the term. One of the participants was able to articulate this into words:

While I was using these tactics, I was never thinking 'ahh this is an ingratiation tactic'. My actions were habitual in that sense. But come to think of it, maybe [OP] is something so intrinsically woven into our professional lives that we very often forget we're even doing it. It wasn't until I really reflected on the process now that I realized 'hey wait a minute this isn't so negative and I actually do use it to my advantage' [...] Our roles and responsibilities as communicators are messy and because lines are constantly blurred in the office, I think it is also important to view OP tactics as messy, not entirely good or bad, but as something incredibly nuanced. (Comm_15)

The interpretation I draw from the discourse level of this interview and many others is that OP as a phenomenon is not something that is unfamiliar to these practitioners. Instead, it is actively lived out and grappled with in many of their working environments. However, such actions are not necessarily tinged with negative connotations of OP and its self-serving demeanor.

Parallels to the phrasing of 'habitual actions' by Comm_15 can further be drawn to the tenets of social constructionism where Berger and Luckmann (1991) posit "all human activity is subject to habitualization. Any action that is repeated frequently becomes cast into a pattern" (p. 70). Similarly analyzed through the impression management theory lens, Goffman (1959) held that "the performer himself is typically unaware of how routinized his performance really is" (p. 31). Hence the collective understanding that many of the informants and I came to at the end is that: communication practitioners may become so enculturated in their roles and employ some of these tactics regularly, that eventually they cease to realize they are even drawing upon them (Comm_1; Comm_2; Comm_11; Comm_13; Comm_15). Bringing the chapter to a close, I end with an excerpt that largely reflects the leitmotif of most of the impressions I gathered from others. Depicting OP as *"a term that people commonly engage in but are not even aware of… but it's everywhere, it's how you persuade the decision-making process, persuade others to acquire your needs [...] The politicking process is interaction with people"* (Comm_2).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

This thesis set out to gain a deeper understanding of the utility of OP within the communication profession through a hands-on qualitative inquiry. In this final chapter, the results are discussed together with contributions of the study for research and practice. Avenues for future research are then addressed before ending with concluding remarks. On the theoretical level, this study has furthered the domain of the tactic typology put forth by Yukl et al. (2008), by testing its applicability to a novice population of communication practitioners. The overarching results have *not* only shown that OP transpires among the communication professionals work in this study, but that softer approaches to OP are preferred over coercion, and that OP is routinely used as a tool in expediting and alleviating the communicator's job function. While this aligns with Spicer's (1997) findings from over 22 years ago wherein he claims PR practitioners perceive their working environments as political, this study goes beyond this claim in two significant ways. First it has identified *which* tactics practitioners (and a more diverse range of such communication practitioners) actualize in their work. Secondly, it also traced *how* these tactics are (or in some cases not) enacted in the communication practitioners' day-to day work. Most importantly, this thesis has produced new insight into an exceedingly underdeveloped topic in the organizational communication literature, the findings of which support the need to refurbish the roles of communication practitioners to accommodate a more pragmatic understanding of what it entails to perform their roles.

6.1 Contributions of the Study

This study contributes to the mosaic of what we know about communication practitioners' job functions by suggesting that communication practitioners exercise OP as 'iron hands in velvet gloves', meaning their influential techniques are subtle, soft, and infused through their interpersonal interactions yet their iron fists prevail with disguised firmness in attaining their strategic ends. This highlights the need for academic circles to readjust their gaze and reflect these more subtler shades of OP found in this study because as it currently stands, existing literature paints a very categorical black and white picture of the concept as either entirely good or bad –even the literature that reasons with both sides of the debate (Ferris & Treadway, 2012; Grunig, 2013; Landells & Albrecht, 2015; Poon, 2003; Vigoda & Cohen, 2002).

Communication as a second-order management function predicted this 'subtlety' in managing the management of others (Nothhaft, 2010), however this study adds to this theoretical string by highlighting that OP *can* in fact be coupled with second-order management, due to the common motif of institutionalizing concerns. The difference lies in the understanding that OP is largely considered by the majority of the participants in my study, as an informal mechanism used to expedite, ease, and alleviate the communicator's job functions in order to materialize these institutionalized concerns. In this regard, the self-serving features propagated by the term itself become apparent.

Another key finding indicates a resoluteness among the practitioners in wanting to play the political game positively by employing these tactics without 'burning their bridges' so to speak. Previous studies have mostly covered what *causes* actors to perceive positive politicking or the successful ways of executing tactics (Buchanan, 2008; Eldor, 2017; Hoschwater, 2012; Spicer, 1997). Yet my research suggests an additional explanation to *how* positive politicking can be maintained: through the practitioner's use of a self-regulated mechanism of dramaturgical discipline to control the process. It is precisely this impression management technique derived from the inklings of the reactions of others, which allows practitioners to hold off on certain acts or readjust their behavior to better the chances of politicking *not* producing harmful effects for themselves or others.

More concretely, for the first RQ of how communication practitioners use OP tactics, it can be concluded that to the majority of the participants, these influence tactics do permeate communication practitioners day-to-day work life. The analysis of the material has shown that while certain tactics took on more subtler forms such as *pressure* and *legitimating tactics,* support was held for the remaining tactics: *rational persuasion, consultation, collaboration, coalition, inspirational appeals, ingratiation, apprising, and exchange tactics.* The contribution here extends on the nature of communication management roles underscored in previous research by Moss et al (2005), and beyond Broom and Smith's (1986) still famously cited classifications of communication managers and communication technicians. By showing that in addition to managerial tasks, responsibilities, and effective oral and written skills, another essential core function of the communication job involves harnessing the ability to make ends meet despite organizational hindrances.

The second RQ inquired into what kinds of expertise, values and assets were invoked by the communication practitioners alongside the various tactics. Here it was found some of the core strengths communication practitioners have at their disposal when trying to impact decisions was firstly, they call to arm their *boundary spanning* expertise on relevant stakeholders i.e. knowing what topics are newsworthy and induce competitive benchmarking as support arguments within the tactics. The contribution here, is a found link between boundary spanning and OP because of the occasional magnification and framing of events in more ominous regards in ways that aligns with the communicators' own objectives. Secondly, drawing upon *institutional memory* to influence upper management was also a significant finding according to many communication practitioners, given the oft-times expectation of practitioners working closely with internals within and across departments which leads to the aggregation of useful memory of the organization's internal environment. These insights add on to previous studies by Reber and Berger (2006), Grunig, (1992) and Kanihan et al. (2013) concerning communication practitioner entrance into the dominant coalition where both boundary spanning and institutional memory can indeed be seen as valuable tools to gaining favor with upper members of the coalition. Where this study slight diverges is, this is *not* to say practitioners use this expertise to gain entrance into the dominant coalition as suggested by Kanihan et al. (2013). Instead this knowledge is cited as complementary tools of OP because they give the communication practitioner leverage and can serve their own interests as shown by one informant who was able to forge a new role for themselves. To actually accrue institutional memory, further suggests perhaps there is also a need for communication practitioners to keep one foot outside the dominant coalition so as to effectively be able to contribute with valuable insider insight.

The prime contribution on the theoretical level for the second RQ was the addition of the *fait accompli* tactic to the Yukl et al. (2008) typology as well as the two overarching meta-tactics of *tactical timing* and *time cultivation.* For *fait accomplis*, it was the need to execute tasks directly rather than risk ideas dying on the vine in the wait for formal approval that drove practitioners to engage in this tactic. I was unable to get a grasp of how often this tactic is employed, but if found to be recurring among practitioners, then it points to serious flaws in the underlying decision-making processes of the given organization. This reinforces the need for organizational members with persons under their authority to continuously re-assess and perhaps even loosen the strains on which decisions *can* and *cannot* be made by communication practitioners to increase efficiency. Also, to foster organizational cultures where it becomes

acceptable for employees to test the waters with certain decisions, without fear of retribution, much like horizontal organizational structures already advocate. The alternative of *not* addressing these issues could increase both the frequency of *fait accomplis* as well as further concealment of such actions by practitioners.

Regarding *tactical timing* and *time cultivation* within the communication field, much of the practitioners' day-to-day work already centralizes around concise key messages and paying attention to timely deliverances of communication material. However, this study found that these attributes transcend into the practitioners' persuasive efforts of managing other 'persons' within the organization. These findings are significant because they lend support to the view of organizations as *not* always consisting of rational models of management. From where I stand, the rationalist view represents an ideological barrier to the further development of OP, despite studies time and time again emphasizing a plurality of interests within organizations. Consequently, tactics like the strategic consideration of the mood of a constituent, continue to be estranged from the scholarly literature in strategic communication. Rather than comprehending this information as weakening one's internal locus of control, I argue the opposite, that this information can help practitioners find manageable ways around these circumstances. The other conclusion I draw from *tactical timing and time cultivation* is that communication practitioners appear to be already carrying certain skills associated with political astuteness. This more so elevated by the finding that participants in this study attribute much of their success to their social skills i.e. ability to read and anticipate social situations when influencing. Several previous studies (Heide & Simonsson, 2011; Kanihan et al., 2013; Reber & Berger, 2006) have pointed to the need of building informal relationships with organizational members to better understand organizational life, but fewer have addressed *how*. In this study it was shown, that practitioners build personal connections outside the formal office spaces in milieus such as coffee shops restaurants, and even work trips through conversing about personal issues, shared values, and their personal lives which allows them to reap the benefits of knowing the other persons' values and ideals for future circumstances when they ingrain them into said tactics.

In the greater scheme of the communication profession, the implications of these findings suggest that the mentality surrounding OP must change if we are to gain a more accurate portrayal of how organizational life is conducted. Disregarding politicking raises the risk of

practitioners being left alone to navigate these grey areas by themselves which may in turn lead to more detrimental behavior and poorer organizational performance due to indirection. Rather than turning a blind eye, more attention needs to be directed towards managerial education in the form of textbooks as well as in-house teaching on the job to increase awareness on OP's different facets.

6.2 Suggestions for Future Research

Future avenues of research seeking to build on this thesis should consider several things. Firstly, a prime limitation with this research was the small sample size, thus quantitative inquiries are needed to gauge whether the tactical constructs discovered here hold up to scrutiny for larger samples of communication practitioners. Secondly, the current research has opened up a platform for further discussion which supports the speculation of OP being a relevant field of study among communication practitioners. Subsequent studies would do well to hone in on OP's relationship to distinct communication roles as it would allow more useful conclusions to be drawn about the specificities of those working roles. Another alternative would be to do a cross-comparative analysis of one specific organization and investigate how different departments experience OP in comparison to communication practitioners. This would cast light on one entity with the same organizational structure for all participants and shed light on how the communication function differs informally from others. Finally, many academic textbooks, especially in the management literature, still largely steer clear from the subject of OP. As previously stated, its peripheral nature in academic discourse stems from a variety of issues, including OP's negative connotations and its overall underestimation as a legitimate and necessary function in the lives of practitioners. Thus, another intriguing front would be to explore the different ways in which individuals first come into contact with OP and whether having learnt about it pragmatically or theoretically beforehand has an effect on practitioners' demeanor and perceptions surrounding the concept.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

At the very heart of strategic communication lies the human interaction process. This fact alone means that trying to make universal assumptions, such as those of classical management literature that views organizations as unified rational bodies, should be approached with caution. If scholars and academia at large are to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the macro-processes of strategic communication in organizations, it is crucial that the everyday micro practices of how strategic objectives emerge, and their underlying influences be

highlighted through the various OP examples proffered in this study. It is about time the outdated and misconstrued notions of organizations and by extension its people, their objectives and tactics, are thoroughly updated, so that the entire field of strategic communication can evolve in this day and age.

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Appendix

Consent Form and Interview Guide

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INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Thank you again sincerely for agreeing to be an interviewee for my Master Thesis. In order to be as ethically salient as possible and in line with the ethical review act in Swedish Law and International guidelines, informed consent is requested from those partaking in the research to inform you about the purpose of the study accompanied with relevant information specific to the undertakings of the thesis.

- Your name and organization will remain strictly confidential throughout the process and you will be given an anonymous identity in the findings unless requested otherwise. Any of the Interview material explicated in the thesis will be given care to ensure that that other information in the interview that could identify yourself is not revealed.
- You will receive a copy of the transcript after the Interview has taken place and given the opportunity to correct factual errors and mask unwanted project names
- Access to the anonymized interview transcript will be limited to myself (Lisa Kenny) and my supervisor (Howard Nothhaft)
- The original recording will be kept only by me and deleted after transcriptions
- Your participation is voluntary, and you maintain the right of stopping the interview or at any time without any negative consequences
- Should you not wish to answer particular questions, you are free to decline

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INTERVIEW GUIDE

Topic Introduction

Organizational Politicking (OP) or workplace politics among the many circulating definitions has been defined as "informal, unofficial, and sometimes behind-the-scenes efforts to sell ideas, influence a co-worker, organization, increase power, or achieve other targeted objectives". It's been cast in both negative and optimistic lights, with more emphasis on the former negative aspects in existing studies. My interest with this study concerns this concept of OP and the relationship it may have to communication practitioners.

With that Said: My aims with this study is to see how you as a communicator push for things in organizations. How do you go about influencing people who you do not necessarily hold formal authority over? What are some of the tactics you use? Ultimately, I want to gain your perspective on what you make of this phenomenon of 'Organizational Politicking' in relation to your job and what role it plays in the communication profession.

Questions (Seen only by me)

Part 1: ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

1. *Can you tell me about your communication role and job responsibilities?*
2. *What or who do you have authority over? And who do you report to?*
3. *How do you feel about your position in this communication role? Do you for example feel confident in delivering on your job expectations?*
4. *In your opinion, what is the hardest part about working in your role?*
5. *How do you deal with these hardships?*

Part 2: EXPERIENCE WITH OP (Without jumping into OP first)

6. *Can you give me an example where you had to convince someone, or push someone to do something?*
7. *What tactics were involved in achieving this outcome?*
8. *Can you describe an incident where you succeeded in getting your co-worker, boss, sub-ordinate to do something that you wanted? (how did you do this)*
9. *Do you have any examples of an episodes where something went wrong in the organization, or where you did something you weren't supposed to, but it still resulted in a good outcome? (again, ask for their tactics)*

Part 3: CONCEPTUALIZING OP

10. *How would you define Organizational Politicking? And what are your feelings surrounding its conduct?*
11. *(If answered yes in engagement) What drives you to partake in OP?*
12. *Do you think OP is necessitated more for some professions than others? Why?*
13. *Do you find it possible to demarcate what is considered OP or not? Why or why not?*
14. *Can you share with me some experiences of when OP has personally enabled you to achieve strategic outcomes or be efficient in a work task? (Probe on tactics)*
15. *Do you have any experience when OP has hindered you from achieving a strategic outcome or be efficient in a work task? (Probe on tactics)*

Part 4: TACTIC TYPOLOGY INSIGHTS

16. *Do any of these tactics resonate with you? /depending on yes or no*
17. What are your thoughts surrounding them?
18. *Which ones would you say you actively employ in your job?*
19. *Which ones do you **not** actively employ?*
20. *Are there any changes you would make to them or is there any additional insight you would like to add?*