TOWARDS A NEW MODEL TO DESCRIBE THE ORGANIZATION-STAKEHOLDER RELATIONSHIP (OSR) BUILDING PROCESS: A STRATEGIC CORPORATE COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

ABSTRACT*

Successful organizations depend on stakeholder perceptions to address changes in turbulent organizational environments, report on social and environmental impacts of activities, the prevalence of public activism, globalization, emerging issues and crises and the need to be good corporate citizens through ethical and socially responsible behaviour. Despite the current emphasis on stakeholder relations and management, a lack of research exists on how to *build* these relationships. This article aims to report and discuss the findings of a study that explored the lack of OSR building models to emphasize the elements and development of an organization-stakeholder relationship (OSR) and highlight the need for a generic, strategic, integrated approach for sustainable OSR to contribute towards organizational effectiveness. This will be done by an exploratory literature review to constitute a conceptual framework for OSR building of which the principles of the framework will be explored and measured among leading Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) listed, South African organizations, by means of a quantitative web-based survey and qualitative one-on-one interviews. The dominant focus on organizational stakeholders has also provided added impetus and importance to the role of corporate communication, and hence, this article will simultaneously endevour to highlight the importance of practicing corporate communication strategically by emphasizing the role thereof in OSR.

Key-words: *Organization-stakeholder relationships (OSRs); organizational stakeholder partnerships (OSPs); corporate communication; strategic communication; two-way symmetrical communication; strategic stakeholders*
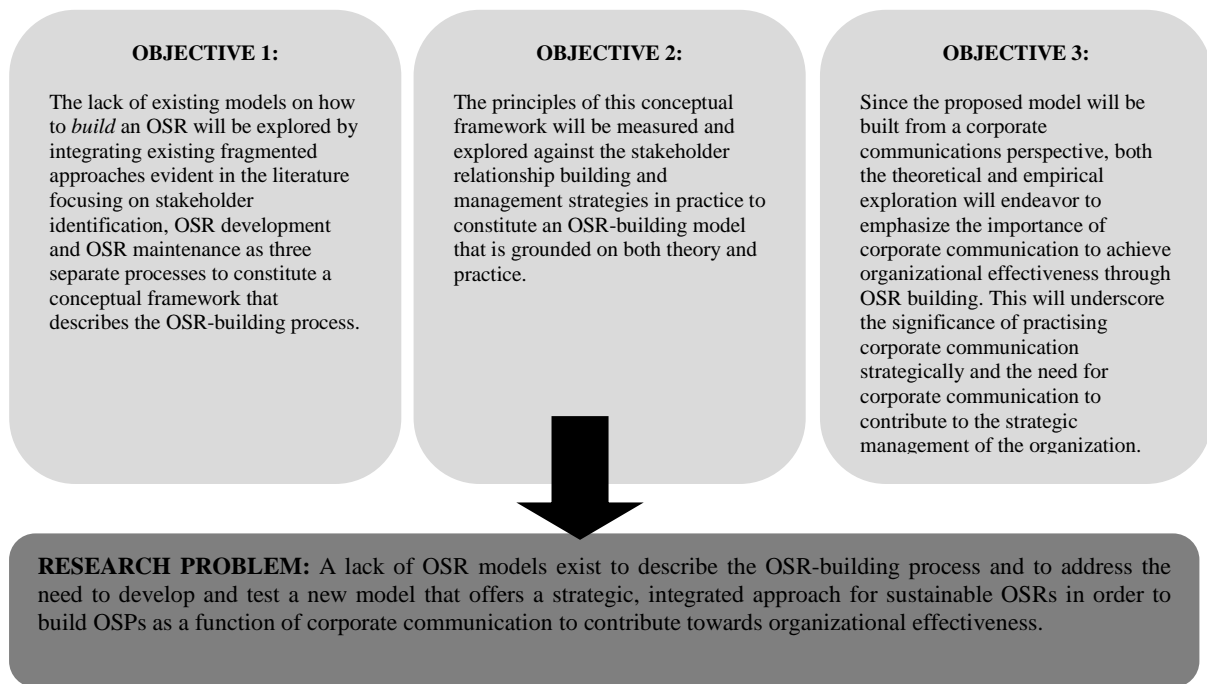
1. INTRODUCTION

According to Heath (2008, 13), organizations should rely on the goodwill of stakeholders for survival, while Maak (2007, 329) contends that "stakeholders expect organizations to take a more active role and thus acknowledge their co-responsibility vis-à-vis the pressing problems". Goodwin (2003) argues that organization-stakeholder relationships (OSRs) should be proactively built with strategic stakeholders to achieve the long-term objective of creating value for both the organization and stakeholder. Ulmer, Sellnow and Seeger (2007, 35) and Valackiene (2010, 101) state that *partnerships* with strategic stakeholders should be built in order to maximize organizational performance.

An example of the movement towards stakeholder centricity in South Africa is that the King III Report, released on 1 September 2009, for the first time included a chapter to provide guidelines on how to govern stakeholder relationships, which all listed South African organizations on the JSE should apply to. The purpose of the King Report is to ensure that South African organizations are at the forefront of international governance standards (King III Report, 2009).

Numerous authors specifically highlight the significance of OSRs and corporate communication. For example, Luoma-aho and Paloviita (2010, 49) maintain that stakeholder relations are the essence of corporate communication, while Thiessen and Ingenhof (2011, 11) posit that stakeholder relationships can serve as a resource in any difficult corporate communication situation and that the function of OSR building should be fulfilled by corporate communication professionals. According to Cornelissen (2005), corporate communication is concerned with the organization as a whole in relation to the central task of how the organization is presented to its stakeholders.

Despite this acknowledgement of the significance of OSRs and the role of corporate communication in building OSR, two issues can be identified. Firstly, a lack of research exists indicating how to actually *build* OSRs (Bridges & Nelson, 2000, 106; Kim, 2007, 167). For example, Noland and Phillips (2010) argue that many studies focus on the 'attributes of the organizations or the attributes of the stakeholders rather than on the *attributes of the relationship* between organizations and stakeholders'. According to the literature, future developments of the stakeholder theory should acknowledge that there is a lack of models to manage stakeholder relationships more efficiently (Freeman, Harrison, Wicks, Parmar & De Colle, 2010, 117), which arguably for the purpose of this study should begin with the way in which these stakeholder relationships are *built*. Secondly, the ambiguity or undefined status of corporate communication as described by Kristensen (2010, 138) has been characteristic of the discipline for decades which, alongside a myriad of other reasons, influenced the power of corporate communication professionals in practice. Malmelin (2007, 298), however, states that the current focus on organizational stakeholders could provide 'added impetus and importance to the role of corporate communication', which therefore necessitates the need to position corporate communication as a strategic OSR building function. According to Grunig and Repper (1992, 96) two main proponents of the strategic management approach of corporate communication are prevalent. The first proponent emphasizes that corporate communication professionals have to be part of the strategic management of the overall organization through *environmental scanning* and providing inputs to define the organizational mission and objectives, which provides direction from the *organizational level*. Furthermore, as a second proponent, corporate communication professionals should manage *communication programmes* strategically – that is, corporate communication itself should be practised strategically, which should be achieved through strategic stakeholder identification and the proactive resolution of issues by means of symmetrical communication programmes.

Against this background, the three-fold objectives and research problem addressed in this article are as follows:

OBJECTIVE 1:	OBJECTIVE 2:	OBJECTIVE 3:
The lack of existing models on how to *build* an OSR will be explored by integrating existing fragmented approaches evident in the literature focusing on stakeholder identification, OSR development and OSR maintenance as three separate processes to constitute a conceptual framework that describes the OSR-building process.	The principles of this conceptual framework will be measured and explored against the stakeholder relationship building and management strategies in practice to constitute an OSR-building model that is grounded on both theory and practice.	Since the proposed model will be built from a corporate communications perspective, both the theoretical and empirical exploration will endeavor to emphasize the importance of corporate communication to achieve organizational effectiveness through OSR building. This will underscore the significance of practising corporate communication strategically and the need for corporate communication to contribute to the strategic management of the organization.

RESEARCH PROBLEM: A lack of OSR models exist to describe the OSR-building process and to address the need to develop and test a new model that offers a strategic, integrated approach for sustainable OSRs in order to build OSPs as a function of corporate communication to contribute towards organizational effectiveness.

The article will firstly define the key concepts of the study, followed by an exploration of the literature to constitute a conceptual framework for OSR building from a corporate communication perspective in an attempt to describe the OSR building process more sufficiently. The methodology to measure and explore this conceptual framework in practice and the subsequent findings will then be reported on. This discussion will be followed by the presentation of a sequential, integrated, sustainable OSR building model based on theory and practice. The article will be concluded with limitations and contributions for future research.
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2. DEFINING KEY CONCEPTS

Based on an exploration of the literature, the authors have defined the following key concepts within the context of this study as follows.

Corporate communication: It could be defined as *an umbrella term for all internal and external strategic communication with the core purpose of building and maintaining sustainable OSR with strategic stakeholders to contribute to organizational success.* To make this definition a realization, it is argued for the purpose of this article that corporate communication should be practiced from a two-way symmetrical communication perspective and essential corporate communication functions should be integrated to ensure successful OSR building. These prerequisites constitute the first building block of the proposed conceptual framework and will be further defined in Section 3.1. Although various other communication terms (within an organizational context) exist, it is argued for the purpose of this article that only corporate communication, public relations and integrated communication are truly focused on building relationships with internal and external stakeholders. Although both integrated communication and corporate communication can be regarded as an umbrella term for all internal and external strategic communication, integrated communication is arguably not suitable for the purpose of this article because it is deemed to be a function that includes "multiple deployment of elements of the corporate communication arsenal" (Kitchen & Schultz 2001, 103) which implies that corporate communication is a broader, all-encompassing concept. Furthermore, it is argued that corporate communication and public relations are terms that are often used synonymously, especially when referring to public relations *management*; corporate communication is also sometimes regarded as the evolution of public relations (Cornelissen, Van Bekkum & Ruler, 2006, 115); or conversely, that it includes public relations (Goodman, 2006, 197).

Since this study follows a strong stakeholder-centric approach, corporate communication will be used as the preferred term when referring to all internal and external strategic communication practised by the organisation, because "the stakeholder concept takes centre stage within corporate communication…" (Cornelissen, 2005, 24). This implies that the organisation should view its surrounding environment in terms of its various strategic stakeholders on which its very survival depends.

Strategic stakeholder: It is those *internal and/or external organizational groups that have a continuous high degree of stakeholder salience with which the organization shares a reciprocal interest that should be nurtured through proactive, mutually beneficial relationship building to ensure organizational survival.* This definition, however, requires the following considerations: Firstly, since this study proposes a *generic, holistic approach to OSRs that is not customized to a specific industry,* specific strategic stakeholders cannot be identified as the situation will vary for each organization, depending on the industry and the organization's business activities. Secondly, both internal and external stakeholders may be strategic which reflects Freeman's (2010, 26) call for integrated approaches to manage multiple internal and external stakeholder groups. Thirdly, since this definition proposes that strategic stakeholders are the most important stakeholders it suggests that organizations will only have a few strategic stakeholders.

Organization-stakeholder relationship (OSR): It constitutes a foundational OSR (basic OSR) and is defined as *the result of the management of common interests between the organization and strategic stakeholder(s) over time in order to achieve mutually beneficial goals through a high degree of reciprocity and continuous two-way symmetrical communication.*

3. A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR OSR BUILDING

The proposed conceptual framework for an eventual OSR building model holds the following characteristics: It is *sequential* as a three phase, process approach to OSR building will be presented where one phase is dependent on the successful completion of the previous phase. An *integrated* perspective will be provided whereby relational concepts that are often study independently will be integrated into one model. The framework will promote a *sustainable* process through the proposition of a partnership approach towards OSR building with strategic stakeholders in which the ideal conditions are presented to ensure that a basic OSR is maintained to grow and evolve into an eventual OSP. Although the framework will focus on strategic stakeholders, the framework will be *generic* and not applied to a specific strategic stakeholder group, industry or communication situation. The framework will promote a *proactive* approach to OSR building and not focus on active publics and/or secondary stakeholders since the purpose of engaging with these groups are short term and there is arguably no need to build and maintain sustainable relationships with these groups. Instead the framework aims to present a proactive OSR-building process with *strategic* stakeholders, those stakeholders that will always be evident and relevant over time. The building blocks of the conceptual framework for OSR building are as follows.

3.1 Building block 1: Strategic communication foundation

The strategic communication foundation building block constitutes the foundational prerequisites that are essential for a successful OSR-building process, and includes the practice of two-way symmetrical communication and the integration of essential corporate communication functions.

- **Two-way symmetrical communication:**
The literature indicates that two-way symmetrical communication is characterized by the following: A consideration of stakeholder interests when making organizational decisions; responsive communication and timeous feedback; collaboration and negotiation; interdependency; message

consistency; openness; truthfulness and fundamentality; mutual understanding and shared vision; and collaborative problem solving (Bishop 2006, 217-221; Burchell & Cook 2006, 212; Grunig 2006, 156). This article supports Johansen and Nielsen's (2011) perspective that '… traditional unidirectional means of stakeholder communication must be replaced or replenished by two-way communication', which implies that two-way symmetrical communication will represent an interactive communication process concerned with establishing a balanced dialogue *between the organization and strategic stakeholders* in order to stimulate transparency and sincerity with a view to building mutually beneficial OSRs (Lubbe 1994, 8). 'Two-way', for the purpose of this study, means communication between the organization and strategic stakeholders and is not representative of one-to-one, one-to-many and even many-to-many communication notions. According to Farquhar and Rowley (2006, 162), these notions were predominantly established through the relationship-marketing paradigm to improve communication relationships with individuals by means of online social networks.

According to Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002, 548), corporate communication can only contribute towards organizational effectiveness by practising two-way symmetrical communication to build and maintain OSRs. In support of this statement, it is argued that corporate communication should be practised from a two-way symmetrical perspective to ensure sustainable OSR building. Two-way symmetrical communication therefore provides the fundamental grounding for the successful implementation of the proposed OSR-building model.

- **Essential corporate communication functions for OSR building**

For the purpose of this article, the following corporate communication functions are arguably essential for OSR-building.

a) Research: environmental scanning and evaluation research: Grunig and Grunig (2008, 328) state that research is an essential function to ensure the successful execution of the corporate communication function at strategic level. According to Bruning (2002, 45), to build mutually beneficial OSR the communication needs of stakeholders have to be fulfilled, made possible through research which consists of environmental scanning and evaluation research. Environmental scanning is research aimed at detecting problems and assessing the status quo, whereas evaluation research is aimed at evaluating the planning, implementation and effect of corporate communication strategies (Dozier & Repper, 1992, 186). Both environmental scanning and evaluation research will arguably be relevant throughout the OSR- building process. *Evaluation research* is accepted in this study as a two-pronged approach where it should be applied during the strategic stakeholder identification phase of the conceptual framework to determine these strategic stakeholders' needs and expectations; and also becomes relevant during OSR maintenance to determine whether these relational needs and expectations are being met to sustain the OSR and thus to ensure that the OSR grows in intensity to an eventual OSP. *Environmental scanning* should be applied as a continuous process throughout the OSR-building process to detect issues of concern that could harm the OSR-building process.

b) Issues management: It can be defined as a process that manages impeding issues and their potential to interfere with the operations of the organization to ensure continuous communication and coordination (Heath, 2008, 5). It is proposed that issues management should be conducted throughout the OSR-building process to manage and resolve issues that have been identified through environmental scanning, ranging from the formation of active publics, potential crises and/or conflict resolution between relational parties, to avoid damaging the OSR-building process.

c) Reputation management: According to Romenti (2010, 306), corporate communication plays a crucial role in developing an organization's reputation by listening to stakeholder expectations, addressing these concerns with planned strategies and establishing sustainable relationships with strategic stakeholders. For the purpose of this article, Thiessen and Ingenhoff's (2010, 9) perception that reputation management is the aggregate of individual perceptions of an *organization's past performance and future outlook* and that it is regarded as *'relational capital'* that strengthens

relationships and builds trust; it is the organization's 'reservoir of goodwill' is supported. From this perspective it will be argued that a positive organizational reputation is a prerequisite for adequate OSR building with *strategic* stakeholders, and that corporate communication professionals should also manage the reputation of the organization throughout the OSR-building process.

d) Knowledge sharing enabled by a culture of knowledge: Knowledge sharing implies that stakeholders are recognized 'as *partners* who create both economic and social value through *collaborative* problem solving' (Halal, 2001, 28). It is argued that knowledge sharing occurs on the foundation of an internal organizational culture that allows employees to create, share and utilise knowledge (Ribiére & Sitar, 2010, 36) and it will be proposed as an element to build sustainable OSRs based on the argument that knowledge sharing between a strategic stakeholder and the organization will only occur once a mutually beneficial OSR has been established.

3.2 Building block 2: Theoretical foundation

This building block represents an integration of the most prominent theories and concepts utilised in OSR building literature and includes Freeman's (1984) stakeholder concept from a normative, relational perspective; Ferguson's (1984) relational paradigm; and Ledingham's (2003) theory of relationship management, which, in essence are encapsulated by the excellence theory (Grunig, 1984) characteristics.

It is argued that the *stakeholder concept from a normative, relational paradigm*, which is orientated towards establishing OSRs in an ethical and morally acceptable framework removed from economic interests (Donaldson & Preston, 1995, 74), can make a fourfold contribution to OSR building. Firstly, it emphasizes the need for a wider, stakeholder mindset in the organization and promoted proactive OSR building. Secondly, it highlights the fact that the success of the organization depends on collaboration between the organization and its strategic stakeholders. Thirdly, it emphasized that an OSR should be based on ethical principles, which make the practice of two-way symmetrical communication relevant. Lastly, it underscores the fact that management decision making should contribute to elevating the corporate communication function as the means for OSR building, to the desired strategic level. In conjunction with the stakeholder concept, the collection of ideas and propositions put forth by *Ferguson's relational paradigm* can be regarded as the starting point and foundation for the development of corporate communication as OSR building function. Ferguson (1984) argued that the relationship between the organization and publics should be the unit of analysis as opposed to focusing on the organization and its publics as distinct entities. The *relationship management theory* makes an affirmative contribution to this study because it helps to define the function of corporate communication, it provides a process for determining the contribution of corporate communication to achieve organizational goals and it emphasizes that corporate communication should focus on establishing mutual understanding and benefits for both the organization and stakeholders (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000, 56-57).

The *excellence theory* is an umbrella term for an integrated collection of middle-range theories that were utilized in a study at the IABC Research Foundation to explain the value of corporate communication to an organization and to identify the specific characteristics of corporate communication that contribute to organizational effectiveness (Grunig & Grunig, 2008, 327). The characteristics of the excellence theory are summarized in Table 1 (Grunig & Grunig 2008, 335-338; Grunig et al 2002, 13-16):

TABLE 1: Characteristics of the excellence communication theory

Characteristic	Description
The senior corporate communication professional is involved with the strategic management process of the organization, and communication programmes are developed for strategic stakeholders as part of this process.	Corporate communication contributes to strategic management through environmental scanning to detect issues of concern and identify stakeholders that may be affected by the consequences of or have an influence on the outcomes of business decisions.
The communication programmes organized by excellent departments to communicate with strategic stakeholders should be managed strategically.	Managing a corporate communication programme strategically implies that programmes should be based on research, measurable objectives should be implemented, varying techniques should be applied and the programme should be evaluated.
The senior corporate communication professional is a member of the dominant coalition or has a direct reporting relationship with the dominant coalition.	The only way for corporate communication professionals to influence organizational decisions is when the senior corporate communication professional is part of the dominant coalition or has access to members of the dominant coalition.
A strategic corporate communication professional should head the corporate communication unit.	Excellent corporate communication units must have a senior corporate communication professional to direct corporate communication programmes. If not, other members of the dominant coalition or an administrative manager who do not have proper corporate communication knowledge will guide the unit.
The senior corporate communication professional must have the necessary knowledge for the corporate communication function to become a managerial function.	The corporate communication department must be staffed with corporate communication professionals with practical and academic knowledge of corporate communication.
Corporate communication should be an integrated communication function.	All corporate communication functions should be integrated into a single department that provides a central means to coordinate the programmes managed by different departments. This is essential to ensure the development of updated communication programmes for strategic stakeholders.
Corporate communication should be a management function separated from other functions.	The corporate communication function should not be placed under another department with another purpose other than communication.
The corporate communication department and dominant coalition (decision makers) share the worldview that the communication department should base its goals and activities on the two-way symmetrical communication model. Communication programmes developed for strategic stakeholders are built on two-way symmetrical communication strategies for building and maintaining stakeholder relationships. The senior corporate communication professional must have the knowledge to practise the two-way symmetrical model.	Excellent communication departments utilize the two-way symmetrical communication model that is based on research and applied to enhance stakeholder *participation*. The two-way symmetrical model produces sustainable, OSR relationships. Since the two-way symmetrical communication model employs ethical practices, the interests of the organization and stakeholders can be balanced more effectively. Two-way symmetrical internal communication allows employee empowerment through participation in decision making. A collective working relationship is evident between managers and employees. A high degree of employee satisfaction, control mutuality commitment and trust is evident.
The organization should have a symmetrical system of internal communication.	To ensure the practice of symmetrical communication, a *participative* as opposed to an authoritarian culture is evident.

For the purpose of this study the implementation of an excellent communication function supports the principles of the stakeholder concept, the relationship management paradigm and relationship management theories for the following reasons: it allows the development of strategic communication programmes for various strategic stakeholders (the stakeholder concept); it focuses on the *relationship* between the organization and stakeholders (the relationship management paradigm); and it proposes a two-way symmetrical communication process to allow the establishment of mutually beneficial OSR (the relationship management theory and stakeholder concept). Furthermore, the excellence theory specifically emphasizes the need to practise corporate communication strategically and the way in which corporate communication can contribute to the overall strategic management of the organization. Hence, it is posited that the implementation of an

excellent communication function is not only a prerequisite for OSR building, but it also encapsulates the essence of the stakeholder concept (from a normative paradigm and relational perspective), relational paradigm and the relationship management theory.

3.3 Building block 3: Conceptualization of OSR building

The third building block of the proposed OSR-building model constitutes the actual OSR-building process and is specifically concerned with the actual phases and subphases of the proposed OSR building model.

- **Phase 1: strategic stakeholder identification**

The following methodology for strategic stakeholder identification is proposed for this article, which is derived from the situational theory of publics (Grunig, 1983), the communicative constitution of organizations (CCO) theory (Koschman, 2009), the cost-benefit analysis (Grunig & Huang 2000), and the theory of stakeholder identification and salience (TSIS) (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997): strategic stakeholders should have stakeholder salience (mutual power dependence, legitimacy and urgency); the benefit of building an OSR with strategic stakeholders should outweigh the costs; and a high level of involvement in one another's business activities should exist.

- **Phase 2: OSR development**

Based on existing literature, the following factors will be considered in this phase: OSR antecedents; OSR elements; the unique proposition of an OSR development continuum consisting of four OSR types; and stakeholder engagement as an OSR outcome.

OSR antecedents: It is evident from the literature that prior to the development of an OSR, various *OSR antecedents* existed (Kim 2007, 170; Seltzer & Mitrook 2009, 7), which are essentially those conditions on which an OSR depends. According to the literature, the following four OSR antecedents are prevalent: trustworthiness, organization-stakeholder association, mutual consequence and expectations (Greenwood & Van Buren 2010, 429; Kim & Radar 2010, 62). These antecedents will be explored to serve as a subphase preceding *OSR development* for the proposed OSR-building model.

OSR elements: The following are considered as elements of an OSR, namely; trust, control mutuality, relational satisfaction, relational commitment and mutual understanding (Stafford & Canary 1991, 224; Grunig & Huang 2000, 29).

OSR development continuum: Since the conceptual framework for OSR building will provide a partnership approach to OSR building, an *OSR development continuum* that will highlight four unique OSR types will be proposed for this article. It will be argued that an OSR could grow in intensity over time from a *foundational OSR* (a basic OSR as defined earlier) to a *mutually beneficial OSR* (an OSR characterized by a high degree of reciprocity, compromise and true concern on the part of the organization and strategic stakeholder for the wellbeing of one another) to a *sustainable OSR* (a relational state in which the organization and strategic stakeholder act in the best interest of each other evident through shared meaning and decision making to achieve mutually-beneficial objectives; both the organization and strategic stakeholder(s) observe the benefit of cooperatively working towards attaining relational objectives)*,* and ultimately to an *OSP* (a foundational OSR practiced over a long period of time to reach the level of two-way engagement, characterized by a mutual experience of stewardship, where both the organization and strategic stakeholder join in collaborative problem solving to achieve mutually desired end goals). This OSR development continuum is in line with an OSR characteristic mentioned earlier, namely that a relationship is a process and evolves in intensity over time. The relationship can also be defined at different points in the OSR development process (hence the proposition of four OSR types across the OSR development continuum, whereby a foundational OSR will be presented as a basic OSR

and OSP as an advanced OSR). This OSR development continuum will also be aligned with the phases of the proposed OSR-building model. It is also suggested that a foundational OSR is *predominantly initiated by the organization*. As the OSR strengthens, *partial mutual initiation* could become evident and finally, *full mutual initiation* from both the strategic stakeholder and organization could occur at OSP level.

Stakeholder engagement as an OSR outcome: Various theorists argue that once an OSR has been established, certain *OSR outcomes* will exist, which may include: control mutuality; trust; satisfaction; and commitment (Hon & Grunig 1999, 3; Grunig & Huang 2000, 42; Jonker & Foster 2002, 191). For the purpose of this article, *stakeholder engagement* will uniquely be explored as an OSR outcome and a subphase after OSR development, whereby the organization starts to engage stakeholders in its business activities (Noland & Phillips, 2010, 40). Stakeholder engagement will be regarded as a more advanced OSR activity which requires an OSR to be in place to ensure stakeholder engagement because the process of stakeholder engagement is a strategy to strengthen the foundational OSR into a mutually beneficial OSR. It is further proposed that *two-way engagement* will be experienced at OSP level, whereby both the strategic stakeholder and organization involve one another in their business activities.

- **Phase 3: OSR maintenance**

The OSR development continuum proposes that once a foundational OSR has been established, it should be nurtured to grow in intensity to evolve into a mutually beneficial OSR, a sustainable OSR and ultimately an OSP. This perspective is sometimes contradicted in the literature, as many theorists argue that an OSR is dynamic and in continuous flux (Rensburg & Cant, 2009, 58) and cannot be maintained. However, for the purpose of this article, maintenance encapsulates the *nurturing* of a desired (foundational) OSR. This is in line with Stafford and Canary's (1991, 220) perspective that a continuous relationship requires maintenance – especially when a staged, process approach is proposed for OSR building. As mentioned previously, *evaluation research* should also be conducted during this stage to determine whether relational needs are being met. Possible *symmetrical conflict resolution strategies* (which also forms part of issues management) could also be considered.

This conceptual framework has been explored and measured in practice to constitute an eventual SISOSR based on theory and practice to describe the OSR building process.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Triangulation by means of a quantitative web-based, self-administered survey and qualitative semistructured, one-on-one interviews were utilized for this study. The purpose of the web-based survey was to measure the principles of the proposed conceptual framework among *several* senior communication professionals (the collective term used for executives responsible for stakeholder relations and management) from different leading, JSE listed South African organizations. The objective of the semistructured one-on-one interviews in this study was to further explore the trends identified in the web-based survey; address the detail of the conceptual framework's phases that were not possible with the web-based survey; and most importantly, to explore the process of OSR building, that is, the proposed sequential steps, and the role of corporate communication as an OSR-building function. The SurveyMonkey program was used to host the web-based survey and respondents were required to answer closed ended, statement based questions with a Likert scale response option. The questions of the survey were categorized according to the elements of the three building blocks of the proposed conceptual framework as discussed in the previous section. In addition to questions relating to the conceptual framework categories, the one-on-one interview questions also focused on the role of corporate communication in the organization and as OSR building function.

The population comprised leading South African organizations listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE). The rationale for selecting these organizations was that listed South African organizations are expected to apply the principles of the King III Report (King III Report 2009), which include the principles on governing stakeholder relations, as mentioned earlier. It was therefore assumed that these organizations would have sufficient stakeholder relations management strategies in place to enable the researcher to glean key insights. To specifically obtain a population of *leading* listed South African organizations, the *Financial Mail* Top Companies SA Giants for 2011 (SA Giants 2011, 29-46) was utilized, which is an index that ranks 200 South African organizations on the basis of their total assets (Same players dominate 2011, 28). The sample of the study comprised 53 senior communication professionals from these listed South African organizations in the *Financial Mail's* SA Giants list for 2011. Only 36 respondents completed the web-based survey and eight participants of this realized sample agreed to participate in the follow-up interviews, which included senior communication professionals from Absa, Barloworld, Reunert, Clover Industries, Life Health Care, Liberty Holdings and two senior communication professionals from First National Bank. The nonprobability sampling methods employed to constitute the realized sample were purposive and convenient sampling. Purposive sampling was first applied by selecting leading, listed South African organizations; and secondly, since this study was based on a corporate communications perspective, senior communication professionals from these organizations were specifically selected. Convenient sampling was evident since only organizations that were willing and available to participate in the survey and follow-up interviews were included.

The initial analysis of the survey data entailed a *descriptive analysis* to obtain the frequencies and percentages of individual items. The purpose of the descriptive analysis in this study was to determine what percentage of respondents agreed, strongly agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed with the items in each construct. Furthermore, two-way frequency tables were used to indicate the typical response for each construct (category and subcategory). *Inferential analysis* was further applied to statistically determine whether mean differences existed between groups. To obtain these mean differences, it was necessary to conduct an analysis of variance (ANOVA). However, since the realised sample for the web-based survey was too small, it was deemed more appropriate to use a nonparametric procedure, namely the Kruskal-Wallis test. This test is focused on the analysis of independent random samples from k populations. The Kruskal-Wallis test statistic is based on the sum of ranks for each of the samples and this statistic is used to decide whether or not the null hypothesis can be rejected. The rule of thumb is that when the p-value<α-value, the null hypothesis is rejected. Because the α-value=0.05, the level of significance is 5%. In essence, if the null hypothesis is rejected it implies that there is enough statistical evidence that identified response groups displayed a different opinion towards a specific construct. By contrast, if the null hypothesis is not rejected, it implies that there is not enough statistical evidence to indicate the response groups have varied opinions on a construct. Furthermore, the Cronbach alpha measure was applied to measure the internal consistency or reliability of a set of items (ie the various questions in each category and subcategory of the survey questionnaire which related to the proposed building blocks of the conceptual framework). Item analysis was further conducted to determine how each item (question) influenced the Cronbach alpha if removed from the construct (category). The questionnaire was also evaluated by an expert panel and three pilot tests were conducted to further ensure the reliability and validity of the survey questionnaire. The SAS 9.3 version software program was used to aid the data analysis process.

The data analysis method used for the one-on-one interviews in this study was an integration of Creswell's (1998) analytical spiral and Marshall and Rossman's (1999, 152-159) data analysis process. Trustworthiness was presented as an alternative for establishing reliability and validity in qualitative research and was established through the elements of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson & Spiers, 2002, 11-12).

5. REPORTING AND DISCUSSION OF KEY FINDINGS

This section will focus on reporting the key findings of the web-based survey and one-on-one interviews.

5.1 Findings of the web-based survey

This study was specifically concerned with obtaining insights from senior communication professionals responsible for stakeholder relations in their organizations. Although the results indicated that the predominant specialization of the respondents was corporate communication, other areas of specialization were also evident namely, marketing, corporate affairs, investor relations, public relations and stakeholder relations and management. Hence, the results for the web-based survey will be reported according to three predominant response groups identified, namely, *corporate communication*, *corporate affairs* and *other*, which include the collective responses of respondents who indicated that they specialize in the remaining areas as mentioned above. The reporting will specifically emphasize corporate communication's responsibility towards the proposed principles of the conceptual framework, which is a key focus of this study. Furthermore, the study aimed to obtain inputs from senior communication professionals in managerial or executive positions.

The results indicated that respondents predominantly held senior positions, with 27.78% acting as head of department; 22.22% holding an executive or director position and 19.44% acting as managers or senior managers respectively. Only 11.11% of the respondents functioned at a technical, consultant level in the organization. This is in line with the excellence theory characteristics which emphasized the importance of having a strategic communication professional to head the corporate communication department and that it is more likely for individuals in senior positions to have access to the dominant coalition or to be part of the dominant coalition of the organization. The results also indicated that 66.67% of the respondents have formal communication qualifications and 75% highlighted that they have more than five years' experience in the communication industry. Furthermore, 63.89% of respondents indicated that employees in their department responsible for stakeholder communication have formal communication qualifications with 57.78% of respondents indicating that these employees in their department also have five or more years' experience in the communication industry. This is also congruent with the excellence theory characteristics highlighting that the communication department must be headed and staffed by professionals with the necessary practical and academic knowledge of corporate communication.

Table 2 presents the codes that have been developed for the various categories of the conceptual framework which were measured in the web-based survey.

TABLE 2: Coding of the web-based survey questionnaire categories

Questionnaire category	Code
Characteristics of the excellent communication function (Building block 2)	SecBCoECF
Strategic communication foundation (Building block 1)	
Two-way symmetrical communication	SecCTWSC
Environmental scanning and evaluation research	SecCESER
Issues management	SecCIM
Reputation management	SecCRM
Knowledge sharing enabled by a culture of knowledge	SecCKSECoK
Conceptualization of OSR building (Building block 3)	
Strategic stakeholder identification	SecDSSI
OSR antecedents	SecDOSA
OSR development	SecDOSRD
Stakeholder engagement	SecDSE
OSR maintenance	SecDOSRM
OSP	SecDOSP

The discussions to follow will focus on reporting the most significant findings of the web-based survey pertaining to the proposed conceptual framework according to the above codes.

The values in Table 3 reflect the typical response per category for each of the three response groups based on the descriptive analyses conducted.

TABLE 3: Descriptive analysis of the principles of the proposed conceptual framework*

	Excellence theory characteristics (Building block 2)	Strategic communication foundation (Building block 1)					Conceptualization of OSR building (Building block 3)					
	SecBCoECF	SecCTWSC	SecCESER	SecCIM	SecCRM	SecCKSECoK	SecDSSI	SecDOSA	SecDOSRD	SecDSE	SecDOSRM	SecDOSP
Corporate communication	2.97	2.59	2.56	2.86	3.32	2.84	2.84	3.22	3.09	2.85	2.93	2.77
Corporate affairs	3.20	2.76	3.06	3.27	3.19	2.48	3.03	3.03	3.08	2.81	2.88	2.79
Other	2.94	2.86	2.67	3.06	3.17	3.13	2.88	3.14	3.05	2.73	2.88	2.71

Key: Disagree strongly =1; Disagree = 2; Agree = 3; Agree strongly = 4
* Only the mean scores of the descriptive analyses are reported in this table. It should be noted that the standard deviation, 25th percentile, median (50th percentile) and 75th percentile values which formed part of the descriptive analyses have not been reported for the purpose of this article.

Prior to elaborating on the results in Table 3, it should be noted that the Cronbach Alphas for all the above constructs ranged from 0.62 and 0.91, which can be accepted as a measure of adequate to good reliability.

From Table 3 it can be deduced that all the principles of the conceptual framework were in general supported by all three response groups. Since the article is built from a corporate communication perspective, it is of specific interest to determine what the corporate communication response group's opinion was on the various principles of the proposed conceptual framework in comparison to the corporate affairs and other response groups. From Table 3 it is prevalent that the corporate communication response group showed a stronger support for categories SecCRM, SecDOSA, SecDOSRD, SecDSE, SecDOSRM of the conceptual framework in comparison to the corporate affairs and other response groups. Furthermore, in relation to the corporate affairs and other

response groups, the corporate communication response group's support for the following categories was the lowest: SecCTWSC, SecCESER, SecCIM, SecDSSI. However, since these results are only descriptive, it is essential to *statistically* determine whether these response groups had indeed varied opinions towards the constructs measured. For the purpose of this article, Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted for all these constructs. These tests indicated that there was not enough statistical evidence to indicate that the three response groups had varied opinions towards these constructs and hence, it could be argued that the principles of the conceptual framework were generally equally supported by the three response groups and in line with OSR-building strategies in practice. However, there was enough statistical evidence to indicate that the three response groups had a different opinion towards SecCTWSC (two-way symmetrical communication). The Kruskal-Wallis test for SecCTWSC is reported in Table 4.

TABLE 4: Kruskal-Wallis: SecCTWSC

Wilcoxon scores (rank sums) for variable SecCTWSC classified according to response groups					
Response group	**N**	**Sum of scores**	**Expected under H0**	**Std dev under H0**	**Mean rank score**
Corporate communication/ communication	15	195.50	262.50	28.57	13.03
Other	10	227.00	175.00	26.22	22.70
Corporate affairs	9	172.50	157.50	25.39	19.17
Average scores were used for ties.					

Kruskal-Wallis test	
Chi-square	6.11
DF	2
Pr> Chi-square	0.04

H_0: The response groups are identical.
H_a: The response groups are not identical.
Because the p-value is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 4 reflects a p-value of 0.04, indicating that there was enough statistical evidence to indicate a varied opinion towards two-way symmetrical communication among the three response groups. From the mean scores reported in Table 3, it is evident that the corporate communication response group had the lowest mean score of 2.59 in comparison to 2.76 and 2.86 of the corporate affairs and other response groups respectively. This neutral stance towards two-way symmetrical communication, especially among the corporate communication response group, could be ascribed to the critique associated with the two-way symmetrical communication model as being a normative ideal and too idealistic, or that practising two-way-symmetrical communication is only applicable to certain situations. From the results, and in line with arguments in the literature, it can be argued that the respondents' departments practiced two-way communication with stakeholders and were concerned about their wants and needs, but from an *asymmetrical* viewpoint in order to the benefit of the organization. This could explain the neutral stance of the respondents towards the compromising nature of two-way symmetrical communication to achieve mutually beneficial

objectives. In line with the theoretical propositions of this article and the results of this construct, it could therefore be argued that if two-way symmetrical communication is not practised by corporate communication professionals, a proper OSR cannot be built, and the core contribution of corporate communication to achieving organisational effectiveness, and hence to recognize it as a strategic function, will not be realized. Since it was argued that corporate communication professionals should practise two-way communication if they aspire to build a sustainable OSR, the researcher realized that the practice of two-way symmetrical communication required further exploration in the one-on-one interviews because two-way symmetrical communication provides the basis of the proposed conceptual framework.

It was further essential to determine whether respondents are actually responsible for the development, implementation and/or maintenance of the following principles of the conceptual framework in their organizations: Research (environmental scanning and evaluation research); issues management; reputation management; strategic stakeholder identification; OSR development; stakeholder engagement; and OSR maintenance. This involved a two-phased analysis: Firstly, to determine whether the response groups had varied opinions towards the responsibility of these constructs, further Kruskal-Wallis tests were conducted for the questions in the survey that measured this responsibility. Secondly, the typical response for these questions in the survey was further determined by two-way frequency tables. For this analysis, the response options 'agree' and 'agree strongly' were combined to represent agreement with the statement, while 'disagree' and 'disagree strongly' were combined to represent disagreement about the statement.

Table 5 provides a summary of the mean rank scores and p-values of the Kruskal-Wallis tests conducted for the questions in the survey that specifically measured the respondents' responsibility in the organization towards the aforementioned constructs.

TABLE 5: Measuring the responsibility of the principles of the conceptual framework per response group

	SecCESER	SecCIM	SecCRM	SecDSSI	SecDOSRD	SecDSE	SecDOSRM
Corporate communication	13.30	17.07	19.50	14.30	15.70	14.20	12.40
Corporate affairs	23.50	23.11	17.61	22.00	20.83	23.00	24.50
Other	18.40	13.10	14.40	16.50	15.33	15.67	17.17
P-value for Kruskal-Wallis test	**0.01***	**0.04***	0.07	**0.05***	0.27	**0.03***	**0.002****

* Significant at a 5% level of significance
**Significant at a 1% level of significance

The p-values of the Kruskal-Wallis tests in Table 5 highlight that the three response groups had varied opinions towards the responsibility of all these constructs except for SecCRM (reputation management) and SecDOSRD (OSR development) where it could be argued that respondents all equally supported these two constructs (refer to Table 3). It should be noted that although the p-value for SecDSSI was not less than 0.05, it was equal to 0.05, and will thus still be regarded as sufficient to reject the null hypothesis.

Figure 1-5 provides a comparative analysis between the three response groups' level of agreement towards the constructs on which a varied opinion were evident, namely, SecCESER, SecCIM, SecDSSI, SecDSE and SecDOSRM. The percentages reflected in these figures are based on the two-way frequency tables conducted to determine the typical response as mentioned earlier.
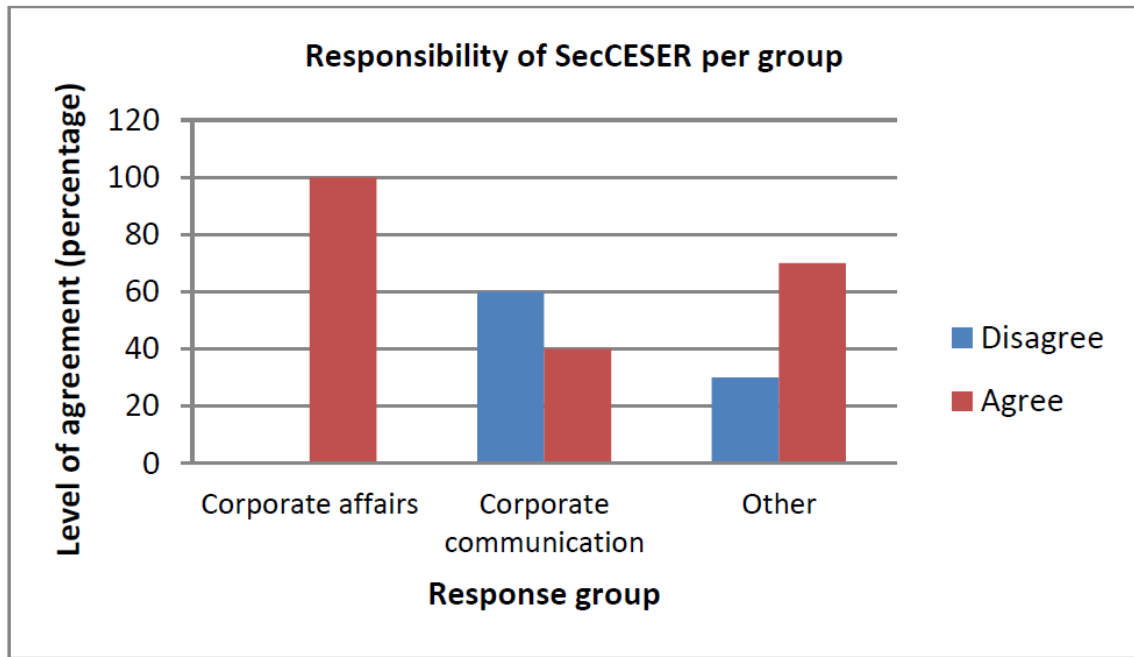
FIGURE 1: Measuring the responsibility per response group

The lack of the corporate communication response group's support towards conducting research (SecCESER) reflected in Figure 1 could be ascribed to the core focus of corporate communication on measuring, analyzing and influencing public opinion. This contradicts the argument posed in the literature that *corporate communication professionals* should participate in the strategic management of the organization by conducting, inter alia, stakeholder *research*. This therefore affirms the theoretical proposition that corporate communication's worth as a strategic function is still not fully developed in practice, and arguably pinpoints the need to emphasize corporate communication professionals' contribution towards organizational effectiveness through OSR building.
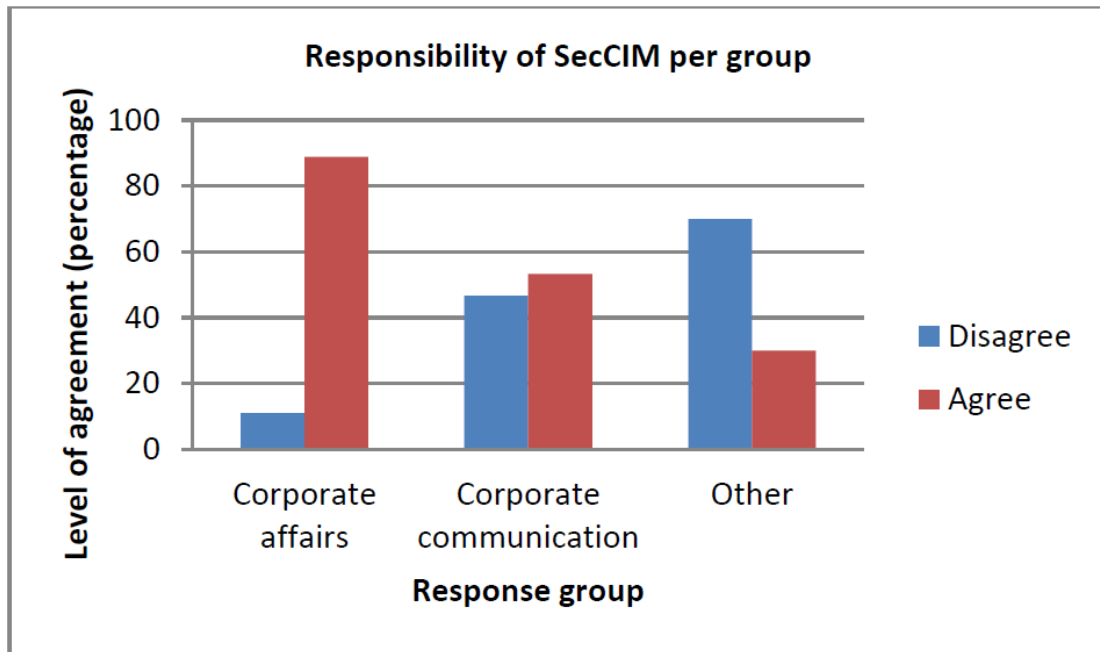
FIGURE 2: Level of agreement on the responsibility of SecCIM per response group

From Figure 2 it can be deduced that, despite the other response group being in strong disagreement, both the corporate communication and corporate affairs response groups highlighted that they are specifically responsible for issues management (SecCIM) in their organisation. The results are in line with the arguments in the literature that a successful stakeholder centric organisation requires effective issues management through continuous communication and coordination. Furthermore, as proposed by this article, issues management in conjunction with environmental scanning should continuously be conducted to proactively manage issues to avoid the formation of organisational crises and the emergence of reactive publics that could harm the OSR building process.
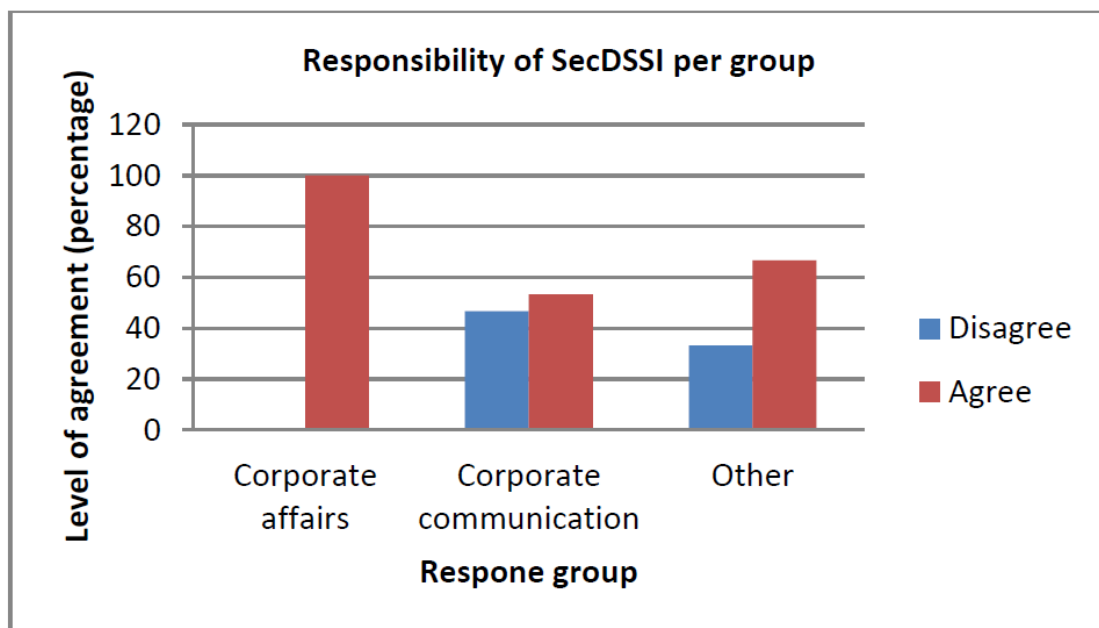
FIGURE 3: Level of agreement on the responsibility of SecDSSI per response group

The corporate communication response group's neutral support for conducting stakeholder identification as indicated in Figure 3 could be ascribed to the fact the corporate communication response group's mean score for SecCESER (as reported in Table 3) and the *responsibility* of conducting research (Figure 1), which were key to strategic stakeholder identification, were the lowest. This could imply that the corporate communication response group was not responsible for conducting research in their organization or seldom conducted research and therefore also did not strongly support identifying strategic stakeholders. This is in contrast to the theoretical dimensions of the literature review, which specifically indicated that corporate communication should be practised strategically, which can be achieved by means of, inter alia, *strategic stakeholder identification* through research.
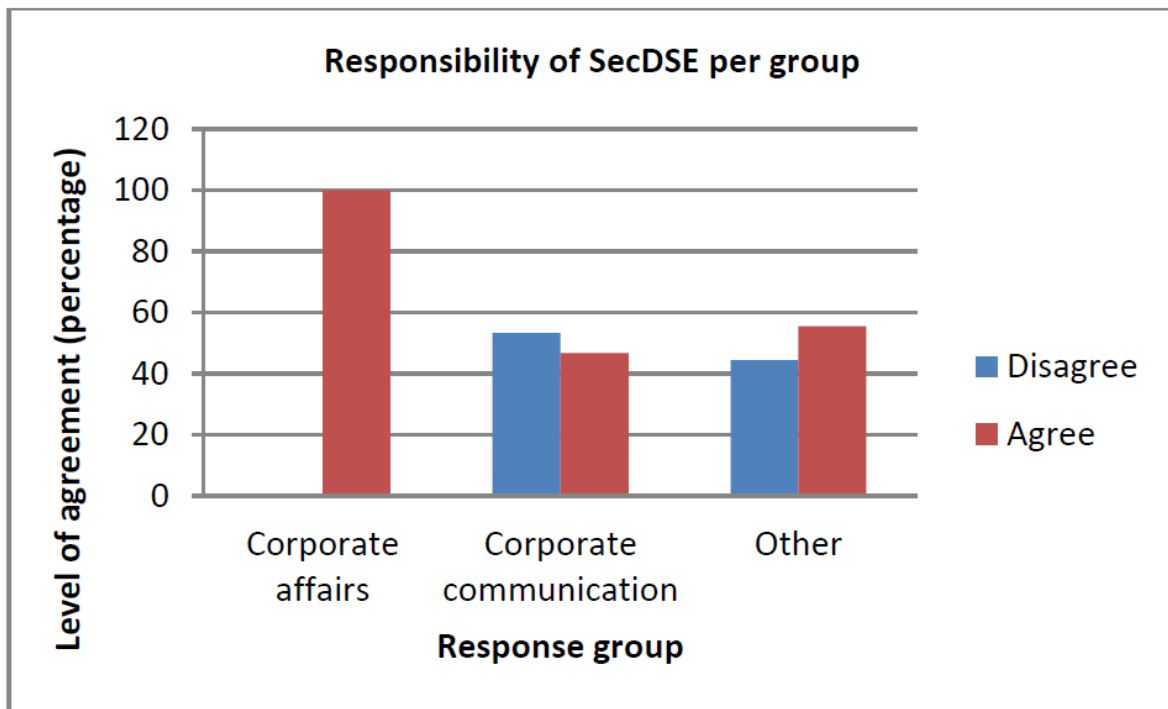

FIGURE 4: Level of agreement on the responsibility of SecDSE per response group

Figure 4 indicates that the corporate communication response group did not agree on the responsibility for stakeholder engagement, which necessitated further exploration in the one-on-one interviews to test the theoretical proposition that *corporate communication professionals* must engage stakeholders in organisational activities to ensure the development of a mutually beneficial OSR, a sustainable OSR and an ultimate OSP.
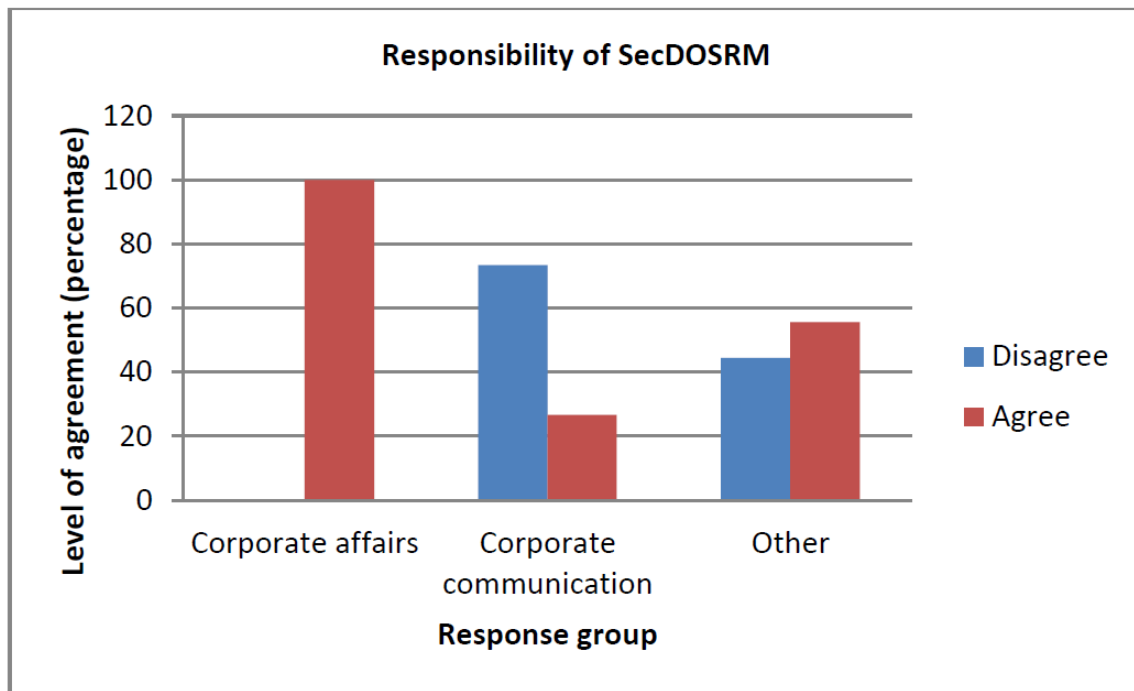
FIGURE 5: Level of agreement on the responsibility of SecDOSRM per response group

The corporate communication response group's lack of support for SecDOSRM evident from Figure 5 contradicts the theoretical proposition which argued for a relational paradigm of corporate communication as an approach that focuses on the building, *maintenance* and enhancement of relationships between the organization and its environment. Based on this and the argument that the excellence communication function emphasizes that stakeholder communication strategies should be built on two-way symmetrical communication for building and *maintaining* stakeholder relationships, further exploration on this matter in the one-on-one interviews was required.

5.2 Findings of the one-on-one interviews

The principles of the proposed conceptual framework were overall supported by all participants. The most significant findings of these interviews, which resulted into subsequent amendments to the proposed conceptual framework to build towards a SISOSR model, are as follows:

- Participants indicated that *ethics and values* should be integrated as an essential corporate communication function of the proposed strategic communication foundation. For example, one participant stated that "...relationships cannot be built with contrasting ethics and values between the organization and stakeholder".

- Based on comments of participants that "it is necessary to establish what these identified strategic stakeholder perceptions of the organization are" and "...a stakeholder dipstick analysis was conducted...we went out to the market and measured the perception of the organization among stakeholders, which turned out to be very different from what we perceived it would be", it is proposed for the purpose of this article that a *strategic stakeholder perception analysis (SSPA)* should be included in the strategic stakeholder identification phase of the proposed model because it will be necessary to study the perceptions of the strategic stakeholders prior to OSR building as this could influence the relationship-building approach. It should be noted that although it was argued earlier that the aggregate perceptions of all internal and external stakeholders should be positive for a positive organizational reputation, the specific perceptions of the *strategic* stakeholders should be determined by means of this SSPA analysis. The SSPA will also inform the proposed OSR antecedents. Furthermore, it is possible that the SSPA will

also detect certain stakeholder issues that could be addressed in the *stakeholder engagement* phase of the model.

- Participants stated: "a platform is required to start engaging" and "our stakeholder engagement process is very issue orientated...instead of focusing on the day-to-day interactions, we focus on the deep seeded stakeholder issues that are relevant to stakeholders and will impact our business strategy". This implies that organizations have to take stock of the foundational OSR once it has been built. This means that the organization needs to conduct *OSR evaluation* to identify strategic stakeholder issues that could be addressed in the stakeholder engagement phase of the model to further strengthen the OSR. It should be noted that this "stakeholder issue identification" is separate from the environmental scanning and subsequent issues management process of the organization as a whole, which focus on identifying any organizational issues that may hinder the OSR-building process. Identifying stakeholder issues in OSR evaluation will identify pertinent areas on which stakeholders would like to focus, for example, employees who have identified the need for a career development programme in the organization. The sole purpose of OSR evaluation is to detect stakeholder issues as a means to strengthen the OSR. Further evaluation research, as proposed by this model, will still have to be conducted during OSR maintenance to measure the OSR quality and to determine whether relational expectations are being met.

- The interview participants indicated that although most stakeholder relationships are built from an organization's outward perspective, an OSR can also be initiated by stakeholders and not only the organization, as suggested earlier. One interview participant indicated that the initiation of an OSR also "depends on who has the resources". The initial proposition of *organizational initiation*, *partial mutual initiation* and *full initiation* of the OSR-building process will be replaced with *mutual organization-stakeholder initiation* throughout the OSR-building process. Although it often happens that an organizational-outward approach will be followed, that is, where the organization is the driver of the OSR, this may be reversed in some instances, depending on the particular organization and industry. Since this model adopts a generic, cross-industry approach, it will have to make provision for the possibility that the organization may also be approached by a strategic stakeholder.

- Besides the OSR elements proposed earlier, a *reciprocal value system* was also emphasised as a key OSR element by some participants who stated: "One cannot build sustainable OSR when relational parties have conflicting values".

- Strategic stakeholders must be included as part of the evaluation research during OSR maintenance to determine whether relational needs and expectations are being met. For example, one participant stated it is essential to "...include stakeholders to see whether relational needs are continuously being met".

- According to some of the participants, the practice of stakeholder inclusivity in a partnership entails appointing *stakeholder panels* at organizational board level, which means that representatives of each strategic stakeholder group would be *actively involved* in decision making to represent their respective stakeholder groups. Inviting stakeholders to participate in such panels would promote *collaborative problem solving,* which was proposed as an element of an OSP. Although not directly related to the OSR building process of the model, this finding implies that the proposed definition of OSP provided earlier has to be amended to highlight this stakeholder inclusitivity: An OSP is a *foundational OSR practiced over a long period of time to reach the level of two-way engagement, whereby stakeholders are actively involved at organizational board level to promote a mutual experience of stewardship and collaborative problem solving*.

- Participants stated that "part of stakeholder methodology is to prioritize issues". It should be noted that the partnership approach towards OSR building proposed by this article is applicable to an organization's *strategic* stakeholders specifically. The secondary stakeholders of the organization should be managed on a "prioritization of needs and/or issues" basis, since there may not be a need for the organization to maintain these relationships. However, to successfully

address these secondary stakeholder issues, partnerships with the organization's strategic stakeholders should be in place, which could serve as the necessary basis for addressing these secondary stakeholder needs and/or issues. Although some of the principles of the proposed SISOSR model will remain applicable, the successful management of secondary stakeholder needs and/or issues constitutes a different approach and stakeholder management model altogether. Furthermore, the emergence of active publics also requires a reactive management approach, which is a topic for possible future research.

Based on the literature and key findings from the web-based survey and one-on-one interviews the following section will focus on presenting a sequential, integrated, sustainable organization-stakeholder relationship (SISOSR) model to describe the OSR building process.

6. A SISOSR MODEL FOR BUILDING OSP

Figure 6 provides an illustration of the proposed SISOSR model for building stakeholder partnerships.
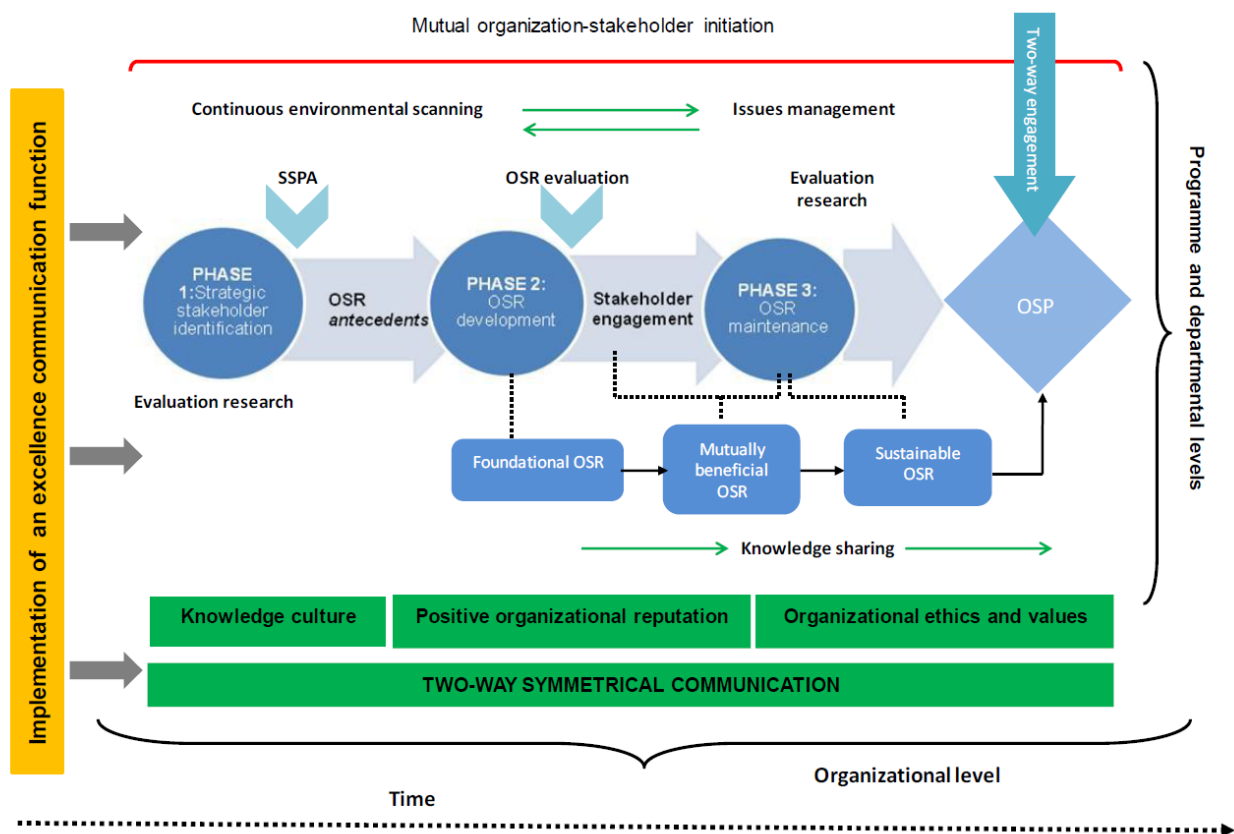

FIGURE 6: A sequential, integrated, sustainable OSR (SISOSR) model for building OSP

Figure 6 indicates that a partnership approach to OSR building with strategic stakeholders requires the establishment of a knowledge culture in the organization and ensuring a positive organizational reputation that is aligned with the organization's ethics and values. The corporate communication department requires the integration of the excellence communication function, which is made possible by adopting a two-way symmetrical communication worldview shared by the executives of the organization. Continuous environmental scanning should be conducted to detect issues of concern which should be managed to avoid organizational crises and the emergence of active publics that could damage the OSR-building process. The actual OSR-building process requires

formal methods to identify strategic stakeholders, in which evaluation research plays a critical role to identify relational needs and expectations, followed by a strategic stakeholder perception analysis (SSPA) to determine the perceptions of these strategic stakeholders of the organization. This analysis will also inform the various OSR antecedents on which a foundational OSR will be built. Once a foundational OSR has been established, which could be initiated either by the organization or the stakeholder (mutual organization-stakeholder initiation), it should be evaluated to identify stakeholder issues to engage stakeholders. This method is congruent with the process of knowledge sharing between the organization and strategic stakeholders to strengthen the relationship into a mutually beneficial OSR. The OSR should further be maintained to allow the mutually beneficial OSR to evolve into a sustainable relationship. It is essential during OSR maintenance to conduct evaluation research to determine whether relational expectations are being met to allow the sustainable OSR to further grow into a partnership. At OSP level, both the organization and stakeholder act as stewards for each other and collaborative problem solving and two-way engagement are promoted by stakeholders who become actively involved at organizational board level, which emphasizes *stakeholder inclusivity*. The principles of the strategic communication foundation (building block 1) are applied on organizational level; the theoretical foundation (building block 2) are applied on organizational, programme and departmental levels and; the conceptualization of OSR building (building block 3) are applied on programme and departmental levels. Lastly, Figure 1 highlights that these OSPs are built *over time*.

Executive buy-in of such an approach to OSR building driven by corporate communication could have the following implications in practice: A substantial change in the mindset of the organization at board and executive level is required because the corporate communication department in the organization needs to be expanded and elevated, since, according to one interview participant, 'stakeholder relations takes time and resources'. In line with the issues relating to the credibility of corporate communication, the term 'corporate communication' should arguably be replaced with the term 'stakeholder relations' in order to emphasize more effectively corporate communication's required contribution in the organization and to start moving away from the perception of corporate communication as a predominant media, publicity and messenger function. Lastly, all strategic stakeholders should be of equal importance to the organization – hence no prioritization criteria (which are more applicable to secondary stakeholders and/or active publics) are suggested for *strategic* stakeholders. Hence, a different stakeholder specialist (referring to senior communication professionals) should be appointed for each strategic stakeholder group to ensure simultaneous OSP building with all strategic stakeholders and that these OSPs with strategic stakeholders could be essential to effectively address secondary stakeholder claims and/or to manage active publics.

7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The main limitations are that the SISOSR model could be regarded as normative as it portrays the ideal OSR development process; the results of the study cannot be generalised since non-probability sampling was utilized; and since this study proposed an OSR building approach for strategic stakeholders, it tended to give a one-sided approach. Although organizations need to be able to manage a web of stakeholder claims, OSPs with strategic stakeholders should be in place as a necessary foundation to successfully prioritize secondary stakeholder claims and manage the emergence of active publics.

The following recommendations could be made for future research: the principles of this model could be used as a basis for a customized OSR-building model for a specific strategic stakeholder group, organization and/or industry; a longitudinal study could be conducted to test the workability of the SISOSR model at a specific organization; more insights in terms of OSR building in practice could be obtained with a larger population; this model could be used as a basis for the development of a model for working relationships with secondary stakeholders that should adopt an issue

prioritization approach or active publics that require a reactive management approach; and the perspectives on OSR building could perhaps be obtained from external PR/communication agencies, as various organizations make use of such external sources as oppose to in-house corporate communication departments. Furthermore, since this model was structured from a corporate communication perspective to, among others, address the undefined status of corporate communication, the model did not elaborate on the interaction of the proposed 'stakeholder relations department' with other communication functions. Future studies could therefore focus on amending the SISOSR model to illustrate the integration of these communication functions in building OSPs.

8. CONCLUSION

This article aimed to address the lack of models to describe the OSR building process through the proposition of a SISOSR model whereby it was proposed that strategic stakeholder identification, OSR development and OSR maintenance should be combined into one model to offer a phased, step-by-step guideline for OSR building. The SISOSR model could also lay the necessary foundation to develop working relationships with secondary stakeholders and/or to manage active publics. Since this study was approached from a corporate communication perspective, it should be emphasized that the value of corporate communication, as an OSR-building function contributing to organizational effectiveness, could be elevated to a strategic function.

The key essence of this article is probably best explained in the words of Maak (2007, 329-330): '... businesses and their leaders are increasingly held accountable for what they do – and fail to do so by multiple stakeholders and society at large ... good stakeholder relationships are key to organizational viability and business success'.

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