International Comparative Study Indicates Different PR Roles in South Africa and The UK, Using the Same Measuring Instrument

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En la segona etapa d'un estudi comparatiu internacional, Moss [et al.] (2004) van trobar cinc dimensions en els rols de gerència de les relacions públiques en un grup de 1.000 membres de la IPR del Regne Unit: "Localització i resolució de problemes"; "Conseller de polítiques clau i estratègia"; "Expert en gestió de temes"; "Monitoratge i avaluació"; i "Tècnic de comunicació". Fent servir el mateix instrument en el tercer estadi per investigar si hi havia diferències de context culturals i nacionals/globals que influïssin els resultats, Everett (2006) va repetir l'estudi a Sud-àfrica i va trobar dos rols: el de "director estratègic de relacions públiques" i el de "director d'operacions de relacions públiques". Aquest article compara els dos nous rols i índexs d'Everett, en primer lloc, amb els cinc rols trobats a l'estudi original de la Gran Bretanya i, en segon, amb els rols "d'estrateg de relacions públiques" i de "director de relacions públiques" trobats per Steyn (2000b) en un estudi de rols fet anteriorment a Sud-àfrica.

KEY WORDS: strategic PR, PR Roles Research, PR Strategist Role, PR Manager Role, PR Role Index, new PR Roles, senior PR Practitioners, Institutionalising Strategic PR.

PARAULES CLAU: RP estratègiques, recerca de rols en RP, rol d'estrateg de RP, rol de director de RP, índex de rols de RP. nous rols de RP, professionals superiors de RP, institucionalització estratégica de RP.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most discussed areas in PR research in the United States (US) is PR roles (Pasadeos, Renfro & Hanily, 1999). The US focus on the traditional PR 'manager' and 'technician' roles (Dozier, 1984; Dozier & Broom, 1995) is increasingly being criticised as inadequate in the fast-changing external environment.

Roles research in international settings is often also based on the two traditional US roles (Culbertson & Chen, 1996) - the debate being whether PR practice/roles is similar across national and cultural borders, or generic across countries (Verčič, Grunig & Grunig, 1996). International roles studies (e.g., in Thailand and Japan) indicate that practitioners are moving away from the PR technician role, increasingly performing PR management roles (Ekachai, 1995; Watson & Sallot, 2001). This is also a trend in Western countries such as Australia (Singh & Smyth, 2000), the UK (Moss, Warnaby, & Newman, 2000) and South Africa (Steyn, 2000a; 2000b; Van Heerden, 2004; Steyn & Green, 2006).

PROBLEM STATEMENT AND RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The problem addressed in this article is multifaceted, starting with the theoretical problem of the adequacy of the US PR 'manager' role conceptualisation and measurement indices. Although there have been a number of studies on PR's interaction with senior management, e.g., its role in scanning and issues management, and its power and influence (Broom & Dozier, 1986; Lauzen, 1997), the manager/technician role is increasingly seen as oversimplified (Leichty & Springston, 1993). It does not take into consideration the differing work patterns of senior practitioners (Moss & Green, 2001:112) or the actual nature and practice of management as encountered in the management literature (Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000). According to Moss and Green (2001:122), there is a strong case for re-examining the conceptualisation of the PR manager role and the adequacy of its role measures.

New conceptual roles for senior PR managers are emerging in different parts of the world. Examples are the 'communication executive' in the USA (Wright, 1995); the 'reflective' and 'expressive' role/dimension in Denmark (Holmström, 1996); the 'sales manager' and 'intermediary' in the Netherlands (Van Ruler, 1997); the 'agency' role in the US (Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998); and the 'reflective' and 'educationist' roles in the European Body of Knowledge (EBOK) project (Van Ruler, Vercic, Flodin & Bütschi, 2001).

In SA, the 'PR strategist' and redefined 'PR manager' roles were conceptualised by Steyn (2000a) and empirically verified according to the expectations of 103 South African chief executives (Steyn, 2000b; 2003). A 'PR strategist' operates at the top management or macro level, performing the *mirror* function of PR - scanning and monitoring relevant environmental developments/issues and anticipating their consequences for the organisation's policies and strategies (especially with regard to the stakeholder and societal environment). A 'PR manager' operates at the functional/middle management level, partly performing the *window* function of PR by developing PR strategy and a strategic PR plan that results in messages portraying all facets of the organisation. A 'PR technician' operates at the implementation level, partly performing the *window* function of PR by implementing communication plans through functional activities/tactics.

A comparative analysis by Steyn and Bütschi (2003) pointed out the similarities between the 'PR strategist', 'manager' and 'technician' roles found in SA and three of the four roles identified by the EBOK project (Van Ruler *et al.*, 2001). Two of these four European roles were new: the 'reflective' and 'educationist' roles. Based on (i) the similarities between the 'PR strategist' in SA and EBOK's 'reflective' role and (ii) conceptualising the 'educationist' role, Steyn and Green (2006) operationalised, measured and verified the four EBOK roles in a SA corporate case study.

Based on the studies above, Van Heerden (2004) measured the 'PR strategist' (broadened with a reflective dimension), 'manager' and 'technician' roles in a quantitative study in South and East Africa. She found two roles: the 'PR strategist' (broadened with a reflective dimension) and a combined 'PR manager/technician' role.

In the UK and US, the 1st stage of an international comparative study to conceptualise new PR manager roles and develop measurement indices was conducted by DeSanto and Moss (2004). In qualitative research amongst PR practitioners at managerial levels (UK and US), they found that work patterns of some contained elements fitting the traditional PR manager profile but some reflected dimensions of managerial work as identified in the management literature.

In the 2nd stage, eight roles for PR managers were conceptualised and measured by Moss, Newman and DeSanto (2004) amongst 1000 members of the Institute of Public Relations in the UK - realising 218 responses. Based on Mintzberg's (1973) manager roles, the eight roles operationalised were 'Counselling/advisory responsibilities';

'Issues management'; 'Policy and strategy making'; 'Trouble shooting and problem solving'; 'Administrative'; 'Monitoring and evaluation'; 'Negotiation'; and 'Technical responsibilities'. The final factor solution consisted of five PR roles namely 'Monitor & Evaluator'; 'Key Policy & Strategy Advisor'; 'Issue Management Expert'; 'Trouble-Shooter/Problem-Solver'; and the 'Communica-tions Technician'.

The 3rd stage of the international comparative study aimed to map and compare the five PR roles in different organisational settings and cultural contexts, globally. SA was one of the countries selected as little international comparative research has been done. Also, it was a unique testing ground for roles-related issues because of its colonial/political history and cultural composition.

SA seemed to be a combination of Western PR and indigenous African communication practices. For instance, Steyn's research programme on strategic/managerial PR roles provided evidence that PR practice has been influenced by US models. Its findings contradicted Van Leuven and Pratt's (1996:95) view that sub-Saharan Africa offered little opportunity for "practicing public relations in the Western sense of the term," casting its practitioners in roles related to communication development. Furthermore, a study by Petersen, Holtzhausen and Tindall (2002) indicated four generic PR roles in the SA context namely 'cultural interpreter', 'media relations', 'liaison', and 'personal influencer'. Their study showed how practitioners developed their own culture-specific models, despite the historic link to U.S. and U.K. practices.

The UK replication study in SA was conducted by Tery Everett (2006) as part of her master's dissertation. Research Objective 1 of this article is to *compare the findings of the original UK study (Moss et al., 2004) with its replication study in SA (Everett, 2006) - using the same measuring instrument in a different cultural and national/global context*.

The stream of strategic/managerial PR roles research in SA referred to earlier was mostly based on Steyn's (2000b) questionnaire, but subsequent studies adapted the 'PR strategist' role index with the European reflective dimension (Steyn & Bütschi, 2003; Steyn & Green, 2006; Van Heerden, 2004). It was therefore of interest to measure PR managerial roles in SA with another questionnaire so as to provide an opportunity to *analyse and compare the findings previously obtained in a landmark study in SA (Steyn, 2000b), with the findings of the SA component of the international comparative study using the UK questionnaire* (Research Objective 2).

To achieve Research Objectives 1 and 2, a comparative and conceptual analysis was conducted.

A COMPARISON OF UK AND SA ROLES FOUND

The two roles found by Everett's (2006) in the SA comparative study were labelled the 'Strategic public relations manager' and the 'Operational public relations manager' (see Column 1 in Table 1). The labelling was based on the research and findings of Steyn (2000b) and the UK study of Moss *et al.* (2004). The final role indices are indicated in Column 3. Column 4 indicates the corresponding empirical role in the UK study, as it emerged in Moss *et al.*'s 5-factor solution.

Factor Name	Item No.	Activities - Moss *et al.* (2004)	Roles - Moss *et al.* (2004)
Strategic public relations manager role	7	I collect external intelligence relevant to my organisation	Issues management
	1	I advise top management on a regular basis about relevant business / communication issues or challenges	Counselling and advisory responsibilities
	6	I continually monitor external trends that might affect my organisation	Issues management
	4	I advise senior management on how major strategic decisions will be viewed by the media	Counselling and advisory responsibilities
	9	I am responsible for managing the programmes to address identified issues	Issues management
	5	I advise top management on a variety of important stakeholder issues	Counselling and advisory responsibilities
	2	I contribute regularly to top management policy making	Counselling and advisory responsibilities
	23	I am responsible for ensuring that the organisation's information / communication reporting systems are working effectively	Administrative
	3	I advise senior management on how best to present their policies	Counselling and advisory responsibilities
	28	I have to ensure that the public relations function operates within the agreed budgets	Monitoring and evaluation
	15	I work closely with the CEO / other executives to ensure that the PR / communication implications of any strategic decisions are understood	Policy and strategy making
	39	I engage regularly in contacts with the media	Technical responsibility
	8	I recommend how the organisation should respond to the threat from major trends / issues	Issues management
	27	I work with senior management to determine the appropriate targets / benchmarks for the PR function	Monitoring and evaluation
	19	I am recognised as an expert in dealing with major / minor crises affecting the organisation	Trouble shooting and problem solving
	12	I collaborate with other members of top management when formulating our PR strategy	Policy and strategy making
	10	I help the organisation to manage issues arising from conflicts with external stakeholder groups	Issues management
Operational public relations manager role	20	One of my key responsibilities is to help resolve problems caused by others within the organisation	Trouble shooting and problem solving
	18	My job often involves dealing with day-to-day demands for PR support from others within the organisation	Trouble shooting and problem solving
	17	My job often involves 'fire-fighting' a range of internal / external challenges	Trouble shooting and problem solving
	31	A central part of my job is to negotiate with other managers about resources of the workload of the PR department / function	Negotiation
	29	I am responsible for commissioning external agencies to evaluate communication strategies	Monitoring and evaluation

Table 1: Comparison of the 'Strategic public relations manager' and 'Operational public relations manager' roles found in SA (Everett, 2006) with the five empirical roles found in the UK (Moss *et al.*, 2004).

To summarise: In the original UK study, 40 items operationalised eight conceptual PR roles but only five roles were empirically verified namely 'Trouble-shooter & Problem Solver'; 'Key Policy & Strategy Advisor'; 'Issues Management Expert'; 'Monitor & Evaluator'; and 'Communications Technician'. In the SA comparative study, the same measurement items resulted in two empirical managerial PR roles ('Strategic public relations manager' and 'Operational public relations manager'). This finding achieves Research Objective 1.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EVERETT'S (2006) ROLES AND STEYN'S (2000b) ROLES

The identification and labelling of Everett's (2006) 'Strategic public relations manager' and 'Operational public relations manager' roles found in the SA collaborative study was based primarily on Steyn's (2000b) 'PR strategist' and (redefined) 'PR manager' roles - supported by the item descriptions in Moss *et al.* (2004).

Broadening Steyn's (2000b) 'PR strategist' role conceptually

Table 2 indicates the similarities between the activities of Steyn's (2000b) 'PR strategist' role and the activities that made up the 'Strategic public relations manager' role found by Everett (2006) in SA in the international comparative study.
• Column 1 indicates the 5 activities in the 'PR strategist' role index in Steyn's (2000b) study.
• Column 2 indicates (in *italics*) the 17 activities in the 'Strategic public relations manager' role index in Everett's (2006) comparative study in SA, as well as its corresponding role in Moss *et al.*'s (2004) UK study (in **boldface**).
• As can be seen in Table 2, Nr 1-12 of Everett's 17 activities cluster around Steyn's five activities. Based on the findings of the analysis presented in Table 2, it is suggested that Steyn's (2000b) 'PR strategist' role be conceptually broadened by including the 12 corresponding items verified in Everett's (2006) SA international comparative study.
• It is also suggested that the 'PR strategist' role index be further expanded by also including Everett's 5 activities (Nr 13-17) that were *not addressed* by Steyn.

The only activity in the 'Strategic public relations manager' role index in the SA comparative study that did not form part of Steyn's (2000b) 'strategist' role index is the item '*regularly engage in contacts*

with the media' (Item 14 in Column 2 in Table 2). Although traditionally part of the US 'technician' role index, this is not surprising considering the local context. As the media are usually the drivers of most issues and subsequently the platform for a large, growing number of activists, strategically-minded PR managers, with strong negotiation and issues management expertise, are undertaking this function.

Steyn (2000b): 'PR strategist' role items	Corresponding role in Moss *et al.*'s (2004) UK study
	'Strategic public relations manager' role items in Everett's (2006) comparative study in SA
Explains to management the impact of their behaviour (obtained through research) on key external stakeholders	**Issues management:** 1. Collects external intelligence relevant to his/her organisation
	Counselling and advisory responsibilities: 2. Advise senior management on how major strategic decisions will be viewed by the media
	Counselling and advisory responsibilities: 3. Advise senior management on how best to present their policy
	Policy and strategy making: 4. Work closely with the CEO / other executives to ensure that the PR/Communication implications of any strategic decision are understood
Acts as an early warning system to top management before issues erupt into crises	**Counselling and advisory responsibilities:** 5. Advise top management on a regular basis about relevant business / communication issues or challenges
	Issues management: 6. Responsible for managing programmes to address identified issues.
	Trouble shooting and problem solving: 7. Recognised as an expert in dealing with major / minor crises affecting the organisation working efficiently.
Acts as an advocate for key external stakeholders by explaining their views to top management	**Counselling and advisory responsibilities:** 8. Advise top management on a variety of important stakeholder issues
Reduces uncertainty in strategic decision making by interpreting the external environment to top management	Issues management: *9. Recommend how the organisation should respond to the threat from major trends /issues*
	Issues management: *10. Monitor external trends that may affect the organisation.*
Initiates dialogue with pressure groups limiting the organisation's autonomy, e.g., unions	Administrative: *11. Responsible for ensuring the organisation's information /communication reporting systems are working effectively.*
	Issues Management: *12. Help the organisation manage issues arising from conflicts with external stakeholder groups.*
N/A	Monitoring and evaluation: *13. Ensure the public relations function operates within the agreed budgets*
N/A	Technical: *14. Regularly engage in contacts with the media*
N/A	Counselling and advisory responsibilities: *15. Regularly contribute to top management policy making*
N/A	Monitoring and evaluation: *16. Work with senior management to determine the appropriate targets / benchmarks for PR function*
N/A	Policy and strategy making: *17. Collaborate with other members of top management when formulating the PR strategy*

Table 2: Comparison of the activities that comprised Steyn's (2000b) 'PR strategist' role index and the activities verified in the SA comparative study by Everett (2006).

Broadening Steyn's (2000b) 'PR manager' role conceptually

Table 3 indicates the similarities between the activities of Steyn's (2000b) 'PR manager' role and the activities that made up the 'Operational public relations manager' role found by Everett (2006) in SA in the international comparative study.
• Column 1 indicates 3 of the activities in the 'PR manager' role index in Steyn's (2000b) study.
• Column 2 indicates (in *italics*) the 5 activities in the 'Operational public relations manager' role index in Everett's (2006) comparative study in SA, as well as its corresponding role in Moss et al.'s (2004) UK study (in **boldface**).
• As can be seen in Table 3, Everett's 5 activities (Nr 1-5) cluster around Steyn's 3 activities. Based on the findings of the comparative analysis presented in Table 3, it is suggested that Steyn's (2000b) 'PR manager' role be conceptually broadened by including the 5 corresponding items verified by Everett (2006) in SA in the international comparative study.
• It is interesting to note that no 'technical' activities emerged in Everett's empirical 'Operational public relations manager' role, which indicates the true managerial nature of this role. (This might have been the result of a screening question added by Everett to the original UK questionnaire to determine whether the SA respondents were indeed 'managers').
      The findings above achieved Research Objective 2.

Steyn (2000): Redefined 'PR manager' role items	Corresponding role in Moss *et al.'s* (2004) UK study 'Operational public relations manager' role items in Everett's (2006) comparative study in SA
Takes responsibility for success or failure of the PR/communication strategy	Monitoring and evaluation: *1. Responsible for commissioning external agencies to evaluate communication strategies*
Manages the implementation of PR/ communication plans	Negotiation: *2. A central part of the role is to negotiate with other managers about resources of the workload of the PR department/function*
	Trouble shooting and problem solving: *3. This often involves dealing with day-to-day demands for PR support from others within the organisation.*
Monitors the performance of the PR practitioners/ sub-divisions	Trouble shooting and problem solving: *4. The role often involves fire-fighting a range of internal/external challenges.*
	Trouble shooting and problem solving: *5. One of the key responsibilities is to help resolve problems caused by others within the organisation.*

Table 3: Comparison of the activities in Steyn's (2000b) 'PR manager' role index and the activities verified in the SA comparative study (Everett, 2006).

CONCLUSIONS

An international comparative study on PR managerial roles in the UK and SA has unlocked cultural and national perspectives in roles research outside the USA. Its findings indicate that the traditional US two-role typology of manager-technician does not describe the activities performed by (some) PR managers in the UK and SA. A significant contribution in advancing the conceptualisation and measurement of strategic/managerial PR roles was made by the purified role indices of (i) the five empirical PR manager roles found in the UK (Moss *et al.*, 2004) and (ii) the two empirical roles ('Strategic PR manager' and 'Operational PR manager') found by Everett (2006) in the SA comparative study.

Other significant findings are i) that the same questionnaire (developed in the UK by Moss et al. 2004) produced different roles in a different cultural and national/global setting (SA) and ii) that two different questionnaires (one developed in SA and another in the UK five years later) found similar roles in the same setting (SA).

Everett's (2006) findings of two managerial PR roles (splitting the historic PR 'manager' role in two, so to speak) support Steyn's findings (2000b) of a 'PR strategist' and 'PR manager' role performed at different organisational levels in SA. Based on the comparative analysis of the role indices of these two studies, it was recommended that Everett's extensive role indices be used to conceptually broaden Steyn's 'PR strategist' and 'PR manager' roles. Seen in the light of Van Heerden's (2004) findings of a 'reflective strategist' and a combined 'manager/technician' role as well as Steyn and Green's (2006) findings of a 'reflective strategist', 'manager', 'technician' and 'educationist' role, the various instances of advanced managerial role-playing might be indicative of the institutionalisation of strategic/managerial role playing in SA organisations.

The finding of a strategic managerial role by both Steyn (2000b) and Everett (2006) provides some indications of the increasing strategic importance of the PR function in SA - possibly brought about by the changing role of business in society with its triple bottom line approach and focus on corporate social responsibility, and the new interconnected world. Political changes in SA during the last two decades have had major implications for organisations and stakeholders increasingly have to be managed at the strategic organisational level. The focus of organisational strategy needs to become much broader and include the social context, i.e. the stakeholders and societal issues in its environment. It is the contention of the authors that PR practitioners in the role of the

'PR strategist'/ 'Strategic public relations manager' can provide this broader societal perspective at the boardroom table.

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