

**Practitioner's constraints in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles:  
An exploratory study in the South African banking industry**

by  
Tanya le Roux

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**DEDICATION**

This is for you Dad.  
Thank you for never giving up on me.  
“thumbs-up”

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A big thank you to:

- Benita, for sharing your knowledge so enthusiastically.
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## ABSTRACT

Various authors from countries as diverse as South Africa, the Netherlands, Britain and the United States of America, reported the existence of constraints in corporate communication practitioner career advancement (Moss, 2000:1,6; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000:277,302; Plowman, 1998:243; Spicer, 1997:84; Steyn, 1999:21; Steyn, 2000a:2; Steyn, 2000b:70; Steyn & Puth, 2000:3,7,10,12; Van Ruler, 1997:263; Visagie, 1999:148). Their findings have prompted this exploratory phenomenological research.

The primary objective of this research is to explore some corporate communication practitioners' perceptions of the constraints experienced in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles in the South African banking industry.

The research is approached from the excellence and feminist meta-theoretical perspectives. In particular it is based on the strategic contingency theory, organisational structure theory, power-control theory, interpersonal perception theory and corporate communication roles theory. The study focuses on two concepts, namely 'constraints' and 'role'.

The research reflected a snapshot in time of the current communication practitioner's emotional, relational or situational experience of their efforts to advance their careers. The aim was not to support or validate any pre-selected model or theory, but rather to embrace the constraint in a non-assumptive manner as it unfolds from the perspective of the communication practitioner experiencing it (Callahan, 2000:105; Scannell-Desch, 2000).

From the findings of the research, one could argue that there are various individual, organisational and professional career constraints that practitioners experience in trying to advance their careers. Over and above the constraints noted in literature, the study identified a few more constraints such as organisational politics, the time spent in the organisation, the practitioner's lack of networking and relationship building skills, lack of knowledge of overseas practice and the lack of standardisation of communication practitioner deliverables.

**Practitioner's constraints in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles:  
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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Various authors from countries as diverse as South Africa, the Netherlands, Britain and the United States of America, reported the existence of constraints in corporate communication practitioner career advancement (Moss, 2000:1,6; Moss, Warnaby & Newman, 2000:277,302; Plowman, 1998:243; Spicer, 1997:84; Steyn, 1999:21; Steyn, 2000a:2; Steyn, 2000b:70; Steyn & Puth, 2000:3,7,10,12; Van Ruler, 1997:263; Visagie, 1999:148). Their findings have prompted this exploratory phenomenological research.

The study focuses on the experience of corporate communication practitioners in the South African banking industry.

## **2. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

### **2.1. The core of the problem**

The problem addressed by the research centres on the constraints that corporate communication practitioners experience in advancing their careers.

In the view of the researcher, the constraints can be external or internal to the practitioner. External constraints can be divided into two main groups: organisational constraints, such as the organisational view of corporate communication; and communication profession constraints, such as the lack of professional acknowledgement of the corporate communication function.

Constraints internal to the practitioner include, amongst others, individual constraints, such as the practitioner's age, the practitioner's view of communication and the practitioner's lack of strategic communication knowledge and skills.

### **2.2. Background to the problem**

The corporate communication literature points to downsizing, affirmative action (Visagie, 1999:148), the general blurred organisational view of communication (Moss, 2000:1,6; Moss *et al.*, 2000:277, 302; Spicer, 1997:84; Steyn & Puth, 2000:3,7,12; Van Ruler, 1997:263), industry size (Moss *et al.*, 2000:302) and a lack of knowledge and skills or perceived competence (Moss *et al.*, 2000:277; Plowman, 1998:243; Steyn, 1999:21; Steyn, 2000a:2; Steyn, 2000b:70; Steyn & Puth, 2000:10) as the main factors constraining practitioners' career advancement.

Steyn (1999:22; 2000a:1) added inappropriate role behaviour, especially at the strategic level. In South Africa and the Netherlands it was found that communication practitioners still focus on technical procedures rather than strategic functions, although CEOs expect them to perform strategic activities (Steyn, 1999:22; Steyn, 2000a:1,34; Van Ruler, 1997:248).

Over and above identifying possible career constraints, corporate communication research such as the Excellence Study (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995:12), focussed on the communication strategies to be used in a specific scenario. Research on practitioner roles focussed predominantly on female gender discrimination (Moss, 2000:1; Moss *et al.*, 2000:278).

In spite of the constraints pointed out in the internal body of knowledge, there has been limited research to provide guidelines to corporate communication practitioners in advancing their careers.

### **3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The phenomenological approach does not support the setting of hypotheses or propositions, as this may limit the exploratory nature of the study. The research objectives are expected to provide ample guidance without limiting the identification of new phenomena as described by the respondents (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:25,146,147).

#### **3.1. Primary Objective**

To explore the corporate communication practitioners' perceptions of the constraints experienced in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles in the South African banking industry.

#### **3.2. Secondary objectives**

Phase 1: Literature investigation:

- Primary objective 1: To explore the constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.
  - Secondary objective 1: To identify the types of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.
  - Secondary objective 2: To categorise the constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.
- Primary objective 2: To differentiate between the roles performed by corporate communication practitioners.

Phase 2: Empirical research:

- Primary objective 3: To explore the types of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.
  - Secondary objective 3: To identify whether constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners fit into already defined categories.
  - Secondary objective 4: To identify whether there are any other categories of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners not yet identified.
- Primary objective 4: To explore the role that corporate communication practitioners are currently performing.
- Primary objective 5: To identify whether certain types of constraints are experienced by corporate communication practitioners in certain roles.

#### **4. DEFINITION OF TERMS**

##### **4.1. Public relations / corporate communication practitioner**

A public relations / corporate communication practitioner is a person who works professionally within the field of public relations (SPRA, 2002).

##### **4.2. South African banking industry**

The South African banking industry refers to the financial institutions in the South African economy, which operates with a banking license. For the purpose of this study the focus will be on three of the four major South African banking institutions: ABSA, FirstRand and Stanbic. Together the four institutions hold 85% of the banking industry's capital and reserves (Anon., 2002).

##### **4.3. The public relations / corporate communication function**

According to Van Ruler (1997:249) the term 'public relations' seems to have evolved into "communication management".

Public relations / corporate communication is the discipline that manages the relationship between the organisation and its stakeholders (Spicer, 1997:60). It is a "management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficially relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center & Broom, in Dozier *et al.*, 1995:71). According to the Public Relations Society of America, public relations should be defined in terms of the management functions relating to analysis, management counselling, research and evaluation, planning, implementation, management of resources for performance, and knowledge acquisition (Sharpe, 2000). It focuses on the ability of an

organisation to meet its goals in terms of “overall planning, execution and evaluation of an organisation’s communication with both external and internal publics...” (Grunig in Steyn & Puth, 2000:6). The terms ‘public relations’ and ‘corporate communication’ will be used interchangeably in this article.

#### 4.4. Public relations / corporate communication position

The practitioner position is the title and level within the organisation, reached by the individual.

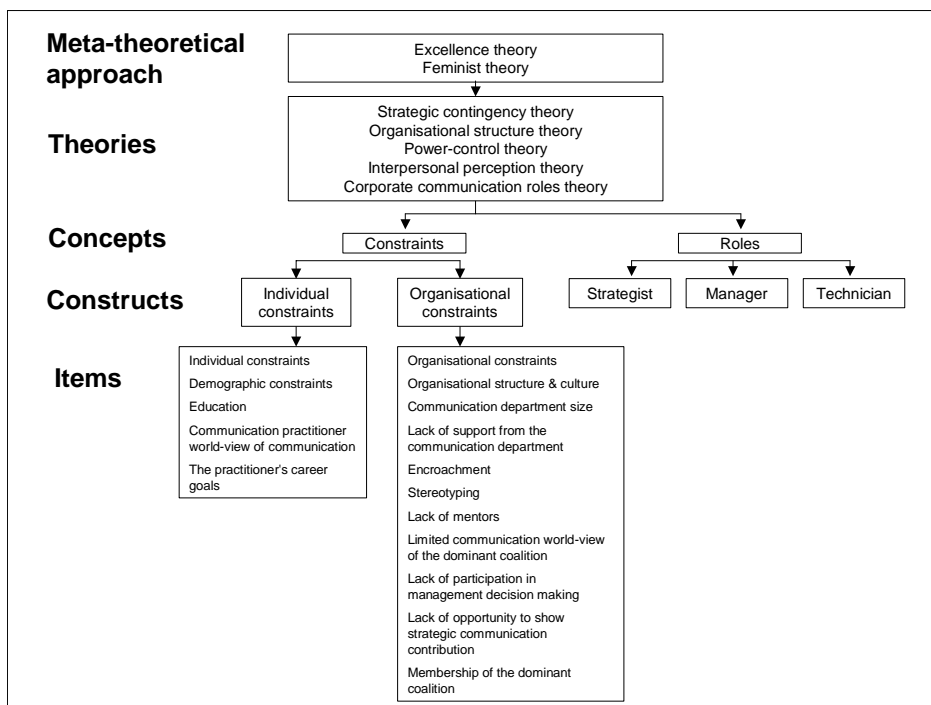
#### 4.5. Dominant coalition

The dominant coalition is the team of decision-makers who have executive power to define the use of outputs from the phases of the decision-making process (White, in Grunig, 1992:5).

### 5. META-THEORETICAL, THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The following diagram offers the conceptualisation of the study.

Figure 1: Conceptualisation of the study



Source: Own research

The feminist theory and excellence theory are meta-theoretical approaches to the study. The strategic contingency theory, organisational structure theory and power-control theory form the theoretical framework of the study.

## **5.1. Meta-theoretical approaches**

### **5.1.1. Excellence theory**

In order to be excellent, the communication practitioner needs to establish two-way communication between the organisation and its publics, reconciling the organisational goals with expectations of strategic constituencies, thereby gaining and using the power of the dominant coalition (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:47; Grunig & Ehling, in Grunig, 1992:86; Plowman, 1998:237; Repper, in Grunig, 1992:111).

The practitioner's knowledge of strategic communication skills such as research- and conflict resolution skills are crucial in the process of applying appropriate relationship building in a rapidly changing environment (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:27,226; Dozier & Grunig in Grunig, 1992:406; Kruckeberg, 1996:19,22; Grunig & Haung, in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000:30,32,33,38; Plowman, 1998:237). This offers practitioners the opportunity to show strategic importance and become part of the dominant coalition.

The lack of skills or the lack of opportunity to show strategic importance, will by implication limit the practitioner's career advancement.

### **5.1.2. Feminist theory**

Feminism, a radical-critical perspective of the sociological understanding of organisational theory, focuses on the foundation that men in a masculine structured world subordinate women. The theory posits that women or people with feminine traits are a homogeneous group and poorly prepared for the business environment because of biological or learned female attributes. As a result this group is then devalued in terms of material reward and limited in their career through the glass ceiling (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:149; Kelly & Dabul Marin, 1998:53; O'Brian Hallstein 2000).

The feminist theory offers more to public relations research than only the superficial adding of gender as a separate variable to the research question (Hurley, 1999:55; Spicer, 1997:212). Public relations were previously only identified in terms of masculine traits such as persuasion, competition, dominance, influence and power, focusing on communication as a means to influence (Holtzhauzen, 1995; Spicer, 2000:119,120). Theory suggests that values such as adapting a relational orientation, power associated with facilitating another's development, creating equality and a focus on social responsibility rather than individual

rights, have been overlooked in the male dominant organisational culture. Practising covert power through stereotyping and gender discrimination will limit the career advancement of female employees (Spicer, 1997:133; O'Brian Hallstein, 2000).

Hon, Grunig and Dozier (in Grunig, 1992:429,430,433) and Holtzhauzen (1995:55) argued that communication roles practised from a feminist perspective will lead to more ethical and effective public relations as more emphasis is placed on relational consequences from communication messages. This approach aligns with the current South African political and economic situation which supports the feminist approach by supporting values such as diversity, empowerment and transparency.

## **5.2. Theoretical framework**

### **5.2.1. Strategic contingency theory**

The contingency theory has its roots in general systems theory. The theory stresses the importance of interconnectivity between subsystems, which equate to the environmental scanning and boundary-spanning roles of the practitioner. The relationship between the organisation and its internal and external environment is dependent on the organisational decision-makers as they interpret specific situations and determine the resulting actions and solutions (Stroh & Jaatinen, 2001:156-158).

On the one hand the dominant coalition need to follow an empowerment approach to create a flexible environment where the practitioner can perform optimally, and on the other hand this highlights the fact that membership of the dominant-coalition is crucial to the communication practitioner (Stroh & Jaatinen, 2001:159).

### **5.2.2. Organisational structure theory**

An organisation's structure is comprised of the formal co-ordinating mechanisms and interaction patterns followed within the organisation and the dominant coalition's decisions on size, technology, span of control and the extent of hierarchical layering which gives meaning to the structure (Bassett & Carr, 1996:44; Donaldson, 1997:84; Grunig, 1992:93). Therefore the organisational structure and dominant coalition's interpretation thereof will have direct influence on corporate communication practitioners' career advancement (Hinings, Thibault, Slack & Kikulis, 1996:219,220).

It will also be beneficial to the practitioner if the dominant coalition understands that a flexible role set is required within a turbulent environment supports empowerment and democratic processes (Bassett & Carr, 1996:38; Feldman, 1997).

An individual cannot be fitted to pre-existing role definitions, as the situation within which they need to operate will influence their role-play (Bassett & Carr, 1996:44). The practitioner will however need to have the skills, experience, temperament and potential to play the role (Bassett & Carr, 1996:38).

### 5.2.3. Power-control theory

Power is an integral part of the organisation's existence and depends on the restriction of access to information. Understanding the use of power within the organisation is important for both survival in the company and the practitioner's own career movements (Grunig & Huang, in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000:44; Spicer, 1997:149). Mintzberg (in Spicer, 1997:134) suggested that the practitioner should focus on referent power, which relates to the position within the hierarchy, as well as access to knowledge or skills that are essential to the organisation.

The power-control theory suggests that the dominant coalition direct the organisation's corporate communication efforts and therefore might not select the most rational type of communication behaviour for their environment (Repper, in Grunig, 1992:113).

### 5.2.4. Interpersonal perception theory

The interpersonal perception theory highlights miscommunication between the practitioner, the organisation and the environment.

The theory postulates that each person in a relationship has three major levels of experience or perceptions, namely the direct perspective, the meta perspective and the meta-meta perspective (Tomlinson, in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000:194-196). The following is an example of the three levels of perspectives:

**Table 1: Levels of perspectives**

Perspective	Example – the practitioner thinking	Example – the CEO thinking
Direct perspective	Communication is important to the organisation.	Communication is important to the organisation.
Meta perspective	The CEO does not value the role of communication in the organisation.	The practitioner does not realise the importance of the role of communication in the organisation.
Meta-meta-perspective	The CEO thinks I cannot perform the tasks necessary and therefore will not promote me to a strategic position.	The practitioner thinks I am ignorant on the importance of communication to the organisation.



The practitioner should practice expectation management in order to align perceptions and eliminate disagreements and misunderstandings (Tomlinson, in Ledingham & Bruning, 2000:196,197).

#### **5.2.5. Corporate communication roles theory**

Originally four corporate communication roles were conceptualised, of which only two were empirically verified, namely that of manager and technician (Broom & Dozier, 1986:47). Technicians carried out instructions and managers were concerned with strategic planning (Van Ruler, 1997:247). These roles are not mutually exclusive and practitioners enact various degrees of the activities of both manager and technician (Dozier & Broom, 1995:5,6; Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig, 1998:9).

In recent years, academics and researchers started questioning the roles of manager and technician (Moss, 2000:1), as the need for a third role to define all the actions taken by the public relations practitioner, became apparent.

American researchers Toth *et al.* (1998) identified the agency profile role. British researchers Moss *et al.* (2000:301) extended the manager role to include strategic level communication functions. Van Ruler (1997:250,251), a Dutch researcher, split the manager role in two, conceptualising the sales manager and intermediary role. In South Africa, Steyn (1999:37-38; 2000a:37; 2000b:412-416) conceptualised and empirically verified the role of strategist, manager and technician.

The concept of role is prevalent in the world of theatre where the outline is sketched and personal interpretation is expected. Practitioners must thus educate themselves and gain experience in order to fulfil expected roles.

## **6. CONCEPTUALISATION**

The study will focus on two concepts, namely 'constraints' and 'role'.

Constraints are defined as the limitations experienced by corporate communication practitioners in advancing their communication careers.

Roles are the individual's standardised patterns of behaviour of recurring activities required in a specific functional relationship, so as to yield a predictable outcome (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:24; Dozier in Grunig, 1992:327; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:597; Katz & Kahn 1978:189). The roles enacted are determined by the concepts influencing the personal achievements of practitioners (Dozier *et al.*, 1995). Moss (2000:7,8) refers to role performance as what

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practitioners indicate they allocate their time doing. This differs from role demands or expectations, which the dominant-coalition holds of the same role.

This study will focus on the technician, managerial and strategist roles, as defined by Steyn (2000a:13-37). These roles were conceptualised and empirically verified, according to the expectations and perceptions of performance of South African chief executives (Steyn, 2000a:13-37; Steyn, 2000b:33,34,412).

The technician role is enacted at the micro level of the organisation. The main task of the technician is to produce audio-visio material for presentations, generating publicity, writing media releases, keeping a media clipping service, editing corporate communication materials such as speeches or the annual report, writing articles for the organisation's publications, and organising special events (Steyn, 2000a:6; Steyn, 2000b:35; Steyn & Puth, 2000:10).

In the redefined manager role, the practitioner identifies the organisation's key strategic issues, considers their implications for strategic stakeholders and develops a corporate communication strategy by determining what should be communicated to solve the problem and to capitalise on the opportunity presented (Steyn, 2000b:34; Steyn & Puth, 2000:16).

The strategist's main duty is to perform environmental scanning in order to gather strategic information on stakeholders and issues from the external environment, which can then be fed back to the dominant coalition to aid the organisation's strategy formulation processes. This role is enacted at the top management level of the organisation (Steyn, 2000b:33; Steyn & Puth, 2000:17,18).

For the purpose of this study the role definitions of Steyn (2000a:13-37) will be used as it is applicable, to the South African environment. The managerial and strategic roles will be referred to as high-level communication roles (Steyn, 2000a:13-37; 2000b:33-35).

Different conceptualisations of emerging roles for corporate communication in the literature can be summarised as follows:

**Table 2: Summary of the communication roles found in literature**

	Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig	Wright	Van Ruler	Moss, Warnaby & Newman	Steyn
<b>Country of origin</b>	USA	USA	Netherlands	United Kingdom	South Africa
<b>Historical foundation of roles studied</b>	Manager & Technician				

	Toth, Serini, Wright & Emig	Wright	Van Ruler	Moss, Warnaby & Newman	Steyn
<b>New role conceptualised</b>	Agency role	Communication Executive	Sales Manager & Intermediary	Show there is room for strategic duties at top management level	Strategist & Manager (re-defined)
<b>Brief description</b>	The authority on both public relations problems and their solutions	Public relations executive reporting directly to the CEO.	Focus on the synchronisation of public and organisational behaviour.	Focus on the strategic duties of the manager role.	Redefined the manager role and added the strategic role to focus on high level issues.
<b>Focus</b>	Managerial	Strategic	Strategic/ Managerial	Strategic/ Managerial	Strategic/ Managerial
<b>Related to which role</b>	Expert prescriber	Manager role	Manager role	Manager role	Manager role
<b>Source</b>	Toth <i>et al.</i> , 1998:9	Wright, 1995:181	Van Ruler, 1997:250,251	Moss <i>et al.</i> , 2000:301	Steyn, 2000a:13-37

## 7. LITERATURE REVIEW: CONSTRAINTS IN THE CAREER ADVANCEMENT OF COMMUNICATION PRACTITIONERS

Various career advancement constraints were identified in the literature.

### 7.1. Individual constraints

#### 7.1.1. Demographic constraints

Affirmative action is a policy applied in South African business in order for the organisation to reflect the population of the country in its workforce by appointing persons on the criteria of race or disability (Visagie, 1999:152). However, as much as 95% of all affirmative action programmes fail, due to no real commitment to the implementation of the affirmative action programme and the lack of a strategic approach with regard to cultural change (Visagie, 1999:156).

#### 7.1.2. Lacking a clear transition from one position to the next

Steyn (1999:41; 2000a:13-37) and Van Ruler (1997) found that communication practitioners still focus on technical procedures rather than strategic activities, although the expectation is for the latter. According to Steyn and Puth (2000:228) it would be beneficial if the corporate communication manager made a clear transition from being a technician to becoming a strategist.

### **7.1.3. Lack of strategic knowledge and skills**

The corporate communication strategist / manager should focus on environmental scanning, managing relationships and building a positive image on behalf of the organization through the use of problem solving strategies (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:27,28; Steyn & Puth, 2000:158; Van Ruler, 1997). However, in practice, practitioners are promoted to the strategist or manager position by virtue of the fact that they are the most senior practitioners, or because they perform well in their technician roles. Steyn (2000a:3) opined that communication practitioners do not fulfill the strategic role, due to a lack of knowledge of this area.

The study by Steyn and Green (2001:32) on strategic management roles within the National Department of Housing highlighted this issue. The most senior corporate communication practitioner played the technician role combined with general managerial activities. The researchers concluded that government could benefit from having senior practitioners functioning in the corporate communication strategist's role.

### **7.1.4. Lack of appropriate and sufficient education**

Dozier *et al.* (1995:5,10) found that there are three layered spheres of knowledge that are needed to lead the corporate communication function to communication excellence. The centre sphere is the knowledge core, which distinguishes excellent from less-than-excellent communication and pertains to practitioner knowledge of two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical communication (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:11). The second sphere is shared expectations between management and the corporate communication department, and the last sphere is a participative culture. According to the findings of the Excellence Study traditional skills alone will not create communication excellence.

Van Ruler (1997:259) showed that 76% of respondents in her study were of the misperception that they only need technical skills, common sense and a certain personality to perform the strategic or managerial role. Management skills or research skills and knowledge of communication processes were downplayed. However, practitioners are excluded from the dominant coalition due to a lack of business and financial knowledge (Moss *et al.*, 2000:3000). Steyn (2000a:4) found that practitioners do not perform the managerial and strategic role due to a lack of training.

Public relations professionals need to have knowledge of communication theory and research methods, which only comes with a university education at the masters or doctoral level (Grunig, in Plowman, 1998:242). Ledingham and Brunig (2000:145) argue that globalisation through technology is the future of business. Therefore practitioners need information technology skills in order to adapt to the business environment.

**7.1.5. Lack of management knowledge and skills**

Below a summary according to literature, of the skills and knowledge the communication practitioner requires at the technician, manager and strategist levels. Where “practitioner” is indicated it refers to all three roles – technician, manager and strategist. The researcher found that South Africa and SPRA have the most detailed expectations of the corporate communication practitioner.

Corporate communication as part of the management core of the organisation will need to make business decisions. Plowman (1998:243) made it clear that public relations professionals lack knowledge about business problems and business experience. In order to function on the management level, corporate communication education will need to be based on business knowledge (Plowman, 1998:243).

**Table 3: Summary of knowledge and skills required by the communication practitioner**

	South Africa	United Kingdom & Europe	USA	Swedish PR Association (SPRA)
Authors	Steyn, 2000a: 13–37; Steyn, 2000b:107; Steyn & Puth, 2000:10–13.	Moss, 2000:2,7; Van Ruler, 1997: 248,249,250,252	White & Dozier, in Grunig, 1992: 103-105; Dozier <i>et al.</i> , 1995:11,23-36; Toth <i>et al.</i> , 1998:5-9	SPRA, 2002; SPRA, 2000.
Strategy formulation	Strategist			Practitioner
Corporate communication strategy formulation and setting of communication goals	Manager	Manager	Manager	Practitioner
Implementation of the communication plan	Technician		Manager	Practitioner
Managing the communication department and supervising others	Manager	Manager	Manager	
Business and management skills i.e. managing the communication program	Manager		Manager	Practitioner
Environmental scanning skills	Strategist			Practitioner
Evaluation of results	Strategist & Manager	Manager	Manager	Practitioner
Setting up and managing budgets	Manager	Manager	Manager	
Negotiation and liaison with stakeholders	Strategist & Manager	Manager	Manager	
Counselling top management on strategic communication issues	Strategist	Manager	Manager	
Identification of key issues	Strategist & Manager	Manager		Practitioner
Decision making on communication policy	Strategist & Manager	Manager	Manager	
Conducting research	Strategist and manager		Manager	
Knowledge of communication theory	Practitioner		Practitioner	Practitioner

	South Africa	United Kingdom & Europe	USA	Swedish PR Association (SPRA)
Writing and delivering speeches				Practitioner
Development of communication material i.e. audio-visual material	Technician	Technician	Technician	Technician
Writing – i.e. media releases and articles	Technician	Technician	Technician	Technician
Editing – i.e. corporate communication materials	Technician	Technician	Technician	Technician
Keeping a media clipping service	Technician	Technician	Technician	Technician
Generation of publicity	Technician	Technician	Technician	Technician
Organising – i.e. special events	Technician	Technician	Technician	Technician

Puth's (1992:40-52) inventory analysis of tertiary institutions' corporate communication training in 1992 found that most Departments of Communication are situated in Arts Faculties. This is a concern as management training should be included in corporate communication training and therefore it should be located in business school (Plowman, 1998:243). Groenewald (1998:7) found that most international literature indicated that corporate communication should not be lectured as a specialised undergraduate course as the practitioner firstly need to develop critical and analytical skills.

#### **7.1.6. The practitioner does not view corporate communication management as a strategic function**

Practitioners rationalise their role and function in the organisation (Jackall, in Spicer, 1997:36). According to Van Ruler (1997:249), practitioners profess their occupation to be a strategic one although they still tend to act operationally. Furthermore, many practitioners view the purpose of corporate communication as manipulating public opinion representing an unethical and asymmetrical dimension (Nessman, 1995:3).

#### **7.1.7. The practitioner downplays the communication profession**

Practitioners tend to downplay their own profession by stating that only technical skill and personality is needed to make a strategic contribution to the organisation (Van Ruler, 1997:252). Furthermore, they view the status of the corporate communication manager as below that of the financial, marketing and personnel managers, although they might all be at the same formal organisational level (Van Ruler, 1997:260). Spicer (1997:36) adds that practitioners are to blame for the negative view of public relations as they rationalise their own tasks to reflect only technical skills. Practitioners are therefore their own worst enemy.

#### **7.1.8. The practitioner is not a member of a professional organisation**

Dozier, *et al.* (1995:66) shows that development workshops and seminars provided by professional organisations hone the practitioner's expertise and update them on new developments. This opportunity is missed if the practitioner is not a member.

#### **7.1.9. The practitioner experiences tension between the creative and managerial role**

Moss (2000:2) regards practitioners as experiencing a tension between their creative preferences and the managerial function they are expected to perform, which can affect the role practitioners play.

#### **7.1.10. The practitioner's career goals**

Dozier (in Grunig, 1992:350-351) identified four types of practitioners, which directly influences the aims and career goals of the practitioners and therefore their career path.

- The *upwardly mobile practitioner* holds a positive opinion about communication and practitioners in general, equates creativity with challenge, and wishes to climb the corporate ladder.
- The *creative artistic practitioner* distrusts management's ability to understand communication and operates as a technician. This practitioner would like greater input into decision making, but not at the expense of spontaneity and emotional involvement in the business.
- The *committed proactive practitioner* is committed to the organisation and takes an ethical view of the practice. They see communication planning as important and wants the practice to rise above the mere application of communication techniques.
- The *literary scientific practitioner*, views communication as an applied social science that needs to be more scientific and regrets the lack of knowledge of new practitioners.

### **7.2. Organisational constraints**

#### **7.2.1. Lack of support from the communication department**

Senior corporate communication practitioners need the support of the communication department in the execution of technical skills in order to set them free to enact their roles. Dozier *et al.* (1995:11) argued that in order to be excellent, the communication department culture has to be based on teamwork. The practitioner also needs to have access to the basic technical communication skills such as page layout equipment (Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:223-228; Dozier & Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:114).

### **7.2.2. Encroachment**

Encroachment is the assignment of top positions to non-corporate communication professionals without the relevant training or experience or empowering a line manager outside of the function to manage corporate communication (Ehling, White & Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:359,363; Hogg & Doolan, 1999:600; Lauzen & Dozier, 1992:211). In this situation the corporate communication practitioner will lack the insight, education and skill to negotiate for organisational power in order to maintain their own domain.

### **7.2.3. Dominant coalition's view of corporate communication**

The dominant coalition's view of corporate communication within the company will determine the role of the practitioner. Top management tend to consider technical communication skills more important than public relation managerial attributes (Wright, in Moss, 2000:6). Top management sometimes act technically due to their specific world-view. According to White and Dozier (in Van Ruler, 1997:248) even CEOs can act as technicians given their view of their function. The dominant coalition's view of public relations within the company will determine the role of the practitioner.

### **7.2.4. Stereotyping and gender discrimination**

Moss *et al.* (2000:279,291) argued that gender discrimination is experienced in terms of the role played and salary. However their study found that there were no gender discrimination in terms of positions held, access to top management, balance of activities and influence on the dominant coalition (Moss *et al.*, 2000:294,303). In contrast, Dozier and Broom (1995:3,7,20) found that women were still stereotyped within the corporate communication profession.

### **7.2.5. Lack of opportunity to show strategic communication contribution**

The organisational environment needs to be of such a nature that it would allow the corporate communication practitioner the opportunity of making strategic inputs in the strategy formulation of the organisation by taking part in decision making (Steyn, 1999:28). The communication practitioner will need to respond strategically to solve problems, acting on his/her knowledge and expertise. By offering strategic input, the dominant coalition will value and seek the practitioner's input and this will in return reinforce the strategic view of communication in the organisation (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:17,87). The practitioner has to however realise that the right to influence strategy has to be earned (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:85,86; Moss *et al.*, 2000:87). This is difficult if the practitioner lacks the knowledge and opportunity to act strategically.



#### **7.2.6. Organisation and communication department size**

When examining physical factors influencing the corporate communication practitioner, one needs to focus on the size of the organisation and corporate communication department. Moss (2000) found that downsizing in the 1990s led to a decline in the number of significant managerial role activities performed by practitioners.

De Beer (2001:xvi,337) disagrees and states that the number of employees in the communication department or even size of the organisation does not affect advanced role-paying by top communicators. However when the corporate communication department is small, the roles performed by the practitioners are influenced as there is no room for delegation (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:114). If the corporate communications department is small, the practitioner must necessarily fulfil the technician role, since there is nobody else to do it. The size of the communication departments does not appear to be related to the organisation's size, but rather to the range of responsibilities of the department (Moss *et al.*, 2000:288,299,300).

#### **7.2.7. Organisational culture**

The organisational environment, including the organisation culture, has an influence on the role the corporate communication practitioner is allowed to perform. For instance, in a culture of two-way symmetrical communication there is more room for the practitioner to act strategically (Steyn, 2000a:17,20). However, De Beer (2001:327) explained that South African managers do not recognise the importance of two-way symmetrical communication and thereby limit the role of the practitioner.

#### **7.2.8. Organisational structure**

Dozier and Grunig (in Grunig, 1992:398,402) argues that the horizontal structure of the organisation does not necessarily influence the communication function, as long as the unit can be flexible. In the horizontal structure the department merely needs access to the dominant coalition.

Communication is generally structured as a staff function reporting to a line manager outside of the function, such as the marketing manager (Hogg & Doolan, 1999:600). In this situation, final decisions on policy are left to a person not knowledgeable on corporate communication aspects. This might even be true of top management, who in most instances have not been trained to lead the corporate communication function to excellence.

### **7.2.9. Lack of mentors**

Top management judges an individual's ability to give strategic input by measuring experience. New practitioners need guidance in order to gain experience (De Beer, 2001:340). Due to the limited number of strategic communication practitioners in the banking industry, mentors are not available to new practitioners.

### **7.2.10. Lack of participation in management decision making**

Communication practitioner job satisfaction is directly linked to participation in management decision making and contribution to strategy (Dozier & Broom, 1995:17; Dozier, in Grunig, 1992:341,342). For the practitioner to be effective, access to management decision making is crucial (Moss *et al.*, 2000:291).

There is a lack of practitioner representation at top management level (Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:489), which might be explained by the fact that practitioners keep on performing technical activities (White & Dozier, in Grunig, 1992). Dozier, in Grunig (1992) showed that practitioners' lack of business knowledge and their focus on communication skills limit their power-control management and use of hierarchical authority, control of resources and network centrality, to become included in the dominant coalition.

### **7.2.11. Limiting organisational environmental influences**

Environmental factors influence the role enacted by practitioners. For instance, the degree of environmental uncertainty is positively related to the role practitioners enact. This means that an uncertain or dynamic environment will positively influence practitioners to perform a more senior role (Lauzen & Dozier, 1992:207; Moss, 2000:3).

## **7.3. Communication profession constraints**

### **7.3.1. Vague view of the communication function and resulting lack of professional recognition**

The lack of a clear definition of corporate communication limits theory building, the creation of ethical values, strategic role playing, and the recognition of the profession (Kruckeberg, 1996:21; Nessman, 1995:3; Spicer, 1997:53).

Practitioners themselves make vague and incomprehensible statements of their field of work (Van Ruler, 1997:257,260). Sharpe (2000) shows that the public relations role is still seen as only a "whitewash" effort on behalf of politicians or the organisation.

### **7.3.2. Corporate communication as part of the marketing function**

Nessmann (1995:3) showed that most people, including practitioners, see public relations as part of the marketing functions, i.e. only a tool of marketing. This limits the practitioner in acting strategically within the communication field.

### **7.3.3. Gender discrimination and stereotyping**

Gender discrimination and stereotyping are alive and well within the communication field (Dozier and Broom, 1995:3,7,20; Toth *et al.*, in Moss, 2000:1). Researchers have sought to explain differences in status and salary and in the pattern of work performed by male and female practitioners in terms of gender discrimination (Dozier *et al.* 1995:149; Moss, 2000:3).

Researcher found that the segregation of females in the technician role contributed to salary differences between male and female practitioners and led to unequal advancement opportunities (Dozier *et al.*, 1995:158,159; Hon, Grunig and Dozier, in Grunig, 1992:419,421; Toth *et al.*, 1998:2).

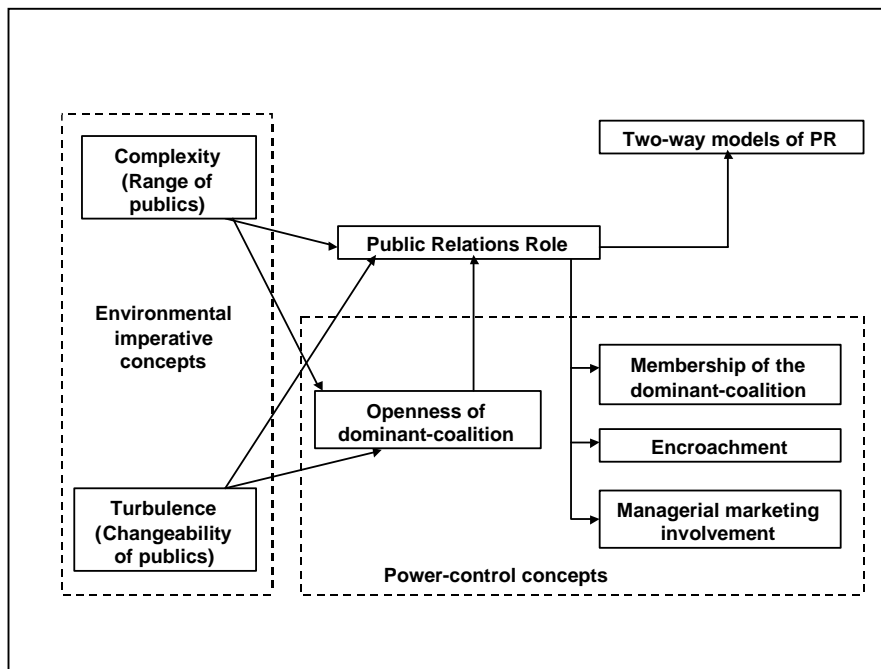
Grunig and Grunig (in Grunig, 1992:302) showed a clear link between femininity and the two-way symmetrical model of communication excellence which indicates that are naturally inclined toward the managerial role. However, they need to develop strategies for overcoming the discrimination and socialisation that keeps them out of the managerial role (Grunig & Grunig, in Grunig, 1992:302).

However, acting more like men will not solve the problem (Hon *et al.*, 1992:430,434). Although males are perceived to be more aggressive and therefore are traditionally congruent with high-level positions, female managers have a higher need for achievement than male managers and are actually more motivated toward achievement and self-actualisation than are men (Hon *et al.*, 1992:425).

### **7.4. Conceptual models in the literature depicting career advancement constraints**

According to Dozier *et al.*, (1992:64-65), practitioners lack a broad business expertise, are passive, naive about organisational politics and have inadequate education experience and organisational status in order to make a strategic and valued contribution to the organisation. Lauzen and Dozier (1992:216-218) provided a conceptual model of factors effecting corporate communication practice.

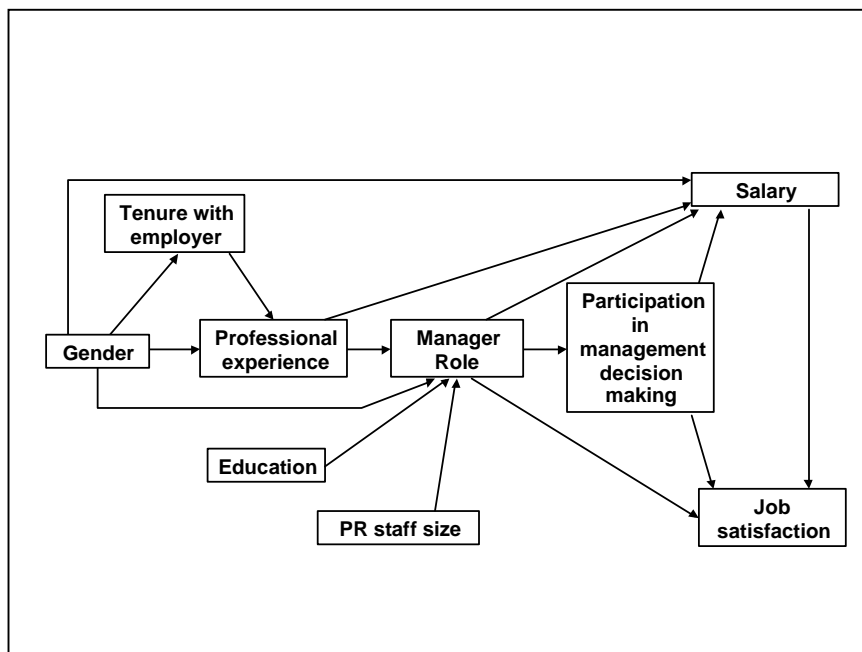
Figure 2: Conceptual model of public relations influences



Source: Lauzen and Dozier (1992:217)

Dozier and Broom (1995:6) identified the following conceptual model, linking practitioner attributes to professional outcomes.

Figure 3: Model linking practitioner attributes to professional outcomes

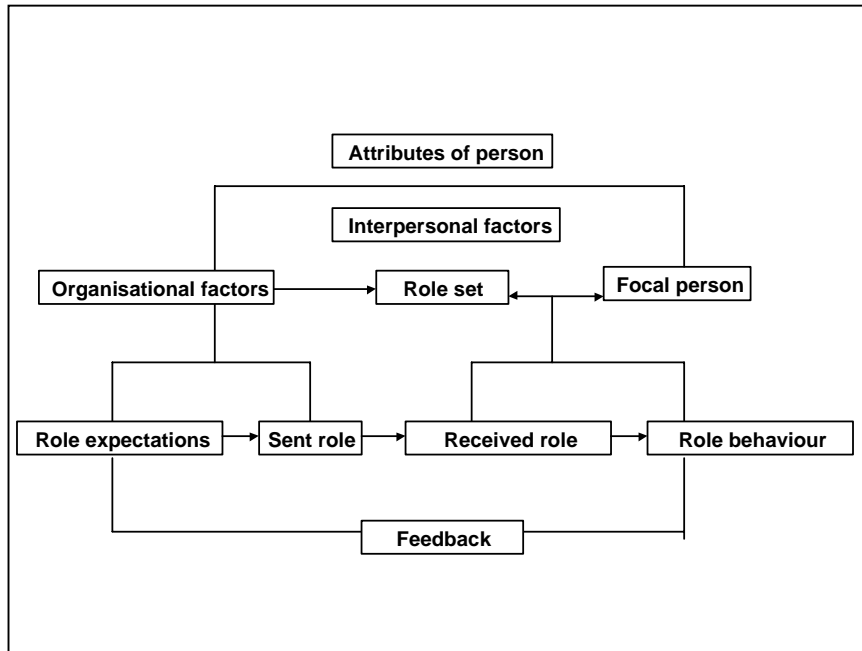


Source: Dozier and Broom (1995:6)

Hogg and Doolan (1999:601) identified factors influencing the role enactment of public relations professionals. They found that a person's psychological make-up and interpersonal

relationships, together with organisational factors, are important determinants of the role enacted.

**Figure 4: Influences on the enactment of the public relations role**



Source: Hogg and Doolan (1999:601)

All the models above take constraints into account that will influence the practitioner in performing his/her duty. The researcher has summarised constraints as follows.

**Table 4: Constraints experienced by communication practitioners in advancing to more senior corporate communication positions**

Individual constraints	Organisational constraints	Constraints within the communication field
Demographic constraints	Organisational structure	Vague view of the communication function
Lack of appropriate and sufficient education	Organisational culture	Communication / public relations as part of the marketing function
Lack of strategic knowledge and skills	Lack of support from the communication department	Lack of professional recognition
Lack of Management knowledge and skills	Encroachment	Gender discrimination
The practitioner does not view communication management as a strategic function	Stereotyping	-----
The practitioner downplays the communication profession	Assigning non-communication managers to manage practitioners	-----
The practitioner is not member of a professional organisation	Lack of mentors	-----

Individual constraints	Organisational constraints	Constraints within the communication field
The practitioner lacks making a clear transition from one role to the next	Lack of participation in management decision making	-----
The practitioner experiences tension between the creative and managerial role	Limited communication world-view of the dominant coalition	-----
The practitioner's career goals	Lack of opportunity to show strategic contribution	-----
-----	Limiting organisational environmental influences	-----
-----	Size of the organisation and downsizing	-----

Source: Own research

The constraints as identified above will form the basis of the empirical research.

## 8. IMPORTANCE OF THE STUDY

For the communication function to become a recognised profession, clear guidance should be available to practitioners in how to advance their careers.

This would include criteria on the education, personality traits and experience required by such a person, as well as outlining the ideal organisational environment. Moss *et al.* (2000:279) suggested that more research is needed in uncovering the relationship between issues that relate to practitioner involvement in strategic decision-making.

By exploring the various constraints experienced, the researcher intends to provide guidelines for further qualitative research into this phenomenon. Further research could also assist the organisation in the selection and education of corporate communication practitioners.

The study is also significant because of employing a research strategy not commonly used in corporate communication research. However, phenomenology is widely used in the psychological field with definite possibilities for greater use in the field of corporate communication (Daymon & Halloway, 2002:146).

## 9. DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study will focus only on corporate communication practitioners in the South African banking industry. Specifically practitioners from Standard Bank, ABSA and First National Bank were consulted.

**10. RESEARCH STRATEGY, DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

This study focuses on the perceptions of corporate communication practitioners (Who) with regards to the constraints (What) experienced in advancing their careers (Cooper & Emory, 1995:39,84). The table below summarises the research strategy, design and method, as derived from the research objectives.

**Table 5: Research strategy**

	Phase 1	Phase 2
Primary objective	To explore the constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners in the South African banking industry in advancing to senior roles.	
Secondary objectives	By means of a literature investigation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore the constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.</li> <li>- To identify the types of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners</li> <li>- To categorise the constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners by means of content analysis.</li> <li>- To differentiate between the roles performed by corporate communication practitioners.</li> </ul>	By means of empirical research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To explore the types of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners.</li> <li>- To identify whether constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners fit into already defined categories.</li> <li>- To identify whether there are any other categories of constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners not yet identified.</li> <li>- To explore the role that corporate communication practitioners are currently performing.</li> <li>- To identify whether certain types of constraints are experienced by corporate communication practitioners in certain roles.</li> </ul>
Research approach	Qualitative	
Research strategy	Phenomenologic	
Research design	Exploratory (Cooper & Emory 1995)	
Population	Corporate communication practitioners within the South African banking industry	
Observation unit	Corporate communication practitioners	
Data generation	Literature study	Questionnaire used before the interview In-depth interview, using the silent card method

The German philosopher Edmund Husserl first introduced phenomenology in the mid 1890s. Since then it has evolved into a philosophical tradition that has been used within almost every pragmatic and scholarly discipline world-wide (Callahan, 2000:105; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:147; Valle & Halling, 1989:41). Daymon and Halloway (2002:146) argued that there is room for the application of more phenomenological studies within the communication field.

Phenomenology aim to enlarge our view of the world by exploring and describing phenomena as they appear through the unique perspective of the individual's lived experience (Callahan, 2000:105; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:148; Leedy, 1997:161; Scannell-Desch, 2000; Valle & Halling, 1989:44;). The assumption that the phenomenologist makes is that humans only know what they experience. The philosophy differs from other descriptive and qualitative

approaches in that experience, and not actions or behaviour, is being researched (Valle & Halling, 1989:44).

The research reflected a snapshot in time of the interviewees' emotional, relational or situational experience of their efforts to advance their careers. The aim was not to support or validate any pre-selected model or theory, but to embrace the constraint in a non-assumptive manner as it unfolds from the perspective of the communication practitioner experiencing it (Callahan, 2000:105; Scannell-Desch, 2000).

The approach had limitations. Firstly, it was very difficult to research experiences and not natural objectives. Secondly, the interviewee's experiences consisted of their inherent perceptions and imaginations, which is several times removed from the actual experience. It was also a challenge to find information-rich respondents who were willing to collaborate. Lastly, there was a real threat that the researcher could influence the findings of the study, as the topic under investigation was of particular interest to the researcher (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:149; Valle & Halling, 1989:45).

#### **10.1. Validity and reliability**

The researcher overcame the limitations explained by focussing on validity and reliability. These measurements improve the quality of quantitative studies by measuring objectivity (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:90). Daymon and Holloway (2002:149,150) suggested achieving objectivity in qualitative research by openly discussing subjectivity.

Reliability measured the extent to which a research instrument will deliver the same results more than once. In this study the researcher was the main instrument and could not be wholly consistent. This limitation was overcome by setting up a decision trail whereby data and decisions were recorded, and by using the silent interview technique (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:90; Martinsuo, 2001:545,546).

In phenomenologic studies, validity is concerned with the accuracy of the data. Interviewer influence and accurate transcription of data can be improved by using multiple sources, respondents and a literature study, to cross-reference the findings (Valle & Halling, 1989:57). The study was made meaningful for those who undertook and read it by receiving input from the various leaders in the field of strategic and managerial corporate communication (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:151).

In summary, the researcher aimed to achieve the following measures of research quality (Daymon & Holloway, 2002:90-93,149,150).



**Table 6: Achieving research quality**

Quality measure		Definition	Action by the researcher
Objectivity		The non-interference of biases.	Openly discuss subjectivity.
Reliability		The extent to which a research instrument will deliver the same results more than once.	- Set up an audit or decision trail. - Use the silent interview technique in order to rule out bias created on words and concepts used in the study.
Authenticity		The extent to which strategies used to gather data is appropriate for the true reporting of participant's ideas.	- Ensure that the data gathering strategies are appropriate for the true reporting of participant's ideas.
Trustworthy	Transferability	Explain how the study is positioned within its specific context.	- Discuss the positioning of the study within its specific context and in relations to the overall theory on the subject.
	Dependability	Focuses on the consistency and accuracy of findings.	- Describe the decision-making process and context.
	Conformability	Evaluating the findings and conclusions of the study against the aims of the study.	- Describe the decision-making process and context. - Match the findings and conclusions of the study to the aims of the study. - Follow an ex post facto design, where the researcher is not able to control variables and an only report on what has already happened (Cooper & Emory, 1995:115,116).

## 10.2. Data generation

The phenomenological data generation methods used were in-depth interviews, supplemented by a questionnaire. The interviews were open-ended and unstructured, leaving enough time to explore the topic in depth. The length of an interview depended on the amount of self-reflection the participant felt comfortable with and the topic of study (Valle & Halling, 1989:48). In this study, interviews of one hour were set up with respondents. The researcher prepared the questionnaire, silent cards and definition list in advance for the interviews.

The researcher started each interview by explaining the aim of the study to the respondents, as well as the procedure to be followed. The anonymity of the respondents were stressed.

The respondent firstly completed the questionnaire, which gathered demographic data and identified the role played by the practitioner. The questionnaire was self-explanatory and did not require input from the researcher. However concepts that were unclear was explained on the definition list.

In the in-depth interview that followed, the interviewer and the interviewee established rapport and then worked together to arrive at the heart of the constraints experienced by the interviewee. The interview was not structured as a series of questions and answers. This

allowed the researcher to take cues from the interviewees' expressions, questions, and occasional sidetracks, creating a conversation where the interviewee did most of the talking (Leedy 1997:162).

The researcher used the silent interview technique where pictures are used to facilitate the conversation. This limits interference, bias (created on words and concepts used in the study) or prejudice from the researcher during the interview (Daymon & Halloway, 2002:178,184; Valle & Halling, 1989:57). The silent card method had to be adjusted slightly to suit the needs of the study, due to the fact that the concepts depicted were very abstract. The pictures alone could not depict the concept and therefore a short description of the concept was added to each silent card.

Through the literature study conducted in Phase One of the study, certain constraints experienced by communication practitioners in advancing their corporate communication careers were identified and categorised (see table 7). For the purpose of the interview the constraints were re-categorised, in order to group similar constraints together. Each of the constraints was then represented with a silent card.

**Table 7: Career advancement constraints identified in literature**

<b>Individual constraints</b>	<b>Organisational constraints</b>
<b>Demographic constraints</b> (questionnaire)	<b>Organisational structure &amp; culture</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Vague view of the communication function.</li> <li>Communication as part of the marketing function.</li> </ul>
<b>Education</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of appropriate and sufficient education.</li> <li>Lack of strategic knowledge and skills.</li> <li>Lack of Management knowledge and skills.</li> </ul>	
<b>Communication practitioner world-view of communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The practitioner does not view communication management as a strategic function.</li> <li>The practitioner downplays the communication profession.</li> <li>The practitioner is not member of a professional organisation.</li> </ul>	<b>Communication department size</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Size of the organisation</li> </ul>
	<b>Lack of support from the communication department</b>
	<b>Encroachment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigning non-communication managers to manage communication practitioners.</li> </ul>
<b>The practitioner's career goals</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The practitioner experiences tension between the creative and managerial role.</li> <li>The practitioner lacks making a clear transition from one role to the next.</li> </ul>	<b>Stereotyping</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gender discrimination.</li> <li>Affirmative action.</li> </ul>
	<b>Lack of mentors</b>
	<b>Limited communication world-view of the dominant coalition</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organisational view of communication.</li> </ul>
	<b>Lack of participation in management decision making</b>
	<b>Lack of opportunity to show strategic communication contribution</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limiting organisational environmental influences.</li> <li>Complexity &amp; turbulence of external environment.</li> </ul>
	<b>Membership of the dominant coalition</b>

Source: Own research

A silent card was presented to the interviewees to react upon in terms of their career advancement. The interviewee had the opportunity to elaborate on their experience and the reaction was noted. If the researcher identified that the response was not focusing on the issue intended by the silent card, this issue was named and the respondent asked to respond to the new possible constraint. Respondents was thus not lead into the questions, but allowed to give their own opinions. The researcher did not offer her own opinion at any stage.

All interviews were audio taped for transcription and analysis purposes. This proved to be important as phenomenological research validity is concerned with the accurate transcription of data (Valle & Haling, 1989:57). The quality of the fieldwork was determined by the thoroughness of the investigation toward previously identified constraints and possible new constraints identified by the respondents.

### **10.3.Sampling design**

A purposeful sample was used, by means of the snowball or chain sampling method, in order to increase the utility of information obtained from small samples (Daymon & Halloway, 2002:149,159; Valle & Halling, 1989:47,48). Through this method the researcher intended to find information rich interviewees (Clark, Riley, Szivas, Wilkie & Wood, 2000:86; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:149,159; Leedy, 1997:162).

The interviewees needed to adhere to the following criteria in order to be suitable for participation in this study (Kruger, 1988:162):

1. Have experience of constraints in advancing their corporate communication career.
2. Be verbally fluent and able to communicate their feelings, thoughts and perceptions in relation to the constraints experienced.
3. Express a willingness to participate in the study and be open to the researcher.

The sample size was determined by the study objectives, the number of interviewees necessary to provide the study with credibility and what was possible, given the time and resource constraints. Phenomenologists typically involve five to 10 people in their studies, as they depend on in-depth interviews (Clark *et al.*, 2000:88). In this study the researcher selected eight corporate communication practitioners from three of the four main institutions representing the banking community of South Africa (ABSA, Standard Bank and First National Bank) that are also high-level communication practitioners.

## **11. DATA ANALYSIS**

The challenge was to analyse the experience as the interviewee understood it. This fitted with Cooper & Emory's (1995:393) view that the data should guide the exploratory data analysis.

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Daymon and Holloway (2002:232) added that qualitative data analysis is concerned with data reduction and interpretation, where meaning and insight is brought into the words of the interviewee.

Content analysis is particularly well suited in this scenario where the transcribed interview forms the data to be analysed (Du Plooy, 1996:154; Zikmund, 2000:309,318). This fits with the unobtrusive nature of the exploratory study (Du Plooy 1996:165).

Phenomenological analysis of transcribed data is characterised as being initially more open, tentative and intuitive. Phenomenologists focus on meaning units, which is the smallest segments of text that are meaningful by themselves (Leedy, 1997:162; Kruger, 1988:161). Through analysis of the interview the researcher intend to describe the respondent's attitudes, opinion, thoughts and behaviours surrounding the issue of career advancement (Rubin *et al.*, 1993). Kruger (1988:157) warned against prematurely fixing the categories of research and thereby excluding the development, discovery and invention of new meaning units.

Phenomenology suggests the following ways of analysing data:

**Table 8: Phenomenologic methods of data analysis**

Method	Van Kaam	Colaizzi	Giorgi	Hayes
<b>Source</b>	Valle & Halling, 1989; 52,53	Valle & Halling, 1989:53; Daymon & Holloway, 2002:150,151	Valle & Halling, 1989:53,54	Hayes, 1997:230-233
<b>Familiarisation</b>		Understand the material – gain familiarity	Researcher examines data	Suspend previous knowledge and views by bracketing
<b>Understand the whole</b>		Get a sense of the whole	Get a sense of the whole	
<b>Identify the units of analysis</b>		Find phrases or sentences pertaining to study	Divide data into units that express a self-contained meaning	Find the analysis units
<b>Listing</b>		List the phrases		
<b>Rearticulation</b>		Rearticulation of data into the researcher's language – formulate meanings	Rearticulate the units into the researcher's language	
<b>Listing</b>		Produce a list of the significant statements or meanings		
<b>Categorise information</b>	Classify data into categories	Cluster the individual themes together	Interrogate each meaning unit and its theme in terms of the specific topic of the study	Analyse by grouping the units together
<b>Rearticulation</b>	Rearticulation of data into the researcher's language			
<b>Intuiting</b>				Intuiting. Understanding the respondents' point of view.
<b>Elimination</b>	Elimination of statements relating to a specific situation or that blend several parts			

	Van Kaam	Colaizzi	Giorgi	Hayes
<b>Description</b>	Identify the first description of the experience	Provide a detailed analytic description of participants feelings and perspectives	Tie individual units together into descriptive statements	Describe the findings
<b>Structuring</b>		Formulate an exhaustive description of the whole phenomenon and identify fundamental structure	Develop descriptions at the general level Provide single general structural description	
<b>Refer findings</b>	Valid identification after previous steps were carried out successfully	Refer findings to respondents for comparison with their experiences		

Traditional content analysis describes a systematic method whereby the data is categorised in order to discover the meaning contained in the messages, in order to arrive at objective, qualitative information (Du Plooy, 1996:152; Reinhard, 1998:180). The following table summarises the steps in content analysis:

**Table 9: Steps in content analysis**

Steps	Du Plooy (1996:156-164)	Patton (1986:149-150)
		Gather all the data
Identify the units of analysis	Select the unit of analysis	
Code information	Code of the information	Label the data according to categories or patterns
Categorise information	Categorise units of analysis into meaningful groups	Organise the data into meaningful categories
	Test validity and reliability in terms of the repeatability of the study and measure what was intended to be measured.	
Report		Report on the findings

As can be seen in tables eight and nine, the steps described in phenomenological analysis correlates closely with the content analysis process.

The main purpose of the phenomenologic approach was to learn something about the content and those who produced the messages (Rubie, Rubin & Piele, 1993:189). The steps the researcher pursued in analysing the questionnaires and interview data were as follows:

1. *Identify or code the units of analysis.* For the purpose of this study “constraints”, in whichever form, was the unit of analysis. Latent coding was used where the researcher needed to make value judgements regarding the meaning contained within the selected unit of analysis (Du Plooy, 1996:159). Reinhard (1998:182) showed that syntactic units (words, phrases or sentences), referential units (the presence or absence of units, prepositional units (statements and argument units) and thematic units (repeated patterns or ideas) could be coded.

2. *Categorise the information.* Daymon and Halloway (2002:237) warned that in categorising data the researcher should be weary of leaving any findings uncategorised as this can deflect attention away from an important finding.
3. *Report on the findings.* The researcher should stay focussed, as it is easy to loose the readers in the sheer volume of possible findings of which all are not equally credible and important. Patton (1986:163) suggested that direct quotations be used in order to allow readers to understand fully the thoughts of the people represented.

## 12. FINDINGS

The responses to the questionnaire and interviews are reported separately.

### 12.1. Findings based on the questionnaire

#### 12.1.1. Individual questions

- **Question 1: Job title**

**Table 10: Summary of job titles**

Title	Number of respondents
Communication Manager / Manager Communication	3
Internal communication specialist	1
Business unit head: Brand and communication services	1
Manager: Communication consulting	1
Account executive and team leader	2

Across companies there does not seem to be a standard agreement on a title for the communication position. Titles ranged from 'Communication Manager' to 'Account executive'. Two of the title did not even contain the word 'communication'.

- **Question 2: Age**

**Table 11: Age**

Age	Number of respondents	Age	Number of respondents	Age	Number of respondents
< 20	0	30 - 34	0	45 - 49	2
20 - 24	0	35 - 39	1	50 - 54	0
25 - 29	4	40 - 44	1	> 54	0

The fact that the African female was in the age category 25 – 29, might point to the affirmative action programmes in South Africa. Half of the respondents were younger that 30 years, possibly pointing to the trend that management teams are becoming younger.

- **Question 3: Race**

**Table 12: Race and gender**

Race	Gender	Number of respondents
White	Female	6
African	Female	1
White	Male	1
African	Male	0

Added to the question of race the interviewer added gender through observation. Six respondents were young white females; one was an African female and one a white male. The fact that seven of the eight respondents were female might point to the feminisation of the communication practice in the South African banking industry.

- **Question 4: How many years have you been with this company?**

**Table 13: Number of years with the company**

Number of years with the company	Number of respondents	Number of years with the company	Number of respondents
< 1	1	11 - 15	1
1 - 5	4	16 - 20	1
6 - 10	0	> 20	1

The respondents had been with their company anything from less than one year to more than 20 years. Five of the respondents were with the company for less than five years. Respondents in the age group 25 – 39 spent less than 5 years with the company, whereas the three respondents older than 40 years spent more than 11 years with the company. It is logical that the time spent with the company could be related to the age of the respondent.

- **Question 5: How many years have you been in your current position?**

**Table 14: Number of years in current position**

Number of years in current position	Number of respondents	Number of years in current position	Number of respondents
< 1	3	11 - 15	0
1 - 5	4	16 - 20	0
6 - 10	1	> 20	0

Seven of the respondents were in their position for less than five years and this could point to the fact that acknowledgement for the communication position has only come about recently. However these respondents were also in the age category 25 – 29. Thus time spent with the company is probably related to their age.

- **Question 6: Years of experience in other functions**

**Table 15: Years of experience in other functions**

Years of experience in the function	Project Management	Marketing & Communication	Human Resources	Administration	Journalism	Public relations	Banking	Change Management	Travel	Secretarial	Marketing
< 1	1										
1 – 5		2	1	1	1	1		1	1	1	3
> 5				1			1				2

The experience gained by practitioners younger than 40 years, was in communication related fields such as marketing, marketing and communication, journalism and public relations. The practitioners older than 40 years had experience in non-communication functions such as human resources, administration, change management, banking, travel and secretarial. This finding was probably related to the fact that communication management was only recently acknowledged as a separate function.

- **Question 7 and 8: Are you a member of a professional organisation? If yes, please give the name of the organisation.**

**Table 16: Professional organisations to which respondents belonged**

Membership of a professional organisation	Number of respondents
None	2
IABC	6
PRISA	3
IMM	1
Contra Adna Foundation	1
IABC, PRISA	3
IABC, PRISA & IMM	1
IABC, PRISA & Contra Adna Foundation	1

Six of the respondents belonged to professional organisations. All six belonged to the IABC. There was no clear relationship between the professional organisations practitioners belonged to and their age, race or education. The conclusion is reached that the IABC is the most popular professional association amongst the respondents.



• **Question 9: Highest qualification**

**Table 17: Highest qualification of respondent**

Highest qualification	Number of Respondents	Details of qualification
Short course / Certificate	3	
BA Degree		
BA Degree (Communication)	1	
B.Com Degree		
B.Com Degree (Communication)		
Postgraduate degree	2	- MBA strategy in communication - MBA general
Postgraduate degree (Communication)	2	- B.Com.Hons Communication Management
Other	2	- Matric

It is concluded that the respondent's type of education might be indicative of their lack of knowledge of strategic communication. Of the respondents only four studied communication specific courses. There was not a specific correlation between the qualifications of the respondents and their membership of professional organisations.

• **Question 10: Please indicate the percentage of the workday allocated to the following tasks**

**Table 18: Percentage of workday allocated to certain tasks**

Activities	Percentage of workday allocated	Role that the activity represent
Putting together / distribution of publications / press releases / speeches	24	Technician
Development of audiovisual or other presentations for senior managers		
Generation of publicity I.e. media releases / exhibitions		
Monitor the performance of the organisation's corporate communication practitioners or sub-divisions	46	Manager
Assisting and educating managers on communication		
Taking responsibility for the success or failure of the corporate communication plans		
Identify external stakeholders and act as advocate for them by explaining their views to top management	30	Strategist
Explain to top management the impact of their behaviour on key external stakeholders I.e. the media / investors		
Develop strategies for building sound relationships between the organisation and key stakeholders		

When summing the percentage of work-day spent on certain tasks, the practitioners showed in total that they spent 30% of their workday on strategic tasks, 46% of their workday on

managerial tasks and 24% of their workday on technical tasks. Three respondents indicated that they perform the strategist role, four the manager role and only one the technician role.

There is no clear trend between the role the practitioner performed and the time the practitioner has spent with the organisation or in that position, the respondent's qualifications, professional organisation they belong to, job title or age. The only noticeable difference was that the only African interviewed performed the technician function. Three white females were in managerial roles and the three remaining white females in strategic roles. The white male performed the manager role.

- **Question 11: Please indicate your top five activities performed over the last three months**

The researcher analysed the most important five activities the practitioner performed over the last three months and classified each activity as strategic, managerial or technical. The role performed according to the main activities performed by the practitioner over the last three months was then compared with the role performed as indicated by the practitioner as percentage of their workday.

**Table 19: Roles performed most over the last three months**

Respondent	Role performed according to the main activities performed by the practitioner over three months	Role performed as indicated by the practitioner as percentage of their workday
1	Manager	Strategist
2	Manager	Manager
3	Strategic	Manager
4	Manager	Technician
5	Strategist / Manager	Manager
6	Manager	Strategist
7	Manager	Manager
8	Manager	Strategist

In two cases the activities that the respondent performed over the last three months corresponded with what the respondent perceived their daily activities to be. In three cases practitioners perceived their daily activities as strategic, and the tasks performed over the last three months indicate a managerial position. This could lead to frustration as practitioners viewed themselves to be on a higher level than the actual work they performed. In three cases practitioners perceived her daily activities as lower than the tasks performed over the last three months. This could create frustration with their managers in their expectation of the practitioner's work deliverables.

This finding could reflect the influence of self-reporting by the practitioners. The practitioners reported on what they want to do or think they should be doing, rather than reporting a true reflection of what they are indeed doing.

#### **12.1.2. Summary of questionnaire findings**

The findings of the questionnaire are summarised in appendix 2.

The respondents older than 40 years that have spent a longer time in the organisation and thus gained more experience seemed to perform the high-level roles manager and strategist. However they've only completed matric and short courses or certificates.

The younger candidates with less experience and time spent in the organisation also performed the high-level roles, manager and strategist. Three of them had a post-graduate communication degree and one a general MBA degree. This could indicate that postgraduate education prepares the practitioner for high-level corporate communication roles.

It is interesting to note that the African female who studied a MBA in strategy in communication performed the technician role. However there were not enough African practitioners involved in this study to make a conclusion on this issue.

#### **12.2. Findings and conclusions: Silent card interviews**

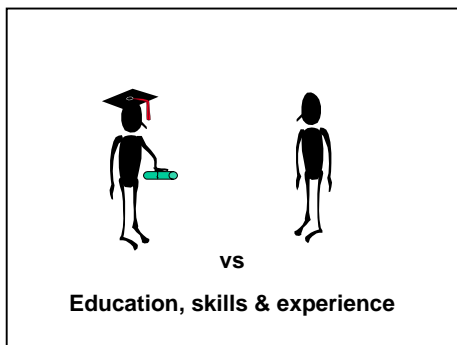
This section explored the perceptions of the constraints experienced by corporate communication practitioners in advancing to more senior corporate communication roles in the South African banking industry. The constraints identified in the literature study, were captured on silent cards and through this method interference, bias (created on words and concepts used in the study) or prejudice from the interviewer during the interview, were limited (Daymon & Halloway, 2002:148,185; Valle & Halling, 1989:57).

Unfortunately, only five of the eight interviews were usable. During two of the interviews the background noise interfered considerably and the interview could not be transcribed. In the third case the recording device did not record effectively and the interview could not be transcribed.

Phenomenologists typically report their findings in the form of a narrative that describes a theme, pattern or commonality among these experiences (Leedy, 1997; Daymon & Halloway, 2002:150,169).

12.2.1. Themes per silent card

- **Silent card 1: Education, skills and experience**



One could deduct that education armed practitioners with valuable knowledge and assisted them in advancing their careers. However it did not seem to be a prerequisite for communication career advancement. Tertiary education was only applicable later in practitioners' careers after they gained enough experience to move to a management level. Together with tertiary education

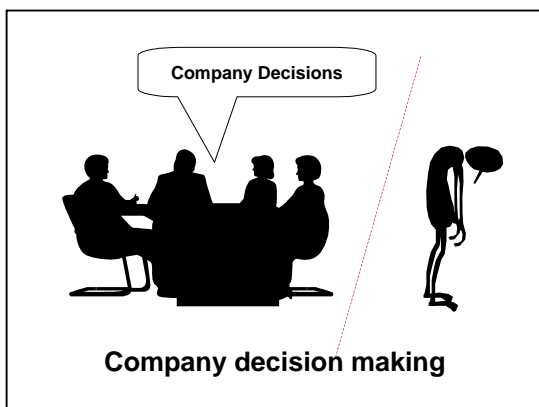
the practitioners also focused on skills development and gaining experience.

- **Silent card 2: Opportunity to make strategic contributions**



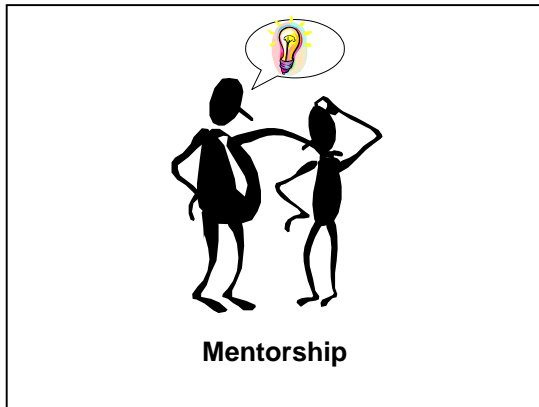
It seemed as if there was room for the practitioner to make a strategic contribution in organisations open to strategic input. However this privilege had to be earned, by showing business understanding. Interviewee one and five consulted leaders in one-on-one situations as this improved their chances of making strategic contributions.

- **Silent card 3: Company decision making**



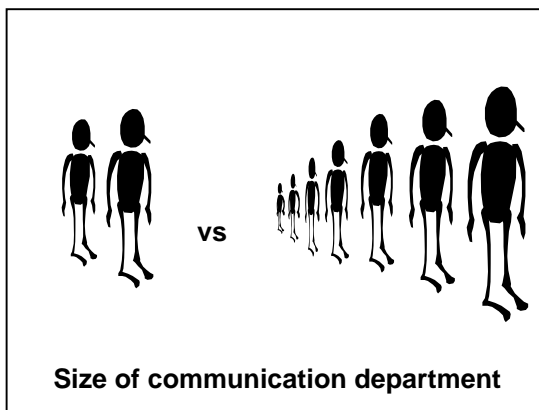
Practitioners were involved in decision making on their own level, but influenced decisions on a higher level through their managers. The practitioners argued that they had a valid contribution to make due to the stakeholder information they held. However, the banking industry is seen to be autocratic.

- **Silent card 4: Mentorship**



Mentorship seemed very important for career advancement. The communication function is slightly isolated, and therefore needed support. Most respondents did not have a mentor or had a business mentor, but not a communication mentor. Most tried to fill this gap with other means such as Listserves and education.

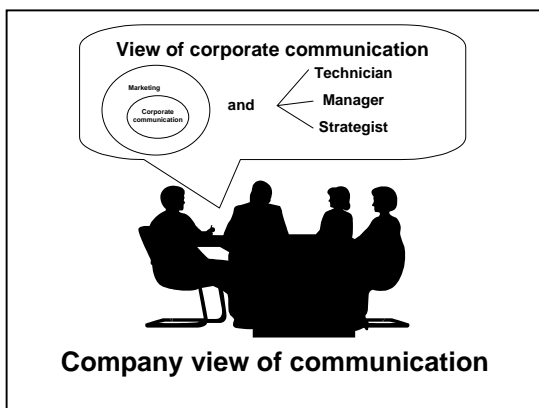
- **Silent card 5: Size of the communication department**



harder to overcome than those of large departments.

Neither big, nor small corporate communication departments were seen as ideal. Large departments had problems such as communication breakdown and territorial issues, and small departments had capacity issues. However large departments offered the opportunity to specialise and small departments' multiskilling. The problems associated with small departments seemed

- **Silent card 6: Organizational view of communication**



Younger top managers were more open to communication management than their older counterparts. Although there was not a set organisation-wide view of communication, the view of top management had a big influence on the practitioner's ability to perform managerial and strategic functions, as this dictated resource allocation.

One respondent added that a very negative organisational communication view could make practitioners uncertain of their actions and views. One could deduce that practitioners has a large role to play in educating the organisation in communication strategy.

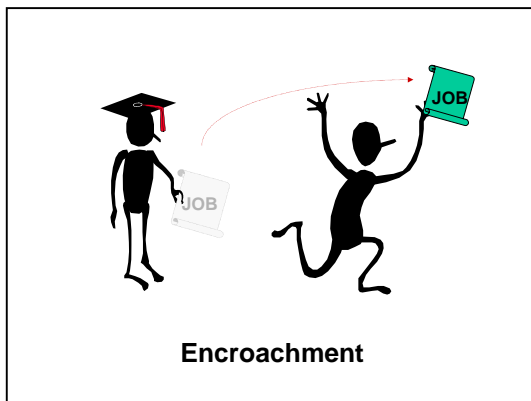
- **Silent card 7: Gender discrimination and stereotyping**



Gender discrimination and stereotyping seemed to play a role in the practitioner's career, although the respondents did comment that there were less discrimination and stereotyping than before. It is interesting to note that interviewees two and four experienced the same situation. One labeled it as stereotyping and the other as gender discrimination. This could point to practitioners' worldviews determining their experience.

The interviewees added that practitioners could select to limit discrimination and stereotyping, by having a sense of their own self worth, joining women's forums for support, gaining business knowledge and by proving their contribution to the organisation.

- **Silent card 8: Encroachment**



Some interviewees experienced encroachment and others not. Those who did not experience encroachment argued that the person would not be able to perform in the position and therefore will be removed. Interestingly encroachment manifested on the individual and departmental levels and in people taking undue credit. Encroachment and organisational politics were closely linked. In

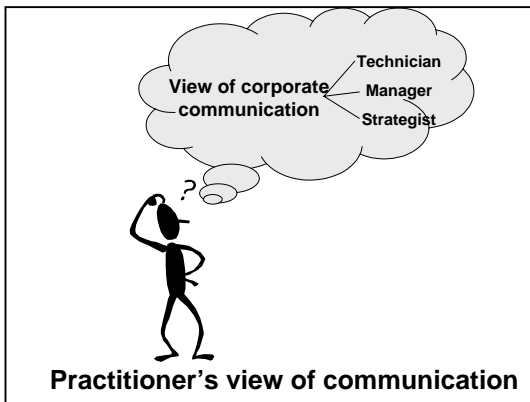
all the above cases the practitioner experienced any form of encroachment as negative.

- **Silent card 9: Organizational structure and culture**



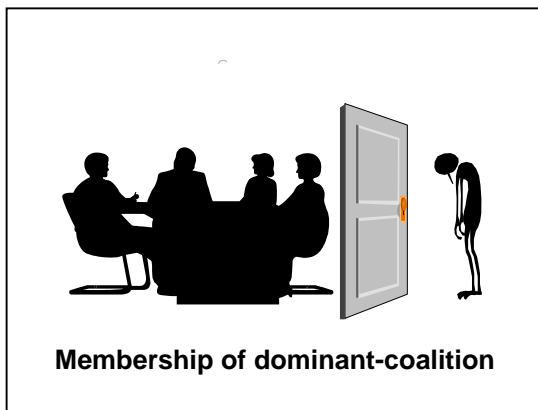
The current organisational structures were not seen as ideal for communication to prosper. The communication practitioner preferred to have an open line or even, through their managers, a dotted line to the CEO. It is clear that top management support for communication is crucial, as in the case of interviewees three and five.

- **Silent card 10: Practitioner's view of communication**



Practitioners benefitted when their superiors had a strategic view of communication. Both interviewees two and five expressed the need for standardised communication practice, as inconsistencies in the expectation of communication deliverables created difficulty. Interviewee four suggested that managers should be persuaded in favour of strategic communication in one-on-one situations.

- **Silent card 11: Membership of the dominant coalition**



Interviewees one, three and five stated that access to the dominant coalition helped practitioners gain more insight into business; gain business knowledge; get a chance to prove themselves; and gain credibility. Interviewee five added that, to advance one's career, it was important whom you knew and who took note of your career.

- **Silent card 12: Your career goals**



Interviewee one, three and five mentioned that being driven helped practitioners in advancing their careers. They, together with interviewee two and four indicated that their career goals have changed over time.

- **Silent card 13: Communication department support**



As stated by interviewee one, two, three, four and implicated by interviewee five, teamwork could assist the practitioner in performing their duties. However teamwork was not experienced in all the organisations. Interviewee two's comments gave the impression that support is closely linked to organisational structure.

- **Constraints not depicted in silent cards**

- *Politics*: Practitioners agreed that one should have knowledge of politics and actively develop relationships and networks. Interviewee four warned that participating in politics could result in the corporate communication department being viewed negatively.
- *Knowledge of overseas practices*: This could assist the practitioner in career advancement. However overseas practices have to be applied to the South African environment.
- *Age*: Although older employees were believed to have greater insight and experience, younger practitioners were being appointed to high-level positions.

- **Summary**

Opportunities were seen as important in advancing the corporate communication practitioner's career. Together with that practitioners need to realise that they don't need to have a degree in communication in order to be successful. The interviewees suggested that business knowledge, project management knowledge, relationship building, champions in the organisation and a clear definition of corporate communication could all help to advance their careers.

Practitioners should decide in which area to specialise and realise that their career goals would change. However most importantly interviewee four stated that practitioners should remember that "...there is life after..." their current job.



### 12.2.2. Themes per respondent

- **Interviewee one:**

The interviewee recognised that politics play an important role in the organisation and in practitioners' careers, and that it was important to have the opportunity to make a strategic contribution. She had many opportunities in her career, in which her mentor guided her to pursue them for career advancement, thereby minimising the effect of discrimination and the glass ceiling. The practitioner felt fortunate to work within an enlightened organisation / department where the Managing Director was positive towards strategic communication and colleagues supported each other. However the interviewee realised that top management continuously needed to be educated on strategic communication. She felt that education has helped in advancing her career as she could provide the same output as people with many years' experience.

- **Interviewee two:**

Although the CEO supported communication and allowed the interviewee access to Exco meetings, she was constrained in advancing her career by the structure and size limitation of the organisation / department, stereotyping and lack of support from the marketing department. She had to deal with time constraints in performing all three communication roles (technician, manager and strategist). As there was only one position for internal communication, role expansion would be the only growth option. She tried to overcome these constraints by proving herself through strategic input, gaining support from her mentor, as well as gaining information from Listserves.

- **Interviewee three:**

Overall this interviewee seemed to have advanced her career by spending over 33 years in the same organisation. She honed her skills over the years and did not rely on formal tertiary education. The interviewee used opportunities to get ahead – it is crucial to offer one's opinion on strategic issues and speaking one's mind. The interviewee argued that practitioners needed to understand their own value and not be dependent on others to acknowledge their worth. This view helped her to ignore encroachment and stereotyping, and to progress without a mentor. She manages a large communication department and dealt with issues such as communication breakdown. She stated that her overseas experience was very valuable to her.

- **Interviewee four:**

The interviewee developed her passion for strategy through tertiary education. It led her to strive for challenging positions where she could contribute strategically. Unfortunately she experienced a great deal of politics, territorial issues and gender discrimination, and found herself in the banking industry which she labelled as autocratic. Her manager did not provide her with the necessary support. She was not part of the decision-making, only consulted after decisions had already been made. One could argue that this was probably related to the fact that she was not part of the dominant coalition.

- **Interviewee five:**

This young and ambitious interviewee stated that her tertiary education helped her in her management position. Her career took off when she joined her current employer. The fact that she had a mentor and that the organisation's view of communication was strategic, enabled her to perform strategically, compete for resources and create career opportunities. She realised that she needed to prove herself and that it would lead to support of, and the ability to influence, the dominant coalition.

Interviewee five experienced the size of the communication department as less important than the support she received from the department. She experienced encroachment and politics, but overcame this by relationship building and networking. In order to focus her attention she divided her tasks between core and context. The fact that there is no standard for communication practice and that the communication definition in business is not clear, made her job even more difficult.

### **12.3. Empirical findings and conclusions compared to the literature investigation**

In summary the empirical findings are matched against the findings of the literature study.

#### **12.3.1. Personal constraints**

- **Demographic constraints**

Age does not seem to be constraint to practitioners, as five of them were younger than 40 years. However, there was the view that the organisation attached greater value to the insight and experience of older employees. Interviewee four mentioned that one could be seen as a youngster. In spite of this there seemed to be a trend that practitioners were appointed to high-level positions at a younger age than before. This was in line with interviewee one and five's statement that management in their organisation were younger than ever before. All of the interviewees stated that practitioners could prove the generalisation on age wrong.

- **Lacking a clear transition form one position to the next**

This constraint did not surface in the empirical study.

- **Lack of strategic knowledge and skills, management knowledge and skills, and appropriate / sufficient education**

Education seemed to assist practitioners in advancing their careers. In total, five of the respondents had a degree or post-graduate qualification. Interviewee one mentioned that it assisted her in delivering quality work on the same level as people with many years experience. Interviewee two argued that she was awarded the position due to her tertiary education. However, interviewee three did not rely on education to further her career. She spent 33 years in the same organisation and honed her skills over the years through experience and short courses.

Education does not seem to be a prerequisite to be a good practitioner, however it does help the practitioner in advancing their careers. Interviewee five mentioned that tertiary education only became applicable when the practitioner reached the middle to top management positions. Thus one could argue that education armed the practitioner with valuable knowledge, especially at the higher levels.

In addition to tertiary education, interviewees also focused on skills development and gaining experience. Interviewee one, two and five mentioned that business skills were especially important to the practitioner, as was knowledge of the politics at play in the organisation.

- **The practitioner does not view communication management as a strategic function**

Interviewees one, two and five argued that their strategic view of communication assisted them in advancing their careers. Interviewee three did not specifically view communication as strategic, however she did apply her motto of “do unto others” to her practice of corporate communication. Only interviewee four regarded it as a disadvantage to her career advancement. However, more than the practitioner’s view of strategic communication, the managerial and organisational view of strategic communication was sited as being important to the practitioner’s career advancement.

- **The practitioner downplays the communication profession**

None of the interviewees downplayed the communication profession.

- **The practitioner is not a member of a professional organisation**

Respondent five and eight were not members of a professional organisation, but still acted on the manager and strategist level.

- **The practitioner experiences tension between the creative and managerial role**

This constraint did not surface in the empirical study.

- **The practitioner's career goals**

Interviewees one, three and five mentioned that their career goals have assisted them in advancing their career. One could argue that their career goals merely reflected their ambitious and driven nature, which lead to career advancement. It is interesting to note that interviewee one, two, four and five indicated that their career goals have changed over time. Most of them only wanted to progress to senior management level and not to director level.

### **12.3.2. Organisational constraints**

- **Lack of support from the communication department**

Interviewees one, two, three and four mentioned the importance of teamwork in the advancement of their careers. Interviewee one stated that she was fortunate to work within an enlightened department where colleagues supported each other. Interviewee five experienced the size of the communication department as less important than the support she received from the department.

Support was not experienced in all the organisations. Both interviewees two and four lacked support from their departments and found that it limited their career opportunities. Interviewee one stated that an individually based reward system constrained teamwork. Interviewee two's comments gave the impression that support is closely linked to organisational structure.

- **Encroachment**

Some interviewees experienced encroachment. Those who did not argued that if a person did not perform in their position, they would be removed. Interviewee one viewed encroachment as more than just individual encroachment, she argued that encroachment could be experienced between departments. Interviewee four stated that encroachment could be applicable to situations where people take credit for tasks they have not completed. Organisational politics also seemed to play an important role in encroachment. In all the cases, practitioners experienced any form of encroachment as being negative.

- **Dominant coalition does not view corporate communication as strategic**

It seemed as if younger members of top management were more open to communication management than their older counterparts. Interviewee one felt fortunate to work within an enlightened organisation and department where her new, young Managing Director was positive towards strategic communication.

Although there was not a set organisation-wide perspective on communication, the view of top management had a big influence on a practitioners' ability to perform managerial and strategic functions since the organisation's view dictated the allocation of resources. Interviewee five stated that, due to the view of strategic communication held by the organisation, she was able to perform the strategic role, compete for resources and create career opportunities for herself. Interviewee one added that top management continuously needed to be educated on strategic communication. Interviewee four stated that a very negative organisational view of communication could make practitioners uncertain of their actions and views. Interviewee two added that even though one's manager and organisation may be positive toward strategic communication, organisational structure constraints still affects the practitioner.

- **Stereotyping and gender discrimination**

Gender discrimination and stereotyping seemed to play a role in the practitioner's career advancement, although the respondents did comment that the situation was improving. Seven of the eight respondents were females, which could point to the feminisation of the profession. However, the practitioners were of the opinion that the individual could select to limit discrimination and stereotyping, by having a sense of their own self worth, joining women's forums for support, gaining business knowledge and proving one's contribution to the organisation.

It is interesting to note that white interviewee two and African interviewee four both experienced the same situation, one labeled it as stereotyping and the other as gender discrimination. This could point to the practitioners' worldview determining their experience.

- **Lack of opportunity to show strategic communication contribution**

Interviewee one recognised the importance of the opportunity to make a strategic contribution. By proving their abilities, practitioners could minimise the effect of discrimination and the glass ceiling – this would lead to support of, and the ability to influence, the dominant coalition.

Before the practitioners could make strategic contributions, however there were constraints to overcome. Interviewee one had to be introduced to the dominant coalition by her mentor, before she would be allowed to make contributions. Interviewee two found that she had the opportunity to make strategic contributions but, due to the department size, she did not have the time to make the necessary contributions. Interviewee four found that she was only consulted after decisions had already been made and did not have the opportunity to make strategic contributions. This might be because she was not part of the dominant coalition.

In conclusion it seems as if there was room for practitioners to make a strategic contribution in organisations where the climate was conducive to strategic contributions. It was however clear that this privilege had to be earned.

- **Organisation culture, and organisation and communication department size**

Neither big, nor small corporate communication departments were seen as ideal. Large departments had problems such as communication breakdown and territorial issues, and small departments had capacity issues. However large departments offered the opportunity to specialise and small departments' multiskilling. The problems associated with small departments seemed harder to overcome than those of large departments.

One could argue that current organisational structures are not ideal for corporate communication practitioners to prosper. The latter preferred to have an open line or even, through their managers, a dotted line to the CEO, because it is clear that top management support for communication is crucial for career advancement. Interviewee five added that the size of the communication department was not as important as the support a practitioner received from the department.

- **Lack of mentors**

Mentorship seemed very important for career advancement. Interviewee five argued that the corporate communication function was slightly isolated, and therefore needed mentor support. A mentor could assist the practitioner in dealing with organisational politics, capitalizing on career opportunities and minimising the effect of discrimination and the glass ceiling. Most interviewees mentioned that they had business mentors, but not communication mentors. They tried to fill this gap with other means such as education and Listserves. This might be because there are not many communication practitioners in high-level positions.

Interviewee three argued that practitioners needed to understand their own value and not be dependent on others to acknowledge their worth. This view helped her to progress without a

mentor. One could reason that her view could be related to the long time she had spent in the organisation.

- **Lack of participation in management decision making**

In conclusion it seems that practitioners are involved in decision-making on the operating level in the organisation. Interviewees argued that they had a valid contribution to make due to the stakeholder information they hold, and could influence decisions on a higher level through their managers. Interviewee three added that practitioners had to offer their opinions on strategic issues and speak their minds in order to create opportunities. The banking industry was however seen to be autocratic. Interviewee four found that she was only informed of decisions after they had been made.

- **Limiting organisational environmental influences**

This constraint did not surface in the empirical study.

### **12.3.3. Communication profession constraints**

- **Vague view of the communication function**

Both interviewees two and five argued the case for standardised communication practice. Inconsistencies in the expectation of communication deliverables create difficulty in the enactment of the technician, managerial and strategist roles.

- **Communication as part of the marketing function**

Only interviewee three mentioned that she reported into the marketing function. She argued that the lack of support on internal communication issues, was a bigger constraint in advancing her career, than reporting into marketing.

- **Lack of professional recognition**

This constraint did not surface in the empirical study.

### **12.3.4. New constraints, not identified in the literature investigation**

- **Organisational politics**

The interviewees agreed that practitioners should have knowledge of organisational politics. Interviewee one, three and five mentioned that their mentors assisted them in handling

politics. Interviewee four warned that participating in politics could result in the corporate communication department being viewed negatively.

- **Lack of time spent in the organisation**

Interviewee three seemed to advance her career by spending over 33 years in the same organisation. Without having obtained further qualifications, the length of time spent in the organisation seems to be crucial for her career advancement.

- **Lack of networking and relationship building**

Interviewee five mentioned that relationship building and networking could assist the practitioner in overcoming encroachment and politics.

- **Lack of knowledge of overseas practice**

Interviewee one, three and four argued that knowledge of overseas practice could assist the practitioner in advancing their careers. Interviewee one had contact with international banks in order to learn more about best practices. Interviewee three argued that it helped her in expanding her view of the world and understanding it better. Interviewee three discovered that contact with international societies helped you to realise that their communication needs were slightly different from the South African needs.

In conclusion, having knowledge of overseas corporate communication practice could assist practitioners in career advancement. However, interviewee five argued that it could be defined as a mere trend and that it had to be applied especially to the South African environment.

- **Lack of dividing communication work into core and context**

In order to focus her attention and allocate her time to the important tasks, interviewee five divided her tasks between core and context. Core tasks were those she could give strategic input to and context were tasks she could merely influence.

- **Lack of standardisation of corporate communication practitioner deliverables**

This constraint is closely linked with the vague view of communication and the lack of professional recognition for the function. Interviewee five argued that there was no standard for communication practice deliverables and this led to inconsistencies within the business. It



was also difficult to manage expectations since the expectations of the communication department were so varied.

### **13. FUTURE RESEARCH**

This study could be followed by a quantitative study, which could determine the extent of the perception of career constraints of corporate communication practitioners in the whole South African banking industry. A study like this should include all banking institutions and a representable sample of practitioners, which should include males and females, and practitioners from all races. The occurrence of constraints as identified in the literature and the existence of the newly identified constraints in the South African working environment, could be identified.

Future research could expand the study further than the banking industry and determine career constraints perceived by all South African corporate communication practitioners. The trends as perceived by the South African practitioners could then be compared to that of practitioners from other countries.

Further qualitative research could focus on the commonalities between perceived career constraints of corporate communication practitioners and individuals in other professions. This could then be followed by quantitative research on the similarities of career constraints between various professions. Through this study the influence of the profession's constraints and the age of the profession on career constraints, could be determined.

Ideally all research on corporate communication practitioner career constraints, should be made available to guide practitioners through their careers.

### **14. LIMITATIONS**

Due to the nature of this phenomenological exploratory study various limitations were experienced.

Three of the interviews that were taped were not usable due to background noise and the quality of the recording. This eliminated the male communication practitioner's interview from inclusion in the interview findings. The fact that only one African was involved in the study and no Coloureds or Asians could also skew the results.

The research was limited to the South African banking industry – results are therefore industry and organisation specific. A quantitative study could provide generalisable results countrywide.

The silent card method was slightly adjusted to suit the needs of the study. According to research methodology theory, the pictures alone should depict the concept the interviewee should respond to. However, due to the fact that the concepts in this study were very abstract, the researcher included a short word description of the picture. This could be seen as leading the interviewee to some extent.

It would have been advisable for the researcher to introduce the interview by asking an open question on the constraints experienced, since that could have led to more 'unprompted' constraints having surfaced. By first having shown the silent cards and then asking the open question, it could be considered that the interviewees were led. The interviewer could also have been more silent during the interviews.

## **15. CONCLUSION**

This study pointed to the fact that there are various individual, organisational and professional career constraints that practitioners experience in trying to advance their careers. Over and above the constraints noted in the literature investigation the study identified a few more constraints such as organisational politics, the times spent in the organisation, the practitioner's lack of networking and relationship building skills, lack of knowledge of overseas corporate communication practice and the lack of standardisation of communication practitioner deliverables.

Practitioners, however, suggested means of overcoming these constraints through acquiring a mentor, becoming a member of the dominant coalition and building relationship management skills. The study also showed that phenomenology, as a research strategy, widely used in the psychological field, is valuable for corporate communication research.

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