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■ *Special Issue Paper*

Strategic communication management in the non-profit sector: a simplified model

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- A model for strategic communication management was developed in South Africa on the basis of the excellence study and relationship management theories. This normative, theoretical model has been applied as part of a project in non-profit organisations (NPOs), government institutions and small-to-medium sized companies. However, the operational reality of organisations' communication practices has not been measured against the model. It was therefore the objective of this article to comprehend the participating NPOs' operational and strategic communication management context. It was discovered that although NPOs can theoretically apply the normative Steyn and Puth model, it is not practically feasible, because of the NPOs' unique constraints.
- Thereafter, the development of a simplified model on the basis of sound theoretical principles for NPOs to implement strategic communication management was carried out, notwithstanding their constraints and limited resources. The steps/actions indicated in the simplified model are aligned to the NPOs' real and current practice, within the requirements of strategic communication management. By simplifying the model, and focusing on what NPOs are already doing, misconceptions about the complexity and feasibility of communication management might be clarified. It is also recommended that staff members of NPOs, who are responsible for communication and relationship management, be trained to strategically manage communication and stakeholder relationships. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

To ensure organisational survival in the present-day competitive environment, non-profit organisations (NPOs) must be managed in almost a similar manner as for-profit organisations. Amongst others, sponsors and donors demand value for their money, want proof that NPOs are fiscally responsible with their donations, and board members require measurable outcomes that must be supported through research. Bowers (2000) clearly emphasised that as NPOs mostly obtain funding from corporations, government and foundations, they must be able to sit *at the table with the decision makers* [and if] *you have not done your homework, know what they want or communicate in their fashion, you will not get what you need* [funding]. This implies that NPOs are accountable to all its stakeholders to obtain public legitimacy and social trust, which is necessary to operate (Balser and McClusky, 2005). Except for donors, NPOs have diverse stakeholders, such as government and other formal authorities, beneficiaries, pressure groups, the community in which it operates and the media—to name but a few. Knox and Gruar (2007) noted that NPO stakeholders are generally more important than those in commercial businesses because they often have complex relationships with the NPOs and are closely involved in the achievement of organisational goals.

Research on stakeholders and their issues[1] are therefore very important factors contributing to effective NPO management. Clear communication about the vision, mission, goals and activities of the NPO must be aimed at both internal and external stakeholders (Bowers, 2000). Therefore, *strategic* communication and relationship management play

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[1]Although Steyn and Puth (2000) do not differentiate between the terms 'risks' and 'issues' in their model, in this article, 'risks' will refer to both organisational and reputation risks as identified by the organisation. 'Issues' refer to aspects or matters that directly concern stakeholders about the organisation, and as such are identified by stakeholders themselves. In other words, issues refer to those problems/challenges that impact most on stakeholders, and which need to be addressed by organisations in ord to maintain strong relationships with stakeholders. Many times an organisation's stakeholders' issues will also be the organisation's risks, as in the case of the participating NPOs, but it might also happen that an organisation's risks might not be their stakeholders' issues.

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an important role in the effective management of NPOs. Communicating strategically and building strong relationships is particularly important in the case of donors because strong relationships could result in repeated and increased donations (Brennan and Brady, 1999; Sargeant, 2001; Bennett and Barkensjo, 2005; MacMillan *et al*., 2005; Polonsky and Sargeant, 2007; Werker and Ahmed, 2008). NPOs furthermore operate in a highly competitive environment, where an ever-increasing number of NPOs rely on a small number of donors (MacMillan *et al*., 2005). It is therefore not surprising that most NPOs view recruiting and retaining donors as the most important challenge that the organisation faces (Sargeant, 2001; MacMillan *et al*., 2005; Wiggill, 2009; Wiggill *et al*., 2009), especially in light of Polonsky and Sargeant (2007) who indicated that NPOs usually lose up to 50% of donors after their first or second donation. This is mainly due to a lack of communication and focused relationship-building activities.

Many NPOs do not realise the importance of strategic communication management and the necessity of building lasting and mutually beneficial relationships with stakeholders (Bowers, 2000; Naudé, 2001; Dyer *et al*., 2002; Wiggill, 2009). Without planned communication and relationship management, many NPOs find it difficult to achieve their mission and goals (Brennan and Brady, 1999; Sargeant, 2001; Bennett and Barkensjo, 2005; MacMillan *et al*., 2005; Polonsky and Sargeant, 2007; Wiggill, 2009). The following factors contribute to this situation: (1) because of a lack of *financial resources*, many NPOs do not have a traditional communication department, or the communication and marketing functions may be combined into one department; many NPOs appoint one person to perform multiple tasks, of which communication management might be one (Dyer *et al*., 2002); (2) a *lack of formal communication training* impedes the person(s) responsible for communication to strategically communicate and build relationships with stakeholders. Naudé (2001) finds that most of the communication practitioners employed in NPOs have tertiary qualifications in disciplines other than communication, such as Political Science and Social Work. This means that the formal communication expertise of many communication staff in NPOs may be lacking. Another obstacle that this situation presents is that staff without formal communication qualifications tends not to value communication functions in their organisations as highly as those who do have such qualifications (Naudé, 2001).

Proceeding from these, Lauer (1993), Bowers (2000) and Selnick (2005) stated that without a specific communication strategy, plan and policy, the messages of NPOs might not be getting through to the right people. Bowers (2000) observed that stakeholders do not want to know about your issues and needs. They want to know how their needs are going to be met. This implies that NPOs must know their stakeholders' issues and needs by engaging in two-way communication with them. However, because of a lack of communication training as well as financial resources, many NPOs practice the public information model: Just getting the word out' (Naudé, 2001; Dyer *et al*., 2002). All communication efforts are centred on communicating to stakeholders what the organisation does for its beneficiaries. Most NPOs believe that if their stakeholders and the public know what the organisation is and what it does, donors and the public will donate money and volunteer for the organisation (Naudé, 2001; Dyer *et al*., 2002). Bowers (2000) added that many NPOs do not practice environmental scanning, and as a result do not focus on their stakeholders' needs. This task is usually performed by a trained communication practitioner. This implies that there is little or no chance of engaging in two-way communication with stakeholders, to learn about stakeholders' needs and build relationships with stakeholders.

Although some NPOs recognise that communication and relationship management is essential for the existence of the organisation, communication mostly occurs unplanned and without clear relationship objectives for a particular stakeholder (Bowers, 2000; Dyer *et al*., 2002; Wiggill, 2009; Wiggill *et al*., 2009). Some NPOs have the notion that a dedicated person would have to be appointed to conduct strategic communication formally and especially relationship-building that is viewed as a time consuming task (Wiggill, 2009). Some NPOs are also of the opinion that the organisation could not afford such an appointment especially because they do not see the value in strategic communication and relationship management (Wiggill, 2009). Furthermore, some NPOs are negative towards formal communication strategies because these are deemed to be time consuming, too complex and too focused on for-profit organisations (Wiggill, 2009).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Steyn and Puth (2000) developed a model for strategic communication management as part of a longitudinal action research project conducted at the University of Pretoria, South Africa. In their research towards the model, Steyn and Puth (2000) empirically verified three communication practitioner roles, as opposed to the widely-accepted two main roles of manager and technician (Broom, 1982; Broom and Dozier, 1986; Dozier, 1992; Moss *et al*., 2000; Moss and Green, 2001). Their first two roles represent a differentiation in the traditional communication manager's role, namely between that of the *strategist* and the *manager* (Steyn and Puth, 2000). The *strategist's* role involves scanning the social, political and economical environment for changes and new developments, and determining its

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influence on the organisation's strategies and policies. In this strategic function, the communication practitioner is able to interpret the collected environmental information and to apply it as strategic management information to be incorporated in the organisation's enterprise[2] strategy. The reflective role, as identified by the European Body of Knowledge Project (Van Heerden, 2004), corresponds with Steyn's (2003) definition of the *communication strategist*. The communication strategist, or most senior communication practitioner, forms part of the dominant coalition and must possess communication management training and expertise to perform the strategic, higher-level managerial tasks expected from him or her. This is in agreement with Grunig *et al.'s* (1992) recommendations.

The *manager* is responsible for the preparation and implementation of communication strategy and policy in clear messages to the organisation's stakeholders. The technician, as a third role, is responsible for the physical implementation of communication plans (see Table 1).

It is clear from this that the Steyn and Puth (2000) model is informed by the key principles of symmetrical communication as identified by Grunig *et al.* (1992), as well as the key principles of relationship management, as identified by a number of researchers (Ledingham and Bruning, 1998; Hon and Grunig, 1999; Hung, 2001; Grunig, *et al.*, 2002; Freeman *et al.*, 2004; Hung, 2005; Hung, 2007; Gregory, 2008). By following the Steyn and Puth (2000) model, the communication practitioner fulfils a strategic role by applying the two-way models, conducting environmental scanning and research on organisational risks, stakeholders and stakeholder issues and feeding this information into the enterprise strategy. This means that stakeholder needs and expectations receive attention at the highest level in the organisation, thereby minimising organisational risks. When stakeholder needs and expectations are known, the organisation can enter into dialogue with stakeholders to create mutual understanding and to build strong, mutually beneficial relationships. This would enable an organisation, especially the NPO, to fulfil its idealistic or critical social role (Grunig, 2000; Grunig and White, 1992; Naudé, 2001). The application of the Steyn and Puth (2000) model will therefore lead to excellence in communication management, and ultimately will contribute to an effective organisation, which obtains its goals.

[2]The *enterprise strategy* is not stated explicitly or formally, but it exists in all organisations (Digman, 1986) and is concerned with the achievement of *non-financial* goals. This strategy, also termed the societal-role strategy, is concerned with the organisation's mission, purpose and role in society (Digman, 1986). Strategies at the enterprise level should be mostly stakeholder orientated (Steyn and Puth, 2000). For NPOs, the development of an enterprise strategy is a legal requirement because the NPO has to be organised around a societal mission, whether it is educational, religious or charitable (Steyn, 2002).

RESEARCH METHOD

An in-depth, qualitative investigation of the strategic communication practices, needs, constraints and operational context of five selected NPOs in the adult literacy sector in South Africa were conducted. The findings were compared with the Steyn and Puth model (2000) for strategic communication management, to determine to what extent NPOs in the adult literacy sector practice communication management according to the model.

The 2007, *SANGONeT Prodder Directory*, the Adult Literacy Network and the Cape Gateway Internet website were used to select the NPOs. The main selection criterion applied was that the NPO should be working mainly towards the upliftment of *adult literacy*. The NPOs included differed in size and type: (1) *SHARE Adult Education Centre* has been operating in the Helderberg region of the Western Cape since 1990; (2) *Project Literacy* was launched in 1973 and is currently one of the largest adult basic education and training (ABET) providers in South Africa; (3) *Family Literacy Project* has been operating in KwaZulu-Natal since 2000; (4) *Optimus Foundation* began in 1976 in Johannesburg; and (5) *ASB* (*Army Support Base*) *Potchefstroom ABET Centre* was launched in 1995 at the Potchefstroom Artillery School to provide ABET to Army staff members. The ABET Centre was thus an NPO within a larger organisation.

Qualitative, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CEO and/or specific person(s) responsible for the communication functions in each organisation. To gain an understanding of each NPO's reasons and motives behind its communication practices, questions covered the communication function in the organisation, as well as the organisational structure, culture and worldview. These questions sought to determine the organisations' approach to communication, to link them to the steps in the Steyn and Puth (2000) model. Therefore, the interviews aimed to: (1) determine the selected NPOs' strategic communication practices, needs and constraints; and (2) compare the *strategic* communication practices of the selected NPOs with the *strategic* steps in the Steyn and Puth (2000) model.

To categorise the NPOs' communication practices, the suppositions underlying the Steyn and Puth (2000) model were identified. Therefore, it could be stated that if NPOs practice strategic communication management according to the steps in Steyn and Puth's (2000) model, their communication practices would: (1) be supported by a symmetrical organisational worldview and culture; (2) be based on formal environmental scanning and/or informal research about the consequences of stakeholders' behaviour, expectations and concerns, as well as social, political and societal risks for the organisation; (3) include stakeholder identification and prioritisation; (4) include the

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Table 1 Steyn and Puth's model

Strategic level: Role of the corporate communication strategist in developing enterprise strategy
Analyse the organisation's/institution's internal environment
Analyse corporate profile/vision/mission/culture/values/policies. Analyse enterprise/corporate/business unit/functional strategies and internal stakeholder concerns.
Scan and analyse the external environment (including societal values, norms, and expectations)
Identify and prioritise strategic external stakeholders. Determine the consequences of their behaviour/expectations/concerns for the organisation. Identify and prioritise key strategic, social, political and societal issues. Determine their consequences/reputation risks for the organisation. Identify the public and activists that emerge around key issues. Determine the consequences/reputation risks for the organisation.
Feed this social intelligence into the *enterprise* strategy formulated at the top management/board level
Functional level: Role of the corporate communication *manager* in developing corporate communication strategy
Describe, differentiate and prioritise key strategic issues identified in the enterprise strategy, as well as ad hoc issues
Identify the implications of each issue for each of the strategic stakeholders, publics, activist groups and society at large. Formulate the key communication themes for each issue. (decide *what* must be *communicated* to solve the problem/capitalise on the opportunity). Set communication goals, on the basis of the implications of the issues/opportunities. (decide *what* must be *achieved with the communication*). Set communication goals in support of other organisational strategies (functional, business unit, corporate). Integrate communication goals of all the strategies.
Conduct an overall corporate communication channel analysis (determine which kinds of channels are best suited to the organisation).
Develop communication policy (determine *who* is allowed to communicate *what* to *whom*).
Develop strategic communication plan for all divisions (for example, employee/media/community/investor/customer relations)
Implementation/operational level: role of the corporate communication *technician* in developing implementation strategy
Develop and implement communication programmes/campaigns/plans

Source: Adapted from Steyn and Puth (2000); Steyn (2007).

identification and management of organisational reputation risks and stakeholder issues; (5) be based on strategic communication goals and objectives; (6) be aimed at building, maintaining and/or improving strong relationships with stakeholders; (7) be practiced according to the two-way symmetrical and/or the mixed motive model; and (8) be characterised by alignment between communication and organisational goals (enterprise strategy).

DISCUSSION

Non-profit organizations communication practices in comparison with Steyn and Puth's (2000) model

Symmetrical organisational worldview

All the NPOs, except one, were mostly managed according to the presuppositions characterising a symmetrical worldview. This implies that most of the NPOs are open to strategic communication management and would most probably apply it, if they knew the benefits of strategic communication management for the organisation, and secondly, if they had the expertise and capacity to do so. In other words, if the NPOs could obtain the knowledge to practice strategic communication management and learn its importance for organisational effectiveness, it would be a natural transition for them.

Environmental scanning and/or informal research

None of the interviewed NPOs conducted *formal* environmental scanning to identify their strategically important stakeholders and their issues. None of the NPOs *formally* prioritised or mapped their stakeholders and issues. Some of the NPOs conducted some form of formal research when starting large projects or planning to make drastic changes in the organisation or curriculum. However, this research was not specifically focused on the views of stakeholders about the organisation, stakeholder issues, or communication needs of stakeholders. This being said, all the NPOs' senior management staff did engage regularly with stakeholders, which brought stakeholder opinions obtained through *informal* environmental scanning into decision-making processes. Another form of informal environmental scanning was scanning the Internet extensively, as well as networking with peers in the adult literacy sector. None of the different methods of environmental scanning focused though on identifying stakeholders' issues and the strategic application of *communication* to address issues and build relationships.

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Stakeholder identification and prioritisation

Resulting from the lack of a communication management strategy, the NPOs did not apply stakeholder profiling to identify specific persons who might assist them with attaining their strategic goals, but rather aimed communication at unspecified persons in the government, a donor organisation, or a newspaper. None of the interviewed NPOs identified any *strategic* relationship management goals for any of their stakeholders and thus did not engage in strategically planned relationship management efforts. All NPOs realised the importance of relationship management though, but they mainly focused on relationships with donors and government, concentrating less on other stakeholders, such as learners and potential learners, teachers and the communities in which programmes are run. Specific messages explaining organisational policy and actions might add to mutual understanding and trust, but the NPO must also *listen* to stakeholders to *understand* their issues, and subsequently might need to adapt organisational strategy and policies.

During the interviews, all the NPOs identified their learners and donors as their most important stakeholders, but most relationship-building efforts were aimed only at donors. Although the NPOs therefore informally identified and prioritised their stakeholders, none of them used strategic communication to manage relationships to assist them with minimising their organisational and/or reputation risks.

Identify and manage reputation risks and stakeholder issues

None of the interviewed NPOs conducted any formal research to determine the consequences or reputation risks of their stakeholders' behaviour, expectations, or concerns or stakeholders' issues for the organisation. The most important stakeholder behaviour consequence and risk that concerned the NPOs was the withdrawal of funding and/or finding new donors, and therefore relationships with donors received much attention from all NPOs.

Plan communication strategically—strategic goals and objectives

It was discovered that the interviewed NPOs did not formally set any *communication* goals, and therefore, there was no alignment between organisational and communication goals. One of the NPOs deliberately created a dialogue between the organisation and its stakeholders, and therefore, it could be argued that communication management assists this specific organisation in attaining its goals. The general lack of alignment between organisational and communication goals might be attributable to a lack of knowledge about the relationship-building component of strategic communication management, as well as a lack of knowledge on the value of relationship management for the organisation.

Managing relationships with stakeholders

Despite the NPOs' constraints and lack of communication training, they use creative and unique ways to build relationships with their stakeholders, for instance: (1) different senior staff members at one NPO were responsible for building relationships with different stakeholders; however, communication and relationship management happened on an *ad hoc* basis and no strategy or plans were followed; (2) staff members, who managed certain projects, were also responsible for communication and relationship-building at another NPO. They placed high emphasis on feedback, and they also insisted on 'feedback on feedback', thus creating dialogue and strong relationships;(3) All the NPOs' teachers were responsible for strong, trusting relationships with learners, but unfortunately no strategy or plans were followed to strategically manage these relationships; and (4) all the NPOs placed a high premium on trust, dependability and commitment, which is characteristic of communal relationships.

Application of two-way symmetrical communication

Although the NPOs mostly applied the one-way models, they also engaged, in various degrees, in two-way communication with stakeholders. For instance, one of the NPO's client relations officer phones all clients once a month to receive feedback on services rendered and to build and maintain strong relationships with these clients. Furthermore, another NPO emphasised dialogue and feedback, even insisting on 'feedback on feedback', as an essential tool to build strong relationships with stakeholders.

Alignment between communication and organisational goals (enterprise strategy)

One of the NPOs specifically claimed that their communication is aligned to their mission, vision and goals. However, when the NPO's communication was analysed, it became clear that their communication was rather *about* the organisation's mission, vision and goals, more than actually having additional content that is aligned to it. Information about stakeholder opinions and needs were not fed into the NPOs' *enterprise* strategy but rather into the *corporate* strategy, which is financially or target-orientated. The reason might be that a formal enterprise strategy does not exist, but is mentally shared amongst members of the organisation rather than being spelled out in a formal document. It can thus be argued that NPOs unwittingly add information about stakeholder expectations and ways to fulfil their social responsibilities to their 'enterprise' strategy, by focusing on financial matters in the corporate strategy. Without sufficient funding available, NPOs cannot fulfil their social responsibilities nor can they survive.

In considering these, it can therefore be argued that the interviewed NPOs mostly did not formally apply

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strategic communication management according to the Steyn and Puth (2000) model. However, in considering the NPOs' organisational worldview, it could also be argued that strategic communication management would be possible in these NPOs, if the persons responsible for communication management were coached and understood how to apply communication management strategically. It can therefore be concluded that most of the NPOs function in a fertile environment for the formalisation and application of strategic communication management principles.

RECOMMENDATIONS

All the NPOs made it clear that appointing a qualified communication practitioner, who is solely responsible for communication management, or contracting a communication agency to manage communication, is not possible because of funding constraints. However, this study concluded that the lack of knowledge about strategic communication management, particularly with regard to its purpose and benefits, is a more serious obstacle to the implementation of strategic communication management in the interviewed NPOs, than a lack of funds. It is thus imperative to find more cost-effective ways to practice strategic communication management in NPOs, using their current staff component. In the following section, the main recommendations of this article, namely to *collapse or condense* and *simplify* the Steyn and Puth (2000) model, will be discussed in detail. Another solution presented is to train the persons responsible for communication management in NPOs in the principles of strategic communication management. This recommendation will also be unpacked.

A simplified Steyn and Puth model

Taking the NPOs' constraints into consideration, this article recommends that the Steyn and Puth model (2000) be *collapsed or condensed* and *simplified* for *implementation* purposes. The proposed actions or steps in the model are based on what the NPOs already do and understand, as well as what they do not do, within the presuppositions and steps of the Steyn and Puth (2000) model. The academic division of the Steyn and Puth (2000) model into strategic, functional, and implementation levels might be too intimidating or overwhelming for NPOs that do not have access to a trained communication practitioner. NPOs might not realise that the Steyn and Puth (2000) model is a continuous, or rolling model, and that they then focus on only certain levels. The purpose of such a collapsed model is to *combine* the *academic*, *normative model with the practical reality as experienced by the NPOs*. Such a collapsed or condensed model would therefore aid NPOs that: (1) do not have communication practitioners or competencies; (2) do not have funds to employ a communication practitioner or to outsource the communication function, and (3) face serious time constraints.

With regard to the simplified model, it is furthermore recommended that NPOs be persuaded of the value and benefits of strategic communication management for building relationships, to minimise and manage organisational risks. If NPOs do not 'buy into' the benefits of strategic communication management, they would view any model as being unnecessary and impossible to implement, because of their constraints. It is therefore important to emphasise that it is possible to manage communication and relationships strategically if NPOs keep on doing, and building on what they are already doing, which will not cost them more in terms of funding or time.

The proposed collapsed or condensed version of Steyn and Puth's (2000) model is presented in Figure 1.

The purpose of the circular depiction of the model is to emphasise the continuous process of managing communication and building relationships with stakeholders. This illustrates that a communication management strategy is not something that should be developed and put away, but rather viewed as a 'working document', which should be consulted and adapted continuously. Another intention of the circular format of the model is to indicate that no part of the strategy is more important than another part, and that all steps in the model need to be followed to manage communication and stakeholder relationships strategically. In the simplified model, the strategic steps in Steyn and Puth's (2000) model, implemented to contribute to enterprise strategy, are situated on the left side. It is very important to show that the information gathered by formal and/or informal research is used for strategic communication management and relationship-building. Creating the communication strategy and implementation plan constitutes the functional level in Steyn and Puth's (2000) model, whereas the implementation of the plans is on a technical or implementation level. The need for evaluation of communication and relationship-building activities by entering into dialogue with stakeholders is illustrated in the *Implement* step in this model, after which organisational and/or communication management strategies might be adapted again.

Enterprise/organisational strategy: implications of the enterprise strategy for communication management

In the first step, NPOs need to determine their enterprise strategy (if it does not already exist) by asking non-financial questions such as: (1) *What are the organisational values that we would like to communicate to our stakeholders*?' (NPOs could, for example, emphasise their ethical business practices, which

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will assist NPOs in building strong relationships); (2) *How would we like our stakeholders to perceive the organisation*?' (3) *How do we fulfil our social responsibilities*?'

Once the enterprise strategy is clear, the implications thereof for communication management should be explored. This can be carried out by asking the 'so what' question for communication management, upon considering the contents of the enterprise strategy. Answering this question will guide NPOs to eventually set *strategic communication goals* that are aligned with organisational goals.

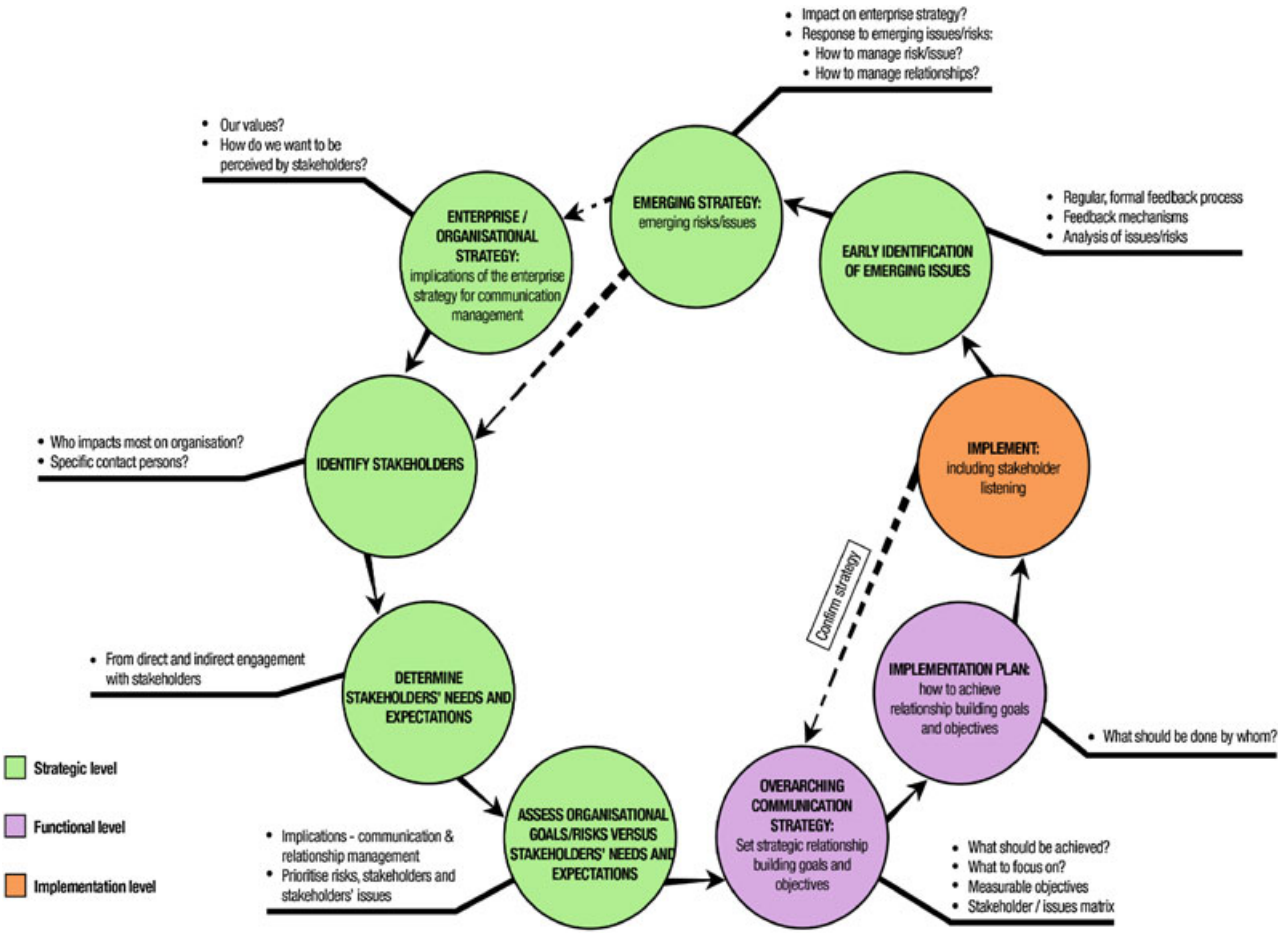
Identify stakeholders

The NPOs already have an idea of who their stakeholders are, but they need to draw up a formal stakeholder map to prioritise their stakeholders, in view of the organisation's enterprise strategy. It is also important for NPOs to identify specific stakeholder representatives to engage with in dialogue, for instance at newspapers, donor organisations and government. This would enable NPOs to compile specific messages aimed at specific stakeholders, and therefore relationship-building efforts would be more effective.

Determine stakeholders' needs and expectations

The NPOs already have access to most of the information about their stakeholders' needs and expectations, but in an informal manner. By formalising the process, specific needs, expectations and issues can be linked to specific stakeholders. This would enable NPOs to develop communication and relationship-building efforts that specifically address a particular stakeholder issue. All staff actions can then uniformly address a particular stakeholder issue, and all communication and relationship- building efforts from the NPO would be aligned to the organisation's enterprise strategy.

Most NPOs expressed the view that relationship-building are costly, and that they do not have enough staff to perform the task. However, senior management already performs most communication and relationship management efforts. By using existing staff members' relationships with stakeholders, senior management's task in this regard can be simplified. For instance, all NPOs noted that teachers had strong relationships—where particularly *trust* has a pivotal role—with learners. If NPOs trained or sensitised teachers to engage in dialogue to determine learners' needs and expectations, and to provide formal feedback to the organisation, no additional staff or funds have to be used to obtain this information.



Source: Wiggill (2009)

Figure 1 A simplified Steyn and Puth (2000) model

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Teachers can also be trained to *strategically* communicate the NPO's values, social role and care to build strong relationships with learners. In this way, teachers perform a more strategic role, and such training can be viewed as capacity building (see recommendation on training).

Assess organisational goals/risks versus stakeholders' needs, expectations and issues: implications for communication management

When NPOs have determined their strategic stakeholders' needs, expectations and issues, their implications for communication and relationship management can be considered. At this stage, the NPO needs to arrive at communication priorities, in other words, prioritise on *whom* and *what* to focus its communication and relationship-building efforts, considering its limited time and financial resources. Prioritising the stakeholders' issues and/or reputation risks to focus on will ensure that NPOs use their scarce resources wisely and with maximum impact. NPOs might, for instance, decide to focus only on certain stakeholders' reputation risks, or performance areas such as positioning, reputation management or employee engagement. An NPO might also decide to rather prioritise positioning to address its shortage of individual donors and corporate clients in a certain geographical area. The NPO might make use of, amongst others, specific media such as community radio stations, community newspapers and its website to attract new donors and clients.

Overarching communication strategy: set strategic relationship building goals and objectives

At this stage, NPOs must determine the strategic communication goals to be achieved, to address the strategic priorities identified in the previous step. In other words, the NPO needs to determine what its communication and stakeholder relationships would look like, if applied effectively. Specific, measureable objectives outline the steps to be taken to achieve the goals set. The communication strategy therefore determines *what should be achieved by communication management and relationship-building efforts, and sets clear objectives that indicate measures for success over a specified time period*. With the steps followed so far, a stakeholder and issues matrix can be compiled, listing priority stakeholders, their issues, consequent reputation risks for the organisation, as well as communication goals, objectives and communication themes relevant to particular stakeholders. The communication strategy is directly linked to the enterprise strategy, and therefore NPOs can link its communication and relationship-building efforts with stakeholders to its enterprise strategy. In this way, NPOs can ensure that the communication strategy contributes to obtaining organisational goals.

Implementation plan: how to achieve relationship-building goals and objectives

Although ideal, it is not necessary for the NPO's CEO or person responsible for communication, to be *directly* responsible for every aspect of communication management. Other staff members, such as board members, teachers or even partners, could be involved *indirectly*, and on behalf of the NPO. For example, specific stakeholders could be assigned to specific board members, who are then responsible for building a relationship with that specific stakeholder. In the case of teachers and/or partners, strong relationships can be built with learners or beneficiaries, and constraints such as learner retention can be addressed more effectively. It is important that a uniform message must be conveyed to all stakeholders to eliminate misunderstanding. *Indirect* communication management and relationship-building are already informally in practice at two of the interviewed NPOs. Formalising the process and providing training to the concerned staff members on especially relationship-building, would assist in attaining organisational goals more effectively (see recommendation on training).

It is therefore vital to include, or at least inform, board members, teachers and partners of the NPO's overarching communication strategy and associated relationship goals per stakeholder, to empower them to communicate and build relationships according to a strategy. In this way, a more participative approach to management will be encouraged, which theoretically links to Ströh's (2007, pp.199–220) criticism of Steyn and Puth's (2000) approach to strategic communication management as not being participative enough. Following an indirect approach to communication management would also reduce cost and manpower needs.

Implement: including stakeholder listening

This step refers to all communication methods, actions and functions implemented by NPOs. Although NPO representatives interact with stakeholders, they must listen and engage with stakeholders as a form of informal research. Every opportunity must therefore be used to pick up on new stakeholder issues, and to probe the status of existing stakeholder issues. It is imperative for NPOs to understand that a communication strategy is not static, but that it involves a continuous *process* of evaluation and adaptation. Whenever NPOs engage in dialogue with stakeholders, they need to *listen* to stakeholders to determine whether the NPO's communication efforts are successful in addressing stakeholder issues and/or whether these issues have changed. If no emerging issues are detected, the current overall communication strategy is confirmed.

Early identification of emerging issues

It is very important for NPOs to have a formalised feedback process to manage feedback between NPO

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representatives and the rest of the organisation, especially where staff members other than senior management indirectly manage relationships with stakeholders. Stakeholders' issues must be conveyed continuously to senior management, where after, the information can be fed into emerging strategy formulation and/or the organisation's enterprise strategy. Feedback mechanisms might include quarterly meetings or more regular and formal reports.

Emerging strategy: emerging risks/issues

Whenever a new organisational risk or stakeholder issue arises, the communication strategy needs to be adapted. New information, gathered through both formal and informal environmental scanning, has to be fed into both the enterprise and communication strategy. It might happen that the enterprise strategy has to be adapted, or, in the case of more short-term risks and issues, an emergent communication strategy needs to be developed.

Summary

It is clear from the earlier discussion that the simplified model for strategic communication management by NPOs is still rooted in the excellence and relationship management theories, because it emphasises the importance of engaging with stakeholders to build strong relationships, which will assist the organisation in achieving its goals. The simplified model aims to build on and improve the NPOs current communication management practices. Nonetheless, NPOs first need to receive training on strategic communication management, which forms part of the next recommendations.

TRAINING

This article postulates that NPOs in the adult literacy sector cannot *afford* to appoint qualified communication practitioners nor can they afford to *outsource* the communication function. Nevertheless, the study also found that it is not necessarily a prerequisite for a formally qualified person to be responsible for strategic communication management. The person(s) currently performing communication management can be sensitised and/or trained to manage the communication function more strategically, by following the guidelines in the simplified model, and as such, contribute to organisational effectiveness. Training unqualified persons to perform strategic communication management might be criticised as impossible, particularly if Grunig *et al.'s* (1992) views on the relationship between trained communication practitioners and the application of two-way symmetrical communication are taken into account. The question here is: how can NPOs in the adult literacy sector best practice strategic communication management, considering their constraints, particularly a lack of funding? It could be argued that following a pragmatic approach by providing training would definitely not result in strategic communication management being practiced as prescribed theoretically, but it would be in the best interests of NPOs to at least improve on their current communication practices.

Furthermore, most of the participating NPOs had a symmetrical worldview, which would support the implementation of strategic communication management. All the participating NPOs have been operating for many years, and *intuitively* practiced communication and relationship management to varying degrees of success. These NPOs would therefore not start communication and relationship management at 'point zero'.

It is also not necessary to train all staff members in strategic communication management, as the responsibility already lies with the organisations' dominant coalition. Therefore, only the persons currently responsible for communication and relationship management can be sensitised and trained according to the simplified model. Although the initial costs of training staff in strategic communication management principles might be high, NPOs must compare these costs with the possible gains (more funding, improved relationships with all stakeholders, strategic management of organisational risks) that practising strategic communication management can offer the organisation. Training staff in strategic communication management can also be viewed as strategic capacity-building. It is for this reason that the simplified strategic communication management model for NPOs (Wiggill, 2009) build on what NPOs are already doing intuitively, and training should follow the same route.

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