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Dimensions of Public Relations Activity:
An Exploratory Study

by

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this thesis is the emerging academic area of public relations (PR) (Hazleton and Botan, 1989: 13), which remains theoretically undeveloped and lacks empirical substantiation (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999). The phenomenon of PR activity -- incorporating all the people, institutions and activities that determine, constitute or result from PR work-- has exercised a growing influence upon society in general and the business world in particular (Cutlip, 1994; Ewen, 1996).

The thesis seeks to contribute to the examination of a poorly researched phenomenon through a holistic approach by emphasising the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts. Given the limited understanding of public relations, it was assumed that a more substantial contribution could be achieved through a general preliminary understanding of the complex phenomenon, rather than by focusing on separate parts without the knowledge of which parts are the most important. Following a review of the relevant literature, a preliminary study was conducted through 15 exploratory interviews, and this led to the identification of core characteristics associated with PR activity. These informed the construction of the research instrument for the main survey, which explored three units of analysis: PR practitioner, PR consultancy and PR industry. The holistic approach was achieved by using three units of analysis, instead of one, thereby facilitating the study of the phenomenon from a variety of angles. The population under study consisted of PR practitioners managing external consultancies in England.

A total of 297 valid questionnaires (representing a 29.7% response rate) were analysed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in order to examine the component structure of the data. Nine scales of measurement were tested through confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), with maximum likelihood estimation using LISREL 8.3 (Joreskog *et al.*, 1999). The final constructs revealed composite reliability and convergent and nomological validity, which verified unidimensionality (Bollen, 1989). Eleven significant correlations among the nine latent constructs were found and analysed. Finally, 16 follow-up interviews were undertaken in order to assess the external validity of the new constructs and to help interpret their correlations.

The main academic contributions of the research are: the identification of dimensions of PR activity, the operationalisation of its constituent elements, and the preliminary understanding of their co-existence. Three dimensions of PR activity are identified: practitioner, consultancy and industry forces. A PR *practitioner* is someone who practises the occupation of public relations. A PR *consultancy* is a company that gives expert advice on the particular subject of PR in exchange for payment. The PR *industry* consists of all the people and activities involved in providing the particular service of PR, and its *forces* consist of all the structural elements of the PR industry that affect those people and activities. Nine constructs relating to the three dimensions are identified. At the practitioner dimension, the constructs are managerial PR and permanence in job. At the consultancy dimension, the constructs are strategic needs from clients, and size. At the industry forces dimension, the constructs are industry standard, trade body contribution, quality of PR graduates, importance of

qualifications, and competition. Researchers are encouraged to incorporate this study's new valid and reliable measures, the new empirically-based findings, and research directions in the future investigation of PR. Further refinement of both conceptual and measurement issues is suggested. The findings have important implications for both PR theory and practice (consultants, professional associations, academics and the industry as a whole). Additional guidelines are provided to stimulate future discussion and reveal potentially fruitful streams of research in the field.

The study contributes to practice by identifying some of the main contemporaneous challenges: for the PR industry forces, the evolution towards a semi-professionalising occupation; for the PR consultancy, the satisfaction of client corporations' strategic needs; for the individual practitioner, the acquisition of new skills motivated by an ongoing evolution of PR from a tactical function to a strategic function. It is suggested that this natural transition period can be quickened in proportion to the ability of individual practitioners to unite and act as a unified community in order to achieve advances in public relations.

Keywords: Exploratory study, public relations, practitioner, consultancy, industry, England, corporate PR, marketing PR measurement scales, CFA.

DECLARATION

This is to declare that:

- I am responsible for the work submitted in this thesis.
- This work has been written by me.
- All verbatim extracts have been distinguished and the sources specifically acknowledged.
- During the preparation of this thesis a number of papers were prepared as listed below. The remaining parts of the thesis are unpublished.

1. Lages, C. & Simkin, L. *(forthcoming).* The Dynamics of Public Relations: Key constructs on a three-dimensional scheme: practitioner, consultancy and industry levels. European Journal of Marketing.

2. Lages, C. & Simkin, L. (2001). Rethinking the Measurement of Public Relations Dimensions. CD-ROM Proceedings of the 30th European Marketing Academy (EMAC) Conference, Bergen, May 8-10.

3. Lages, C. & Simkin, L. (2000). The Dynamics of Public Relations: Empirical Evidence from British Public Relations Consultants. Proceedings of the 5th International Conference on Corporate and Marketing Communications, Rotterdam, May 22-23, 153-175.

4. Lages, C. & Simkin, L. (1998). Public Relations in Communications Executions: an Evolutionary Comparison Between Britain and Portugal. Proceedings of the Academy of Marketing, Sheffield, July 8-10, 622-623.

- This work has not previously been submitted within a degree programme at this or any other institution.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The subject of this thesis is the emerging academic area of public relations (PR). The development of theory explaining the PR phenomenon requires empirical evidence (Morton and Lin, 1995), but so far there has been a conspicuous lack of empirical research. This study seeks to identify empirically the core attributes of public relations activity. By public relations activity is meant all the people, institutions and activities that determine, constitute or result from PR. This agenda is addressed here through a holistic and exploratory study of PR practitioners working in PR consultancies in the British PR industry.

The objectives of this research are exploratory: to provide a preliminary understanding of the public relations activity and to develop measurement scales for further research on the phenomenon. The first objective is pursued through an holistic approach to identify empirically the constituent elements of PR activity; and the second objective is pursued through the operationalisation of those elements.

Data collection involved the following stages: preliminary interviews, a mail survey and follow-up interviews. Following the literature review, a preliminary study was conducted through 15 in-depth exploratory interviews. Respondents discussed issues previously identified by the literature and identified new issues relevant to PR activity. The topics and variables were associated with PR activity at three levels -- practitioner, consultancy and industry forces -- and were used to construct the research instrument for the main survey.

After data collection, 297 valid questionnaires (equivalent to a 29.7% response rate) were analysed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) in order to examine the

component structure of the data. EFA was followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) in order to test nine refined scales referring to the three dimensions of PR activity: practitioner, consultancy and industry forces. The 11 significant correlations among these constructs were analysed. Finally, 16 follow-up interviews were undertaken in order to assess the external validity of the new measurement constructs and to help interpret their correlations. The research findings have important implications for both PR theory and practice (consultants, professional associations and the industry as a whole), and suggest several potentially fruitful streams of research.

I.1 Motivation for the study

Unless there is agreement on what PR activity involves and how to measure it, research into PR will result only in marginal contributions. The empirical identification of the core attributes of PR activity and the development of measurement scales relating to it grounds the developing understanding of what public relations is.

I.1.1 The growing importance of PR activity

The upsurge of PR activity was due to environmental pressures on organisations to act and to be seen to act more responsibly (Moore and Kalupa, 1985; Kitchen, 1993). The fragmentation of audiences and the media in an information-saturated world and the advent of new communication technologies pressured organisations to look for alternatives to traditional communication tools. The environmental pressures required a move from management towards stakeholders (Dibb *et al.*, 1996) and towards recognising the importance of managing 'relationships' with a wider variety of people.

Beyond the groups of people involved in the commercial interaction with the organisation traditionally managed by marketing (particularly consumers, suppliers and distributors), other publics such as environmental groups, legislators, local communities and employees became increasingly important. Managers became increasingly aware that PR has a much broader base and is significantly cheaper than advertising (Fill, 1995). In conjunction with the environmental factors, this change in

the perceived "cost saving" value of public relations in relation to advertising, rather than a full understanding of its potential, explain its high demand.

Today PR remains a versatile tool used by just about every type of organisation, whether it be a commercial organisation, a charity, a political party or an activist group. It is concerned with the strategic management of information to the building of a favourable reputation, and with the strategic management of communication in order to build a constructive relationship. It usually works through the mass media, and that is why media relations, either in-house or in consultancies, represent the biggest part of the PR occupation. PR practitioners play an important social role by shaping messages and affecting perceptions of the world (Heath, 1992; Mickey, 1997). However, the impact of public relations activity has not yet been fully researched and understood (Holzhausen, 2000). The evolution of the business world and the pressures of its complex environment are promoting the increasing use of PR. A better understanding of what PR stands for is thus of importance for society in general and the business world in particular.

I.1.2 The present knowledge gap about PR

Little is currently known about the PR phenomenon at the theoretical and practical levels. At the theoretical level, PR is developing as an independent area of study and is considered by its scholars as an 'emerging' social science discipline (Hazleton and Botan, 1989: 13). At this early academic stage its literature still lacks a paradigmatic and topic diversity (Pasadeos *et al..*, 1999; Morton and Lin, 1995). The central problem in the gradually developing body of knowledge is the lack of consensus as to what constitutes PR (Botan 1993; Hallahan, 1993), a lack which stems from PR's constant adaptation to society's evolutionary change and from the diversity of PR practice itself (Harlow, 1976: 1977).

The lack of consensus as to what constitutes the core meaning of PR and the lack of a systematic reasoning of its processes are damaging PR's theoretical and practical development. At the practical level there is no shared performance procedure. The PR

occupation is subjectively understood and practised by each practitioner in a particular way. The lack of clarity about PR has an impact on organisations, either as clients (in the case of external PR consultancies) or as employees (in the case of in-house PR).

I.1.3 Problems associated with PR activity

Ever since it first emerged, PR has suffered from a relatively poor image due to both its propagandist origins and its often amateurish practice. Ironically, the industry has been remarkably inactive in implementing PR for itself, and generally people mistrust PR. Ideally, PR messages should be created to support a dialogue that promotes mutually beneficial change. However, there are situations when messages are created with a clear disregard for reality or 'truth'. The public disclosure of *mal*practice, as opposed to *good* practice, has led citizens and news media to mistrust some aspects of PR and to regard PR as synonymous with 'spinning' the truth through image manipulation, rather than substantial change. On the whole, PR remains a largely invisible activity which fuels mistrust because of its unclear nature, and promotes a widespread speculation about its power.

I.1.4 The need for operationalisation

There is a need to identify new variables and new measurement constructs in order to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon of PR and motivate further research. There is a need not for more definitions but for empirical studies that can identify, conceptualise and operationalise the constituent elements of PR. Theory creation grounded in the phenomenon under investigation through an exploratory study is intended to provide the empirical evidence that can enhance our understanding of the dynamics of contemporary PR activity.

I.2 The scope of the research

This is an exploratory research project in an academic area with little previous theoretical work and insufficient empirical substantiation. The aim is to gather empirical evidence about the constituent elements and the determinant forces of PR activity, and to understand the contextual circumstances that explain why PR came to be as it is. The research also seeks to operationalise those constituent elements and

determinants of PR activity so that future research can replicate the study in other settings in order to deepen our understanding of the general attributes of PR. PR activity is studied at three levels of analysis – practitioner, consultancy and industry -- because these emerged from both the preliminary study and the literature review as groups of key issues relevant to the study of the PR activity, all the people, the institutions and the activities that determine, constitute or result from PR.

Although generalisation of this study is limited to the specific population under study, directors of PR firms in England, it is expected that the general attributes of PR activity, such as managerial PR and strategic needs from clients, have been identified; and it is hoped that these will aid future research and further our understanding of PR.

1.2.1 PR consultants in the British PR industry

The PR industry consists of practitioners working in-house and practitioners working in PR consultancies. The present study focuses on external PR consultants. Consultants are the invisible men and women behind many organisations' PR practices. Firms in PR services offer one or more resources that clients cannot provide themselves or that clients cannot provide in a cost-effective way (Varey, 1997). Usually these resources are: expertise, in the form of knowledge, experience, specialised skills, or creativity; or time or personnel that the client cannot spare.

The British PR industry is particularly interesting to study because it is experiencing a phenomenal growth (Great Britain Department of Trade and Industry, 1995). In its modern form, PR originated in the United States (Cutlip, 1995). After the US, the UK has the world's largest PR industry. UK PR firms providing external advice to corporations have recently enjoyed a 20% annual growth (Black, 1991; PRCA, 2001). In the UK, PR has its roots in the Government information and propaganda machine during World War I. It was also used extensively in World War II (L'Etang, 1998). From the mid-1940s UK businesses took a serious interest in PR as a commercial communication tool (Bowman and Ellis, 1969), and thereafter its use increased rapidly (Arber, 1986).

External PR firms quickly developed in the UK, many of them lacking skilled staff of sufficient PR expertise, but nevertheless benefiting from the increasing demand for PR services which led to an incredible 'boom' of the occupation, particularly in the 1980s (Black, 1991). Knowledge was not consolidated; PR activity was largely experience-based; and thus there was a considerable variation in the way in which PR was commonly perceived and practiced (Arber, 1986). This variety can still be observed today (Moss *et al.*, 1997). The hasty expansion of PR firms while its knowledge base was not consolidated contributed to the poor reputation of PR among journalists, businessmen, politicians and the general public.

In the past 20 years, however, many PR agencies have built strong portfolios of successful and beneficial practice. Nevertheless, in general the poor perception persists today (Moloney, 1996; MacManus, 1997). The fact that many mechanisms of professionalisation (Blau and Scott, 1962; Hughes, 1958; Farrugia, 1996) are not in place seems to contribute to this poor reputation. There are no barriers to new entrants; no certification is necessary; and large capital investment is rarely required. Many PR firms specialise in various areas of expertise, such as consumer PR, corporate PR, marketing PR, financial PR, media relations and many others.

I.2.2 Three units of analysis

The study adopts an holistic approach by emphasising the importance of the whole and the interdependence of its parts. Given the limited understanding of public relations, it was assumed that a more substantial contribution could be achieved through a general preliminary understanding of the complex phenomenon, rather than by focusing on separate parts without the knowledge of which parts are the most important. The holistic approach was achieved by using three units of analysis, instead of one, thereby facilitating the study of the phenomenon from a variety of angles. They emerged from the literature review and preliminary study as determinant parts of the whole under analysis: public relations practitioner, public relations consultancy, and public relations industry.

A PR *practitioner* is someone who practises the occupation of public relations. A PR *consultancy* is a company that gives expert advice on the particular subject of PR in exchange for payment. The PR *industry* consists of all the people and activities involved in providing the particular service of PR, and its *forces* consist of all the structural elements of the PR industry that affect those people and activities. The use of these three units of analysis allows the examination of the phenomenon of PR from a variety of angles and assists in the development of a number of new, inter-related themes.

I.3 The research problem

There is a dearth of research on the public relations activity phenomena -- embracing all the people, institutions and activities that determine, constitute or result from PR, and therefore an insufficient understanding of what are the significant parts of the whole and how they interact with each other.

I.3.1 Research objectives

Considering that research into the phenomenon of PR is at an early stage, that there is a lack of established and tested theories, and that there is insufficient empirical evidence, the present study is exploratory. The overall objective is:

- To identify key dimensions of PR activity. By dimensions is meant the component parts of whole phenomenon.

This general objective incorporates two more specific objectives:

- To operationalise the constituent elements of the identified dimensions in order to propose new measurement scales that open fruitful avenues for further research.
- To understand the co-existence of elements in each dimension and among dimensions in order to build new theoretical understanding of the phenomenon.

The study contributes a new research instrument with new measurement scales that seek to stimulate theoretical development, open avenues for further research, and support further studies at the measurement and causality levels.

I.3.2 Research questions

Two general research questions are used as a guide for the research. The first of these general research questions has three components: How do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England (a) perceive what PR is, (b) practise PR, and (c) perceive the key elements of contemporary PR activity? The second general research question is: How do the identified elements of PR activity co-exist?

Given the limited empirical knowledge about what public relations stands for, the research was set to be grounded on PR activity (defined in general terms as all the people, institutions and activities that determine, constitute or result from PR) by probing the attitudes and behaviour of its key actors, the PR practitioners. The first of the general research questions is focused on what constitutes PR. The second question seeks to understand how, in the perspective of the PR practitioners, the elements identified as constituting PR interact.

Together, the two questions seek to guide the exploratory research towards the identification and operationalisation of the constituent elements of PR and to provide a preliminary understanding of their co-existence.

I.3.3 The research design

The research design is based on the exploratory aims of the research. In order to understand the PR phenomenon, the research draws on a review of the literature, on primary data collected from exploratory interviews, the main survey and follow-up interviews.

Preliminary interviews were conducted to identify key issues and major themes; a questionnaire survey (Appendix 1) was derived from the preliminary interviews and the literature review; follow-up interviews were undertaken for data validation and further insights into the findings.

I.4 The theoretical and managerial contribution of this research

This exploratory research contributes to the knowledge of Public Relations in two different domains: academic and managerial. In broad terms, the study suggests that PR is going through a period of transition from a technical to a strategic discipline/concept; and from an occupation towards a semi-professionalising activity (that classifies an occupation according to more flexible criteria, more adequate to recent occupations such as consultancy (Farrugia, 1996; Lawendhal, 2000)).

In more specific terms, in the academic domain, the study contributes at the (1) theoretical, (2) measurement and (3) methodological levels.

(1) At the theoretical level:

By answering the research question "How do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England perceive which elements are part of contemporary public relations activity?", and "How do the identified elements (latent constructs) of the PR activity co-exist?" the study:

- Empirically identified three dimensions of PR activity: practitioner, consultancy and industry forces (Figure V-1). The PR practitioner is a person practising activities that constitute the PR occupation. The PR consultancy is a firm that sells expert advice about PR activity. PR industry forces consist of all the structural elements that affect the people and activities involved in providing the PR service. This study identified and operationalised nine constructs related with these three dimensions (see Figure VIII-1). The study allowed a preliminary understanding of the co-existence among the nine latent constructs. These were correlated (Table VII-6), and follow-up interviews provided further valuable insights about the perceived meaning of each significant correlation (Chapter VIII - Discussion). These provide valuable paths for further research, particularly causal studies.

By answering the research questions "How do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England perceive what is PR?", and "How do PR

practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England practice PR?", the study:

- Suggests that PR is in a transition from being mostly tactical to becoming more strategic, and probably a more managerial tool.

  Empirical evidence suggests that PR is widely used at the tactical level, with the most widespread practice being technical media relations, and that PR is also widely used as a marketing communications tool, mainly because marketing provides the framework practitioners cannot find in PR, according to interviewees. Nevertheless, PR practitioners are reported to increasingly value and develop the strategic side of PR. The construct managerial PR – frequency of setting strategic goals, frequency of setting quantifiable objectives and frequency of deciding on communications policy – was perceived to provide more effectiveness, more respectability (including access to the client's board) and more income.
- Reports that PR was seen by interviewees (both during the exploratory study and follow-up interviews) as a component of communication, marketing and/or management. Communication was seen as being intrinsic to PR, while marketing and management were seen as two different ways of applying that specific form of communication. Further research is also needed to shed light on whether corporate PR and marketing PR in fact represent different concepts and practices, and on the extent to which they are tactical or strategic in focus. This has major implications at the conceptual level, and should be further explored in future studies. This thesis argues that PR should always be strategic (even when not developed at the managerial level) as technical implementation without a strategic aim is bound to be effective by chance.
- Identifies different degrees of complexity in developing PR, which should be taken into account by further empirical work. When considering PR objectives, they can aim at building a favourable reputation, building mutual understanding, and advising accommodative behaviour/action. When considering PR means, it can deal with attention, perception and relationships. Each facet implies very different degrees of complexity and very different processes to develop. Future research could incorporate and further conceptualise this identified variety of issues, as they might further the understanding of PR processes and assist the

building of a universal PR-specific framework.

(2) At the measurement level

- The study identified nine valid and reliable constructs that relate to the three identified dimensions of PR activity (see Figure VIII-1), which were checked for validity and reliability by CFA (Table VII-4 and Table VII-5). It also contributes a new research instrument (Appendix 1) with new measurement scales. Future studies may refine the constructs and use them for further operationalisation, and may focus on causality in order to understand relationships between the constructs.

(3) At the methodological level

- This study has also demonstrated a procedure for scale development using Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using SPSS, followed by Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) using LISREL. This procedure can help further research in developing more reliable scales and provide guidance when assessing the validity of results. It is suggested that future studies, building on these initial measures, and using EFA or CFA could show if the factor structure is equivalent with other samples in other countries.
- The study contributes with a new population/sample (PR consultants) and with three units of analysis. The sample consists of English PR consultants, a population that has never been the sole focus of previous studies, that tended to be US based. Three units of analysis are explored in the main survey: PR practitioner, PR consultancy and PR industry, which allowed for a variety of themes relevant to the contemporary nature of the PR industry to be addressed.

In the managerial domain, the study contributes mainly to (1) individual PR practitioners (both in-house and external consultants), to (2) PR consultancies, to (3) PR professional associations and the PR industry as a whole.

(1) The main implication for individual practitioners is the need for acquisition of new

skills as PR evolves from tactical to strategic, which demands more complex skills than tactical implementation.

(2) The main implication for PR consultancies is the satisfaction of strategic needs from clients. Clients are perceived not to be aware of the potential of PR at the management level, so consultancies (particularly small) should be proactive in proposing strategic solutions to clients' problems and educating clients about the role of PR beyond technical media relations.

(3) The main disclosed challenge for PR professional associations is the insufficient membership which brings lack of resources and of legitimacy to enforce change. The perceived limited benefits from membership and insufficient contribution from the trade body by most respondents, are suggested as issues to be solved in the near future. In the long term, professional associations could help build a strong sense of community among PR practitioners.

Overall, the main disclosed challenge for the PR industry is concerned with its standard. Practitioners are aware of the transition towards professionalism, but they are probably not aware that this is possible not as a traditional professional like medicine, but as a semi-professionalising activity (Lawendahl, 2000) that classifies an occupation according to rigorous but more flexible criteria to access professionalism. The improvement of industry standard is one of the most pressing issues. The constructs that correlated with industry standard – importance of qualifications, quality of PR graduates and trade body contribution – are perceived as somewhat poor by practitioners. The process towards higher standards can be quickened through a collective effort, namely through professional associations. It also implies a fundamental change in practitioners' attitudes towards vehicles of knowledge transfer, from favouring intuition, experience and trial-and-error, towards valuing qualifications in PR, both professional and academic, and in-house training.

I.5 The structure of the thesis

The thesis is divided into six chapters, the first of which is the introduction. This is followed by the literature review (Chapter 2), a discussion of the research methodology (Chapter 3), the analysis of the data (Chapter 4), the discussion of the findings (Chapter 5), and the conclusion (Chapter 6).

The first chapter, **Introduction**, introduces the core research problem and the background and outline of the thesis. Chapter 2, **Literature Review**, reviews the theoretical and methodological dimensions of the literature in order to identify research gaps which need to be filled. Chapter 3, **Methodology**, describes the methods used to collect data in order to answer the key research questions. Chapter 4, **Data Analysis**, presents the patterns of research findings and analyses them. Chapter 5, **Discussion**, considers the theoretical implications of the findings within the context of the present and previous research. The final chapter, **Conclusion**, summarises the research, discusses the major limitations of the thesis, and highlights the theoretical and practical implications of the research. Finally, fruitful directions for further research are suggested.

II. OVERVIEW OF AN EMERGING DISCIPLINE

II.1 Introduction

Following the introductory chapter, the next two chapters (II and III) present two parts of the literature review. The present chapter (II) aims to provide an overview of the emerging discipline of public relations, and the next chapter (Chapter III) presents an overview of public relations in England, where primary research data were gathered.

This chapter will start by reviewing the current conceptualisations of public relations and the origins of existing empirical research. It will then introduce the main influences from parent disciplines and from interdisciplinary scholarship. Finally, it will present a summary of the still developing paradigms and theories of public relations.

Until recently, public relations knowledge was mostly derived from its practitioners' accumulated experiences and intuition, but since the mid-1970s scholars have been increasingly interested in studying PR. As an interdisciplinary area, the building of PR theory has been developed from various academic perspectives -- from social science disciplines such as psychology and sociology to theories of communication and management. Drawing on the more established areas, public relations is making an effort to create its own distinctive body of knowledge.

The practice of public relations has grown persistently in response to external demands from organisations and individuals. Inevitably, these demands have expressed a wide range of ideas about what public relations is and how it can serve

organisational and individual needs. Accordingly, the practice of public relations has evolved in many different directions with the result that it not easy to provide a single, homogeneous concept of public relations. There are a growing number of PR practitioners but it is not always clear what they are doing. Public relations does have a major impact across the whole of society, from the private corporate sector to government and public services. It is used by corporate organisations, political leaders and all kinds of activist groups to get their messages across. Moreover, the impact of public relations on society as a whole, which has often been seen in a somewhat negative light, has only recently become the subject of serious investigation. What needs to be clarified, first of all, is the core meaning of the term 'public relations'

II.2 The conceptualisation of public relations

Academics are moving towards a conceptualisation of public relations as a management, and not only a technical, discipline, (e.g. Broom and Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1982; Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984; Grunig, J., 1992a; Cutlip *et al.*, 1994). James Grunig was especially important as an academic contributing to PR's theorisation quest. He was the editor of *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* (Grunig, J. 1992) in which it was recognised by Sriramesh and White (1992: 598) that a strong academic basis was still under construction:

> "public relations theorising had been virtually non-existent until over a decade ago because it has been, and continues to be, regarded as a profession where technicians do the same image-building chores."

II.2.1 The designation "public relations" and the concept of "publics"

The first use of the designation "public relations" close to its contemporary meaning seems to have been by Edward Bernays, who is considered to be one of the fathers of modern public relations, when, together with his wife, Doris Fleishman, he chose to put it on a sign on the door of their business (Bernays, 1965: 287-295). Bernays (1965: 776) used the term to represent the ideas of public interest and public responsibility as used by two previous authors: Dorman Eaton, who wrote *The Public*

Relations and Duties of the Legal Profession in 1882, and Hough Smith, who wrote *The Theory and Regulation of Public Sentiment* in 1842.

Later, Bernays (1986: 35) wrote:

> "Public relations means exactly what it says, relations of an organization, individual, idea, whatever, with the publics on which it depends for its existence".

Many authors joined Bernays in linking the expression "public relations" with relations with publics. Jeffkins (1977: 3), for example, stated:

> "Public relations is a constantly misunderstood expression. A simple explanation is offered by reversing the words to say 'relations with the public.'"

In the view of Cole (1981: 4):

> "It is not 'public relations,' but 'publics relations'".

According to White (1991: ix):

> "Public relations is, quite literally, about the relationship between organization and various 'publics'".

Cheney and Dionispoulus (1989) entitled their article: "Public Relations? No, Relations with Publics."

Dewey (1927) defined a public as a group of people who (1) face a problem, (2) recognise its existence, and (2) organise to solve it. Dewey's (1927) definition was further developed by Grunig, J. (1995), who defined a public as a group of people who (1) face a problem, (2) are divided on its solution and (3) discuss it. For Dozier and Ehling (1992: 170):

> "Organizations create publics when organizational actions have consequences for other organizations or groupings of people."

Thus, publics are groups of people who are affected by an organisation. Dozier and Grunig, L. (1992: 399) proposed that the identification of publics is the strategic decision of a public relations manager. A public can be, among many other possibilities, the local community, legislators, employees, the media or activist groups.

II.2.2 Defining Public Relations

In the mid-1970s Harlow (1976, 1977) identified more than 400 written definitions of public relations since 1900. The continuing confusion can be attributed to the quick and unsystematic development of public relations as an occupation. The author's review exposes how "inextricably" the development of a definition of public relations has been linked to the quick evolution of society (Harlow, 1977: 49).

According to Hutton (1999: 200), PR has evolved historically from an attitude of "the public be damned" to "the public be manipulated" to "the public be informed" to "the public be involved and accommodated". Public relations was initially equated with publicity and propaganda by Ivy Lee, a practitioner who is usually considered to be the father of North American public relations. In 1955 Edward Bernays' book *The Engineering of Consent* provided one of the most memorable and influential definitions of PR as the manipulation of audiences for the self-interest of sponsors. But by the 1950s definitions reflected increasing concern with the social responsibility of organisations (Harlow, 1977). The author concluded that PR practitioners found it difficult to agree on the nature and scope of their work.

> "What is public relations? What do those who practice it do? ... [T]he answers to these questions have been so diverse and conflicting, so affected by the opposing demands of theory and practice, so uncertain and inadequate, that hardly any two of them have been alike or even similar." (Harlow, 1976: 34)

Marston (1963: 4) also provided a revealing description of the PR world as

> "a brotherhood of some 100,000 whose common bond is its profession and whose common woe is that no two of them can ever quite agree on what that profession is."

Table II-1 presents a selection of definitions of public relations from several well-known and influential texts, including some of the most recent works. This list demonstrates the diversity of views by PR practitioners and academics.

In assessing the worth of different definitions of PR, it must be remembered that most were created by the most prominent practitioners and academics (e.g. Bernays, 1955;

Harlow, 1976; Cutlip, Centre and Broom, 1994; Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984). It is impossible to know whether at any particular time the vast majority of practitioners endorsed a certain definition. The most common problem with practitioners' definitions of public relations in the literature is that they tend to describe the tasks in which they are involved rather than clarifying the fundamental meaning of public relations (Hutton, 1999). On the other hand, definitions by scholars tend to be extremely normative and prescriptive, raising questions about the 'reality' of PR. For example, the role of persuasion is typically omitted from the conceptualisation of public relations, and most academic definitions fail to identify the core concept of PR.

Gordon (1997) concluded that the most common components of definitions of PR were 'management', 'organisation' and 'publics'. However, this list is clearly not exhaustive, and other elements deserve consideration. For example, should PR be seen as exclusively managerial, or does it include practices that encompass primarily technical activities such as media placements? Is PR exclusively organisational, or can it also be practised on behalf of individuals? Does PR deal with perceptions or reality? Does it deal with 'image' (let it be known as) or 'substance' (do it well and let it be known)? Are its intended effects at the awareness level, attitude level and/or behavioural level? Should it always address the truth, or is the omission of facts ethically acceptable in certain circumstances? Is PR reactive or proactive? Is it mainly a matter of persuasion, and if so, does that make it unethical?

Table II-1: Definitions/characteristics of public relations

Source	Definitions/characteristics of public relations
Edward Bernays (1955: 6) The author of the first public relations book, *Crystallising Public Opinion*, in 1923.	"PR is the attempt, **by information, persuasion and adjustment**, to engineer public support for an activity, cause, movement or institution."
Harlow (1976: 36), who reviewed 472 definitions of PR and talked to 65 practitioners.	"Public Relations is a distinctive **management function** which helps establish and maintain **mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation** between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems and issues; helps management keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serves as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound ethical communication techniques as its principal tools."
The First World Assembly of Public Relations Associations (whose definition is known as 'the statement of Mexico, 1978'), in Newson, Turk and Kruckeberger, 1996: 4.	"[Public relations practice is] the **art and social science of analysing trends**, predicting their consequences, **counselling** organisational leaders, and **implementing** planned **programs** of action which will serve both the organisation and the public interest."
A widely quoted definition from Denny Griswold (which first appeared in the PR News newsletter), as referred to by Grunig and Hunt, 1984: 8.	"Public relations is the **management function** which **evaluates** public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest, and plans and executes a **program** of action to earn public **understanding and acceptance**."
Grunig and Hunt (1984: 6) Probably the most influential academic definition.	[Public relations is the] "**management of communication** between an organisation and its publics".
Simon (1984: 6-7) Author of *Public Relations: Concepts and Practice*	Simon does not provide a specific definition of PR, but he outlines six elements of the field: - **management function** - **relationships** between an organisation and its publics - analysis and **evaluation** through research - management **counselling** - implementation and execution of planned **program** of action, communication - achievement of **goodwill**
Crable and Vibbert (1986: 5) Authors of *Public Relations as Communication Management*	"the multiphased function of **communication management** that is involved in **researching**, analysing, affecting, and reevaluating the **relationships** between an organisation and any aspect of its environment."
Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994: 6) Authors of *Effective Public Relations*	"the **management function** that establishes and maintains **mutually beneficial relationships** between an organisation and publics on whom its success and failure depends."

Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1995: 8) Authors of *Public Relations Strategies and Tactics*	Wilcox, Ault and Agee do not provide a specific definition of PR, but identify the essential elements of PR as: - **two-way communication**, and - **management function** - deliberate - planned - performance - public interest
Stuart Ewen (1996) Reviews public relations history in *PR! A Social History of Spin*	The public relations practitioner has been identified as an: - educator (pp. 91, 99) - creator and/or manipulator of symbols (pp. 157, 171) - news engineer (p. 76) - publicity doctor (p. 84) - perception manager (p. 151) - middle person
Baskin, Aronoff and Lattimore (1997: 5) Authors of *Public Relations: The Profession and the Practice*	"Public relations is a **management function** that helps achieve organisational objectives, define philosophy, and facilitate organisational change. Public relations practitioners communicate with all relevant internal and external publics to develop positive **relationships** and to create consistency between organisational goals and societal expectations. Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and evaluate organisational **programs** that promote the **exchange of influence and understanding** among all organisation's constituent parts and publics."
Bruning and Ledingham (1999: 157)	"**Management** of a **relationship** between organizations and publics."
James Hutton (1999: 204)	"**Managing** strategic **relationships**."

Hutton (1999: 201) suggests that these unanswered questions in the literature might provide a number of critical attributes of public relations theory and practice: image versus substance; the level of effect (awareness versus attitude versus behaviour); perception versus reality; short-term versus long-term goals; the degree of honesty; the amount of research; the number of stakeholders (and the specific stakeholders selected); internal versus external orientation; and the level of initiative (reactive versus proactive). Moreover, the most recent candidate as an intrinsic component of PR seems to be 'relationships' (Bruning and Ledingham, 1999; Hutton, 1999). Thus, some fundamental questions have not yet been answered. In view of this considerable diversity of opinion about PR and the multifaceted existence of PR, confusion remains about which specific aspects of PR should be stressed in a particular set of circumstances.

The absence of a consensus over what constitutes public relations has been problematic. To begin with, without a clear understanding of the core nature, purpose and standards of PR, it is very difficult to distinguish good and legitimate practice from bad and incompetent practice. The most visible examples of public relations tend to be either the few outstanding and successful cases or the many unprofessional and

unethical cases exposed by the media. The former, in the absence of a clear definition of public relations, tend to create the perception of PR being a rather mysterious practice conducted by particularly gifted individuals. These good examples also tend to attract to the field a number of people who, although they do not have sufficient understanding of public relations, nevertheless believe that they can make easy money. Thus, time and again during the history of public relations, the bad practice of a minority has tainted the reputation of all in the field (Harlow, 1977).

This has led to a second problem: the decline of the designation 'public relations'. There is a great temptation to avoid a term which does not have a clear, unambiguous definition, and which does indeed often carry with it a pejorative and undermining message. Olasky (1984) revealed that public relations practitioners have become associated with a long list of derogatory terms such as "tools of the top brass", "hucksters", "parrots", "low-life liars" and "egomaniacs". More recently, the term 'spin doctors' has been used to denote powerful individuals who twist the truth in the interest of politicians. Thus, in order to avoid such an association many practitioners have tended to replace the term 'public relations' by terms such as 'image management' and 'reputation management', thus adding to the semantic confusion. In fact, 'image' and 'reputation' are not things that can be managed directly; they are possible outcomes of behaviour. These superficial terms do not help to clarify the situation; quite the opposite. Thus, 'corporate communications' is for some synonymous with public relations, but for others it stands for internal communications. "Public affairs" used to refer to government relations but is now sometimes used as a synonym for public relations (Hutton, 1999). These examples of terminological confusion point to the lack of clarification of the field of PR in the minds of clients, practitioners and the public.

A third problem has also arisen: many areas of PR, particularly those that command the highest salaries (such as investor relations and government relations) are being taken over by other functions inside organisations or other expertise areas in the consultancy world (Hutton, 1999). For example, marketing has increasingly taken over corporate identity programmes, legal departments have taken over government relations, human resources departments have taken over internal communications, and

management consultancies have taken over stakeholder relations. All these trends suggest that it is vitally important for the interdisciplinary discipline of PR to define and defend its own identity. As long as there continues to be a lack of understanding of what constitutes PR, this will mean that each practitioner and each academic will be able to add his or her own particular and circumstantial definition. Therefore, research into the public relations phenomenon is urgently required in order to enhance understanding of its core components. As Hutton (1999: 201) puts it,

> "one of the major problems in reconciling the long list of public relations definitions is that little research has explored what might be termed the fundamental 'dimensions' of public relations."

II.2.3 Marketing Public Relations and Corporate Public Relations

Despite an absence of clarity or agreement as to what constitutes the core meaning of PR, two main domains of practice in the field of public relations can be found in the public relations and marketing literature: marketing public relations and corporate public relations. A third domain, personal public relations, remains relatively undeveloped. The first domain, marketing PR, is emphasised mainly by marketers and some PR practitioners who see PR as an effective tool when co-ordinated with other communication tools in a marketing context (e.g. Kitchen, 1996; Kotler, 1991; Henry Jr., 1995). The second domain is presented mainly by public relations academics who are seeking to build a specific theoretical framework for the discipline by presenting it as a corporate management function (e.g., Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994). This quest to upgrade PR to a strategic management tool has led most PR scholars to reject marketing PR as a subordinate and narrow view of the practice. The debate about marketing PR and corporate PR reflects the wider problem of the autonomy of PR.

For McCarthy (1960), the basic task of marketing is to combine four main elements (the marketing mix) into a marketing programme in order to facilitate the market exchange. These four elements are: product, price, place and promotion. In turn, promotion is traditionally divided into four elements (the promotion mix): advertising, sales promotion, personal selling, and public relations. Here PR is understood as a communication tool that will be co-ordinated with the other elements to achieve a

previously defined marketing objective. Therefore, public relations is incorporated within the broader aims of marketing. As Goldman (1984: xi) states:

> "although this book is about public relations, it is primarily concerned with PR as a marketing -- not as a management – tool ... [W]hile all public relations is concerned with strategy, marketing-orientated PR is concerned with marketing strategy -- with the development of means and ends directly related to buying and selling."

Kotler (1982), a leading marketing academic, has been accused by public relations academics of promoting the use of PR under the marketing umbrella among managers and marketers (Grunig, 1992a; White and Mazur, 1995). In fact, Kotler attaches particular importance to PR, seeing it as a fifth 'P' to be added to the traditional marketing mix (product, price, place and promotion). He argues that the success of organisations increasingly depends on carrying out an effective relationship with its publics.

The marketing dimension of public relations has been further developed in recent years in response to the increasing costs of advertising (time and space) and the customisation of audiences (Fill, 1995). It is no longer efficient to present a single message to a wide audience, since the latter is increasingly fragmented. Marketing PR offers high credibility in presenting messages to specific audiences, whereas the traditional paid media find this much more difficult. Therefore, public relations is perceived as a very cost-effective marketing communication activity (Fill, 1995).

The second dimension that can be found in the literature, corporate public relations can be defined as:

> "the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends." (Cutlip *et al.*, 1994: 6)

Under this perspective public relations is a "function of management" responsible for the overall communication policy of an organisation.

Public relations academics see marketing PR as a constraint on the use of PR as a management tool. For example, according to White and Mazur (1995: 252):

> "there is a pressure to force PR into a marketing framework. In this, PR is seen as marketing support, or as part of the promotional activity within the marketing mix. As such, the practice is seen as a collection of communication techniques, carried out by staff working as communication technicians."

Similarly, Grunig, J. (1992a) criticises Kotler's (1982) marketing concept of public relations in the promotion mix. He believes that it leads to the reduction of PR practitioners to technicians (as opposed to managers) and the failure to recognise PR's own intellectual content and administrative responsibilities. He further argues that in order to fulfil its potential, PR departments should exist separately from marketing departments, or at least PR should be separated in concept and procedures within the same department.

The Institute of Public Relations (Public Relations Educational Trust, 1991) in the UK declared that "Public Relations is not Marketing". The basis for this distinction is that marketing is profit-orientated. Fill (1995: 391) reacted to this argument by stating that

> "this is obviously untrue, as groups and organisations such as the NHS and charities would not be able to practise marketing if such a narrow perspective was supported."

By contrast, Wragg (1992: 11) insists that

> "there is little doubt that for most people working in marketing, the PR techniques that matter are those which enable them to achieve their sales target ...[P]art of the role of the PR practitioners must be to alert them to wider issues."

Haywood, past President of the Institute of Public Relations and past Chairman of the Chartered Institute of Marketing, asks:

> "Does it matter whether people think that PR is just a part of Marketing? Yes, it does. This view inhibits the development of public relations, particularly if those who buy our services simply see these as being an extension of the marketing function. But it is even more worrying if public relations professionals believe this themselves. Some of us may be, some of our work might be... but public relations itself certainly is not." (Haywood, 1995)

Kotler and Mindak (1978: 17) present five models of the way in which organisations arrange the relationship between marketing and public relations. In model A, the two disciplines are totally separated: marketing acts to improve profitability, and PR acts to improve the image of an organisation. In model B, although marketing and PR are

considered to be of equal importance, there are areas where they overlap and where they work together to achieve the organisation's objective. In model C, PR is seen as only one of the many tools within the marketing function. In model D, PR controls the marketing activity, that is, it is conceived as an activity that seeks to create the most favourable environment to allow marketing to function successfully. Model E sees the two functions as being of equal importance in achieving the objectives of organisations: they work in co-ordination and support each other. This model is based on the conciliatory position that marketing PR and corporate public relations are not mutually exclusive, but are "mutually interactive" (Kitchen and Proctor, 1991). Corporate PR will help all organisations to create goodwill among all publics, and marketing PR, when working at the product level, contributes to the same goal. It is probable that both marketing PR and corporate PR exist in the real world, but hardly any empirical evidence about how they relate to a core concept of PR.

II.3 Empirical research: origins and characteristics

Most public relations empirical research originated in the United States (Vercic, 2000). The most influential authors and works in public relations research were identified by a content and citation analysis (Morton and Lin, 1995) and later confirmed by a bibliometric study (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999) of public relations journals. Until the mid-1990s most public relations research was developed by a small number of US universities (e.g. the University of Maryland, the University of Houston, and San Diego State University) and their scholars (e.g. James and Larissa Grunig, Donald Wright, David Dozier, Glenn Broom and Robert Heath) (see Morton and Lin, 1995; Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999).

By the end of the 1980s most research in public relations was not programmatic nor predictive, being generally based in qualitative approaches (Gaudino and Steele, 1988), and it had produced few clear streams of research (VanLeuven, 1990). By the mid- 1990s, an increase in published research was visible. Most studies were descriptive in nature (particularly through case studies), with "abundant philosophical discussions", particularly about public relations "techniques and professionalism"

(McElreath and Blamphin, 1994: 70). Morton and Lin's (1995) content and citation analysis of articles published in the academic Public Relations Review Journal between 1975 and 1993 revealed that the most published articles were, first, professional topics, secondly, management topics, and thirdly, technical ones. The study also found out that public relations research was rarely cited by other journals. Recently, Pasadeos *et al.*'s (1999) bibliometric and citation analysis of the four main PR academic journals between 1990 and1995 disclosed a lack of paradigmatic and topical diversity. Most research topics were focused on the communicator or sender (rather than the audience or receiver), and there was an extensive existence of textbooks suggesting the strong influence of practice. The most cited topics by these journals to date also reveal an effort to create a suitable theoretical ground: public relations roles, management and corporate public relations, public relations models, public relations theory development, agenda-building and organisational theory (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999). These reflect the prevalence of professional topics (Morton and Lin, 1995), of which planning and evaluation seem to be the major concerns (McElreath and Blamphin, 1994).

Until the mid-1970s public relations was mostly constituted by a single applied focus driven by the knowledge needs of practitioners. Since then, two major branches of have separated: the more applied branch and the new academic theory-based research; this last one emerging from academics. While the more applied branch embodies business and micro-ethical interests, the new theory-based research is rooted in the concerns of liberal scholarship, i.e. how public relations is used and what it contributes to society (thus, considering business in that context), as well as macro-ethical issues. These two groups within public relations, one interested in how theory-driven practices might benefit practitioners, and the other interested in how theory elucidates how public relations impacts (positively and negatively) on the whole society, seem to be embodying a tension which Botan (1993a) called *the paradigm struggle*. Although representing different interests and values, the two groups are not mutually exclusive, as they have a common concern: the development of solid knowledge to inform public relations practitioners *and* academics.

Nevertheless, the more applied branch tends to dominate the research agenda, and scholars insist that the academic branch should be given the same status (Botan,

1993a). The more applied branch gave rise to two dominant models of practice in public relations (Hallahan, 1993): the four-step process of Cutlip and Center (1952) and the alternative R-A-C-E formula of John Marston (1963) (Files, 1982). The four-step process model suggests that PR involves four orderly steps: fact-finding, planning, communicating and evaluating. This model not only predominates in practice but has served as a framework for teaching and for some succeeding textbooks (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1985; Center and Jackson, 1995; Hendrix, 1992; Wilcox, Ault and Agee, 1995). The R-A-C-E formula proposes the following systematic stages: research, action, communication and evaluation (Files, 1982).

A Body of Knowledge Board of academics and practitioners was appointed by the PRSA (Public Relations Society of America) in 1989, with each member having to produce yearly updated lists of works (VanLeuven, 1990). However, this list of published works was more a body of knowledge of North American public relations rather than a representation of *the* public relations body of knowledge (Vercic, 1994). In 1998 the European Association for Public Relations Education and Research (CERP Education and Research) initiated the European Public Relations Body of Knowledge project (EBOK). The aim is to compile an inventory of the existing publications in several different European countries and encourage the exchange of knowledge. The idea is to contribute to a 'global' public relations body of knowledge by combining the European and North American bodies of knowledge (Van Ruler *et al.*, 2000).

On the whole, public relations practice and academic research is growing; however, this growth is uneven around the world. The US and the EU show the greatest development, with the former in the lead. In Europe, the many different countries are developing research in public relations influenced by distinguished research traditions and cultural contexts. The constraint is that these contributions tend to be lost to the whole PR community due to geographical and language barriers. These constraints apply also to Africa, Asia, and Central and South America. Since 1994, the International Public Relations Research Symposium has been held every year in Bled (Slovenia), gathering an increasing number of researchers from all over the world. One of its most visible aspects is the lack of cross-national references (Vercic, 1994).

Research in specific countries depends on its visibility at the international level and exposure in international publications (in English), and inevitably PR theory is mostly influenced by American and European authors. Americans have provided key theoretical and practical elements, and Europeans, particularly the Germans, such as Jurgen Habermas, have influenced the thought of modern public relations (Nessman, 1995). Although public relations in Europe and the US developed simultaneously during the nineteenth century, PR theory and practice in both countries have developed independently since the 1990s under the constraint of specific economic and social conditions. It seems that early practical and theoretical elements were influenced by Americans, and then further developed in the European context (Nessman, 1995). Signitzer, cited by Botan (1993b) reported 216 theses and dissertations on PR in German between 1980 and 1990.

II.4 Parent disciplines: main influences

For the most part, the public relations body of knowledge has grown by borrowing theories from other disciplines. PR is a behavioural science (VanLeuven, 1990) that draws from the generic body of knowledge from psychology, sociology and anthropology, and from the specific disciplines of communication and management. Today, public relations is bridging these broader areas with PR-based perspectives which are emerging from specific research areas, namely practitioner roles (Broom and Smith, 1978; Broom and Dozier, 1986a; Toth *et al.*, 1998) and models of PR (Grunig, J. 1984; Grunig, J. and Grunig, L., 1992; Leichty and Springston, 1993). According to Prior-Miller (1989), the two logical-theoretical traditions for building PR's theoretical foundations are communication theory and organisational theory (from the sociology of organisation) -- communication because the practice comprises interpersonal and media communications; and organisational theory because the practice comprises the relations that an organisation has with its publics.

II.4.1 Communication theories

During its first steps as an academic discipline, public relations was influenced by one-way communication theories such as Shannon and Weaver's (1949) *Mathematical Theory of Communication*, and other transmission models of communication

(Karlberg, 1996). The mathematical theory of communication had an important role carrying models from the exact sciences to the communication field, based in the notion of 'information' (developed through the communication devices of World War II). Shannon and Weaver (1949) devised a linear schema, from a beginning to an end, which defined communication as a succession of elements: the source of information produces a message; the encoder or transmitter transforms the message into signals (that allow transmission); the channel sends the signals; the decoder or receiver reconstructs the message from the signals; and the destination is the person who (or the thing that) receives the message. The theory conceived communication as a straight line, not taking into consideration the meaning of the signals to the receiver nor the intention behind their transmission, i.e. it assumed that 'transmitting' and 'receiving' were neutral. This one-way communication was taken as a framework by public relations practice through the pioneering authors in public relations, especially Edward Bernays. Bernays (1955) defined public relations as one-way communication as reflected on the title of one of his books, *The Engineering of Consent*. Bernays' works were so influential on succeeding public relations practitioners and academics that Olasky (1984) referred to the one-way perspective as the 'Bernay's paradigm'.

Contemporary public relations academics position two-way communication at the core of public relations' rationale. The theoretical idea of two-way communication is not a new one, as is shown by Plato's ancient notion of dialogue (Terence, 1977). Several contemporary theories of two-way communications have had a great impact on public relations academics. These include co-orientation research (Newcomb, 1953; Carter, 1965; Chaffee and McLeod, 1968), systems theory (Thayer, 1968; Kuhn, 1975; Ruben, 1984; Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984); interpersonal theories which distinguish symmetry from asymmetry (Watzlawick, Beavin and Jackson, 1967); theories contrasting the dissemination and exchange of a message (e.g. Ehling 1984; 1985); liberal-political-communication theories of neutral dialogue (e.g. Ackerman, 1980); and, more recently, Habermas's (1970, 1984) theories of ideal communication and dialogical rationality.

II.4.2 Organisational theory

Contemporary organisational theory is 'inside' the sociology of organisation. Like communication theory, organisation theory does not refer to a single theory capable of explaining and predicting the *totality* of observed organisational phenomena. Organisation theory is comprised of a highly complex and diverse group of middle-range theories or 'partial theories' (Champion, 1975), each of which tries to explain some aspect of organisations. The root theories (or intellectual origins) of organisational theories are: symbolic interactionist theory, exchange theory, conflict theory and structural-functional theory (Prior-Miller, 1989).

II.4.3 Management theories

Strategic management tries to reach a balance between the organisational mission and the "environment" (Higgins, 1979: 1). Greene *et al.* (1985) define strategic management as

> "a process of thinking through the current mission of the organization, thinking through the current environmental conditions, and then combining these elements by setting forth a guide for tomorrow's decisions and results." (Greene *et al.*, 1985: 536)

This search for balance between the internal/ external realities by adapting the mission of the organisation to the environment (Pearce and Robinson, 1982; Uyterhoeven *et al.*, 1977) was seen by Grunig, J. (1992a) as a proposition of the fundamental role of public relations in the management process. Ideally, for this balance to be obtained, public relations would work at the management level of the organisation, helping to define its mission, and would monitor the environment and the organisation's external publics. Public relations would plan and implement strategic programmes of communication between the organisation and the environment (Grunig, J. 1992a).

II.4.4 Other influences: US schools of journalism

Beyond the humanistic social sciences and their concern with the study of communication, a very important factor deeply influenced the practice and theory of public relations: this started to be taught in (Northern American) departments and schools of journalism (Hazleton and Botan, 1989). Naturally, in the beginning public

relations practitioners were taught skills and values from the journalistic perspective; and early public relations practitioners were mainly ex-journalists. The academic influence of journalism was manifested by the impact of studies such as the effects of public-information campaigns (e.g. Rice and Paisley, 1981) and the diffusion of innovations (e.g. Rogers, 1983). Hence, PR students were trained in journalism (and not specifically in public relations) and most became "journalists-in-residence" (Grunig, J., 1989b: 34). Botan and Hazleton (1989) and Grunig, J. (1989b) acknowledge some limitations of this inheritance. Both journalism and public relations were viewed traditionally as crafts to be learned by skilled practitioners. This craft approach to public relations education and training limited the production of a unique body of theoretical knowledge. But Botan and Hazleton (1989: 13) point out that medicine was once practised in barbershops and then developed from the sciences of biology and chemistry.

II.5 The public relations literature: existing paradigms

Some argue that PR is in a *pre-paradigm state* (Botan, 1993a), some say that its literature exhibits signs of an *emerging social science* discipline (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999), and some say that it is an *immature science* according to Raveta's model (VanSlyke, 1980). Reflecting on the Public Relations Body of Knowledge project (that attempts to classify works on the subject of public relations), VanLeuven's (1990) reports the agreement of BOK Board members with Grunig, J. and Hunt's (1984) call:

> "[the body of knowledge in public relations] must provide the intellectual core that leading practitioners and educators will accept as the subject matter of public relations." (VanLeuven, 1990: 24)

Based on Kuhn's (1970) typology, Botan (1993a) argues that public relations is in a pre-paradigm stage. Kuhn (1970: 175) defined 'paradigm' as "the entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques and so on shared by the members of a given community." Thus, for Botan (1993a):

> "the struggle to understand what we are, and how better to do what we do, is really a pre-paradigmatic struggle" (p: 108)

Stemming mainly from interdisciplinary influences, some initial studies can be grouped separately. The groups are divided in "paradigms", risking an overstatement for the emerging area of knowledge under the assumption that they will be corroborated as such in the future.

II.5.1 The systems paradigm

One paradigm seems to stand out from within the total literature, the systems paradigm (Coombs, 1993; Botan, 1993a; Hallahan, 1993). The systems paradigm is best represented by James Grunig (1976; 1989a; Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984; Grunig, J. and White, 1992), although it also influenced other PR theorists such as Cutlip, Centre and Broom (1985), Long and Hazleton (1987), and Pavlik (1987).

The systems perspective developed from the transition of the analogy of the human system in biology (e.g. the biology of the nervous system) to the social sciences, in this case communication theory. The aim of systems theory is to understand the totality of interactions between elements rather than linear causal sequences (such as Shannon's mathematical theory of communication), and to grasp the complexity of wholes made up of many changing relationships. It interprets the variations in a system's structure as efforts made by various parts of the system to regulate and cope with tensions coming from the environment or from within the system. The responses of the system depend on the speed and accuracy with which information is collected, processed and exchanged (through feedback) (Mattelart and Matterlart, 1998). The systems theory emphasises the relation between organisations and their environments. A *closed*-system approach assumes that organisations are closed systems, that is, organisations are autonomous from their environment and can therefore fulfil their missions without interference (such as support) from the environments. Katz and Kahn (1978) argued for the *open*-system perspective, which recognises that organisations are interdependent with groups in their environment. It also recognises that organisations' goals and actions are not solely determined by internal players (managers) but are constrained by external pressures.

Grunig, J. (1989a: 92-98) derived four principles from systems theory (see Ruben, 1984; Kuhn, 1975; Thayer, 1968, Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984: 92-98) for the purpose of building a theory of public relations. The first principle is *holism*: systems consist of subsystems and are parts of suprasystems; the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and each part of a system affects every other part. The second principle is *interdependence*: systems have boundaries that separate them from their environment; however, other systems in the environment cross that boundary and 'interpenetrate' the system (Preston and Post, 1975: 24-27). The third pirnciple is *open system*: the organisation is open to 'interpenetrating' systems and freely exchanges information with those systems. The fourth principle is *moving equilibrium*: systems constantly strive toward equilibrium with other systems, although this equilibrium is seldom achieved. The desired equilibrium state constantly changes as the environment changes. Systems may attempt to establish equilibrium by (a) controlling other systems, by (b) adapting themselves to other systems, or by (c) making mutual,

cooperative adjustments. Grunig, J. (1989a) proposed that effective public relations (the symmetrical approach) will favour cooperative and mutual adjustment rather than control and adaptation. So, when applying the systems paradigm (Thayer, 1968) public relations is understood as an effort to strike a *balance* between an organisation and its environment, i.e. PR practice involves a series of inputs and outputs which are designed to reduce conflicts and build consensus between an organisation and its publics.

Additionally, at least four more paradigms can be identified, (1) the rhetorical/ critical paradigm, (2) the feminist paradigm, (3) the game theory paradigm and (4) the post-modern paradigm.

II.5.2 The rhetorical (and critical) paradigm

The rhetorical paradigm was introduced into the study of public relations by Heath (1980) and Toth (1992). In this context it studies the use of discourse by organisations to communicate with stakeholders (Cheney and Dionisopoulos, 1989). As Heath (1992) wrote in the Epilogue of the book *Rhetorical and Critical Approaches to Public Relations,*

> "Rhetoric has become a well-established and useful rubric for guiding the study of how people select, create, and execute messages. Now that tradition is moving to scrutinise the activities of public relations." (Toth and Heath, 1992: 318)

The rhetorical paradigm is a humanistic, symbol-centred and persuasive view of public relations. Since the time of Aristotle (1955), 2,000 years ago, rhetoric has been seen as

> "the ability to observe in any given case the available means of persuasion -- what needs to be said and how it should be said to achieve desired outcomes." (Heath, 1992b: 21).

This approach sees rhetoric as intrinsic to human society, where dialogue occurs on the basis of several self-interests. Rhetoric sees public relations as the business of producing symbols for organisations. As Bryant (1953: 413) puts it,

> "[rhetoric is] the function of adjusting ideas to people and of people to ideas".

Later, Crable and Vibbert (1986: 394) extended this notion:

> "[corporate discourse is] the art of adjusting organisations to environments and environments to organisations."

When considering public relations, both rhetorical and critical researchers see the organisation as a speaker. Cheney suggests (1992: 169) that rhetorical critics in the public relations field

> "must come to terms with the corporate rhetor, the corporate message and the corporate audience."

This paradigm focuses on how people and organisations negotiate their relationships. A 'critical' perspective in the rhetorical study of public relations aims at scrutinising its potential to influence what people think and how they act. Criticism employs standards in order to judge the ends of a rhetorical exercise and the effect of meanings (perspectives), and not just how efficiently rhetoric is performed. It is concerned with the implications of public relations beyond the activity itself.

II.5.3 The feminist paradigm

In recent years feminist thinkers have challenged traditional models of thinking in most academic disciplines, and they are opening a new stream of research in public relations too. Feminists argue that conventional paradigms are male-oriented insofar as they are devised by men and are dominated by a male emphasis on restricting conventions. Further, these paradigms are often self-serving for men and subversive to the interests of women.

Research into public relations through a feminist perspective (e.g. Creedon, 1991; Toth and Grunig, 1993; Hon, 1995) seems to have been fuelled by the growing feminisation of public relations (Cline *et al.*, 1986; Lukovitz, 1989; Toth and Grunig, 1993) and by the forecast that there will soon be a majority of female practitioners (Lesly, 1988). Another reason seems to be the belief that PR is a male-dominated profession (Joseph, 1985; Grunig L., Toth & Hon, 2000) with a "glass ceiling", which Carnevale and Stone (1995: 345) define as

> "[the] informal -- hence, largely invisible -- set of barriers that effectively blocks women as a group form climbing to the highest level of management."

Broom (1982) and Broom and Dozier (1986a) research found that women are more likely than men to perform the technician role (as opposed to the managerial role) and consequently have lower salaries. Later Dozier and Broom (1995) added that professional experience (in terms of the number of years) was the most significant factor for gender income differences. Gallagher (1990) disagreed by arguing that women actually choose not to get to the top due to their emphasis on family commitments. However, there is strong research evidence that public relations women in managerial positions have lower salaries (Stewart, 1988), less power (Dozier, 1988) and lower status (Toth, 1988) than men. Toth *et al.* (1998) identified a shift in the gender ratio of males to females, but not in salaries.

II.5.4 The game theory paradigm

The foundations of game theory were laid by von Newmann and Morgenstern (1944) in their *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour*, in which it was argued that social problems could be described through models based on "games of strategy", which in turn were workable through mathematical analysis (Davis, 1983: x). Shubik (1982) has summarised the applications of game theory in many social science areas since the 1950s (for example, economics, political science, sociology, psychology and business). In all these different areas, game theory has been applied to conceptualise and model social phenomena involving conflict and choice.

Game theory contends that satisfactory outcomes can be obtained by negotiating and trading information, because it reduces uncertainty and allows good decision-making (Coleman, 1982; Shubik, 1982; Davis, 1983). Game theory identifies two types of game: the *zero-sum game* represents a win-lose situation (if one player wins, the other must loose); and the *non-zero-sum game* represents a win-win situation which uses negotiation to achieve an acceptable playoff for all players. Murphy (1989; 1991) established the link between game theory and public relations by underlining their common grounds:

> "Like public relations, the theory of games focuses on the mediation of conflict, the establishment of an equilibrium among conflicting parties, the functions of power and domination, and questions of fairness and ethics." (Murphy, 1991: 116)

Both PR and the Games theorists try to bring some balance to a situation in which one or more players are engaged in some degree of conflict.

II.5.5 The post-modern paradigm

Some of the main thinkers contributing to postmodernism -- Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard, Jameson and Baudrillard -- are products of the last 20 years. Postmodernists reject the view that *material* reality determines social forces because we no long live in a production society but in an information society. As information is power, we live in a society where signs and images replace the material existence of things (Kellner and Baudrillard, 1989). Postmodernism rejects the metaphor of the mind as a mirror of nature where objects are neutral, arguing that the mind constructs rather than reflects reality (Best and Kellner, 1991, cited by Michey, 1997). For example, language (or a symbol), from a postmodernist perspective, is not a tool but a cultural artefact that has a political or economic reality for the individual.

Postmodernists look critically at culture and language, and as such are concerned with the effects of public relations in society. Mickey (1997: 271) argues that

> "[public relations practitioners] can be called symbolmakers if one considers their work is largely word and image."

This perspective sees PR practitioners as having a great power to create 'reality' in society. Also from a post-modern perspective, Holtzhausen (2000) considers that a definition of public relations as organisational communication management is too narrow, arguing that "public relations can contribute to grassroots democracy through activism and radical politics", and, moreover, he exhorts practitioners to become "activists within organisations" (Holtzhausen, 2000: 93).

So far, only a few well-developed streams of research and publication have been produced in public relations. The systems paradigm predominates in the public relations literature. It argues that organisations should be open systems, defining their goals not only as a reflection of internal interests but also in accordance with the external world with which it interacts. Public relations is seen as a form of organisational communication which should be managed to provide that link. The

rhetorical paradigm studies the discourse between organisations and the groups with which it relates. It is also critical, as it proposes a critical analysis of how the public relations discourse is carried out in influencing people. The feminist paradigm focuses on gender issues and proposes that there is a "glass ceiling" in PR as it is a male-dominated activity even though there are a large number of female practitioners. It is also critical as it points out that female practitioners are less likely to reach the managerial role and to earn equal benefits with males. The game theory approach uses the analogy of games to study the processes of negotiation that public relations carries out between organisations and publics. The postmodernist paradigm focuses on public relations' broader influences on society as practitioners who create reality through the creation of symbols and discourse.

II.6 The public relations literature: existing theory

In Hallahan's (1993: 199) words, "academic research in the field has been ... too eclectic." Nevertheless, there has been a significant increase in such research since the mid-1970s (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999) and a consequent major contribution to the body of PR knowledge. However, the extent of that increase does not in itself indicate the current stage of evolution of the discipline. Pasadeos *et al.* (1999: 46) argue that the public relations scholarly literature "exhibits signs of an emerging social science discipline" due to the concentration of scholarly literature on a few (American) authors and universities, its insufficient diversity of well established paradigms and insufficient diversity of topics. The strong presence of textbooks is understood to reflect the strong influence of practice (Pasadeos *et al.*, 1999). VanLeuven (1990) quotes VanSlyke's (1980) conclusion that public relations is an immature science. It relies more on "folk science" than on "verified scientific principles", it does not have at present "a body of widely accepted standard theory and concepts", and it lacks "inclusive research" (VanLeuven, 1990: 17).

Pasadeos *et al.* (1999) propose that public relations is entering a third phase of its development. In the first stage, until the mid-1970s, mass communication scholars established the foundations for many questions that a few public relations scholars tried to answer in the second stage, from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s. The third

stage (since the mid-1990s) is characterised by new public relations academics expanding topic diversity and developing more sophisticated research. Thus, despite the fact that public relations does not qualify as a social 'science' today, it is believed that it should be able to achieve that status in the future. Undoubtedly, the growth of academic research in public relations will continue, and this will lead to the development of its own theoretical foundations, which is the vital starting-point for attaining a clear disciplinary identity.

According to L'Etang and Pieczka (1996) it cannot be said that there is yet *a* theory of public relations:

> "a well-developed discipline combining a diversity of theories and approaches, such as communication studies, seems to be an aspiration rather than a factual statement." (L'Etang and Pieczka 1996: 5)

In reality and to date, it seems to be more appropriate to speak of *a* theory of public relations represented by the research effort of Professor James Grunig. Many promising trails of research that might lead to alternative consistent theories are being developed as this thesis is being written. Grunig's theory of two-way symmetrical communication or 'excellent public relations', as he calls it, has stimulated many critiques and the development of alternative approaches. Thus, most of the contemporary public relations literature has evolved *in relation to* Grunig's seminal work.

II.6.1 Grunig's situational theory of publics

A public can contribute to the many constraints that organisations face, thereby bringing about the need for public relations efforts (Grunig, J., 1995). The assumption of the situational theory of publics is that publics form around specific situations or issues produced by the consequences that organisations have on people outside itself. Grunig, J. (1989a) stated that people seldom seek information about situations that they do not feel affected by. Knowing how publics perceive an organisation, as well as how to reach those publics (Grunig, L., 1992a), is essential for proactive PR, which prevents costly and unpredictable crisis management.

Grunig, J. & Hunt (1984: 145) provide a typology of publics. A non-public is a group of people who are not involved in a particular problem. A latent public is a group of people who suffer the consequences of the problem, but have not yet recognised it. An aware public is a group of people who recognise the problem. An active public is a group of people who start to discuss the solution. Grunig, L. (1992) added that an activist group is two or more individuals who organise in order to influence another public or publics through action. Action by activist groups can include education, compromise, persuasion, pressure tactics, or force.

Grunig, J and Repper (1992: 126) distinguish between publics and markets, and hence between public relations and marketing: Organisations can choose their markets but cannot choose their publics. Publics arise on their own and might target the organisation for attention. The organisation chooses market segments that fit its capabilities for penetration. The market segments that do not suit the company's capabilities are left for other companies to satisfy. Publics organise around issues and seek out organisations that create those issues. They might try to obtain information, ensure that their opinion is heard, or complain. They can pressure the organisation indirectly by asking government to regulate them. Publics can support the mission of the organisation or prevent it from achieving its mission. The situational theory of publics argues that the role of public relations is to identify the publics that are most likely to limit or enhance the organisation's ability to pursue its mission and to design communication programmes that help the organisation to manage its relation or interdependence with these strategic publics.

II.6.2 Grunig's four models of public relations

Based on an historical analysis of PR practice, Grunig and Hunt (1984) propose four models by which organisations communicate with their publics: *(a) press agentry, (b) public information, (c) the two-way asymmetrical model, and (d) the two-way symmetrical model.* The authors characterise the four models according to two dimensions: the communication process (one-way vs. two-way) and communication effects (asymmetrical vs. symmetrical). These four models correspond to the gradual

historical development of public relations towards increasingly more sophisticated practices.

The "press agentry" model, which is the most primitive form of public relations, corresponds to the first stage of the activity. In the mid-nineteenth century the press agents were the first full-time specialists to practice PR. The aim was to create favourable publicity or propaganda in order to manipulate public opinion (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The second model, *the "public information model"*, reflects the changes of PR activity at the beginning of the twentieth century, when large corporations and government agencies hired journalists as PR practitioners. Propaganda was no longer enough, and there was a need to explain actions to a more demanding audience. But while selectively writing good things about the organisations, the information was often misleading (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The third model, *the "two-way asymmetrical model"*, represents a stage when practitioners not only give information to the publics but also collect information from them. But this practice, according to Grunig, is still not the optimal situation, because it is about the *manipulation* of publics through researching the messages most likely to produce the attitudes and behaviours *wanted by* the organisation, and that is not always in the best interest of publics (Grunig and Hunt, 1984).

The fourth model, the *"two-way symmetrical model"*, represents a two-way dialogue with a public during which all parties are heard. This model reflects a normative theory about what public relations *should be*, and refutes the predominant belief that PR is a way of manipulating publics for the benefit of the organisation (Grunig, 1992a).

Limited evidence that all of the above four models are practised together to some extent was provided by research carried out in two Master studies (Cupp, 1985; Nelson, 1986). Grunig, J. and Grunig, L. (1992) argued that the models serve two

functions: as situational strategies used by public relations practitioners to deal with different publics and different problems, and as an ideology of the organisation.

Both the "two-way asymmetrical" and "two-way symmetrical models" are based on research, whereas the first two models are not. But while the "two-way asymmetrical" model uses research to *persuade* publics, the "two-way symmetrical model" uses research to facilitate *understanding* of and by the publics. Grunig (1989: 32) grouped the three first models under the 'asymmetric' worldview, characterised by presuppositions that "an organisations knows best" and that "the public would benefit by co-operating with the organisation." Thus the organisation need not change its attitudes, values or actions, and public relations should seek to gain compliance from the public. The "two-way symmetrical model" was further developed to become a theory of public relations (Grunig, J. and Grunig, L., 1992) as follows.

J. Grunig took a liberal arts approach to public relations by questioning its assumptions, values and social role. When discussing and creating its symmetrical model. J. Grunig challenged the dominant applied model and the existing 'worldview' that practitioners and academics had of public relations. In Botan's (1993) words, this was

> "a journalism-based model and business orientation." (Botan, 1993a: 108).

Alternatively, the symmetrical model conceives public relations as the *management of communication* in order to improve *understanding* between an organisation and its publics. According to Grunig, J. (1989a), the symmetrical communication is a normative theory for what *should be* Public Relations by refuting the dominant belief that

> "public relations is a way of manipulating publics for the benefit of the organisation." (Grunig, J, 1989a: 30).

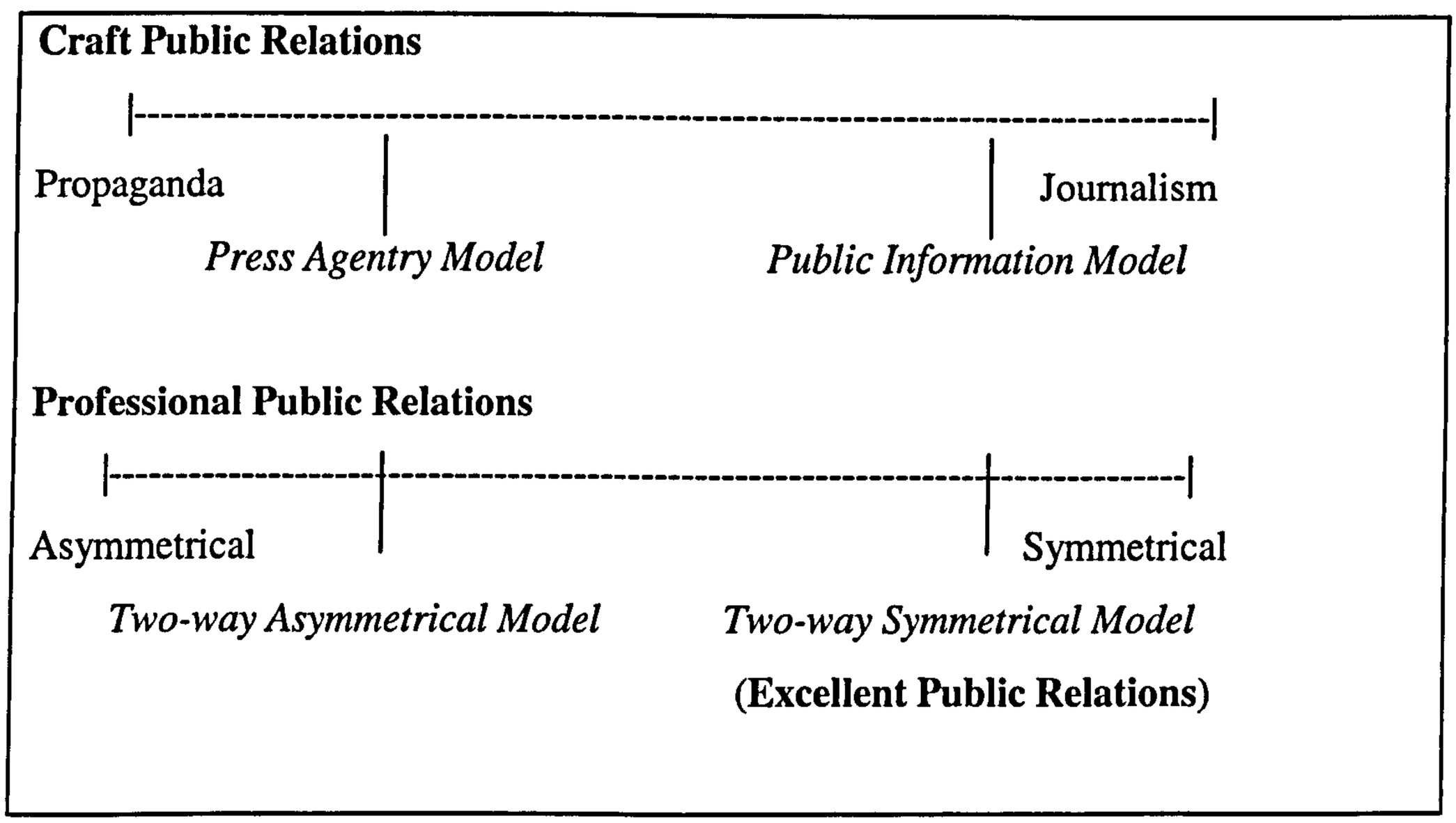
Thus, J. Grunig claims that the symmetrical model is a differentiated form of communication because it rejects persuasive communication. Organisations practising this model engage in telling the truth, negotiating, bargaining and managing conflict in

order to develop symbiotic changes in *both* the organisation and the public (Grunig, J., 1989a).

Although Grunig, J. (1992c) argues that this fourth model is not only a normative theory but also a positive theory (describing the reality), it is hard to prove that its practice is not more than accidental. Grunig, J. (1992a) states that the "two-way symmetrical model" defines not only the most *ethical* way of practising PR but also provides the most *effective* communication. Symmetrical communication however, representing the more developed stage of public relations practice, does not seem to characterise the reality of practitioners today (Murphy, 1991).

In a later development of the original model, J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) proposed that the theory of models could be improved when conceptualised in terms of two continua: one of "craft" and one of "professional" public relations (see Figure II-1)

Figure II-1: Grunig's four models of public relations placed on a two continua.



(Source: Grunig, J. and Grunig,L., 1992: 312)

While practitioners of "craft" public relations (the press agentry model and the public information model) apply the communication techniques to get publicity and information into media of communication, the practitioners of "professional" public relations lean on a body of knowledge and techniques to use public relations with a strategic purpose. Grunig recognises that in practice "professional" public relations

practitioners involve both asymmetrical and symmetrical practice, although the author's argument is that "excellent" public relations is only achieved through symmetrical communication practice.

II.6.3 Scholars' critiques of Grunig's four models of public relations and symmetrical theory

As the most articulated theory existent in the public relations literature, the two-way symmetrical theory (or theory of 'excellent public relations') has not surprisingly attracted both supporters and critics. As is expected in any academic discipline, much of the criticism has helped to improve the existing theory. Despite this improvement, the most useful alternative theories to enrich our understanding of the public relations phenomenon are still under construction.

Criticism of Grunig's symmetrical model can be identified at the conceptual level and at the empirical level. Critiques at the conceptual level attack mainly the normative claims of symmetrical communications, and at the empirical level, they attack the scarcity of definite support from data evidence. The normative claim of the symmetrical communication model is criticised by several authors (e.g. Leichty and Springston, 1993; Cancel *et al*, 1997). Grunig, J. suggests that the symmetrical communication model is the single best out of the four models of public relations. That is, it is the most *effective* and the most *ethical*, and thus it is the *best* model of public relations theory and practice.

Cancel *et al.* (1997) argue that the 'best model' position overlooks the complexity of public relations practice. As Long (1987: 91) observes, to contend that mediation is *better* than persuasion or advisement is *better* than advocacy assumes that public relations exists in a simple black and white world. By assuming that reality is full of greys, the practice of public relations is a combination of all these behaviours *depending* on the situation (Long, 1987; Cancel *et al.*, 1997). Therefore, the presentation of alternative public relations practices as an either/or choice is not appropriate. Following this criticism, Cancel *et al.* (1997; 1999) proposed an alternative contingency theory that is still under development.

Another argument against the normative claim of symmetrical communication is the rejection of two underlying assumptions. The first assumption by Grunig, J. and Grunig, L. (1992) is that organisations are able to practice public relations in a "singular way across publics and across time" (Leichty and Springston, 1993: 337). Leichty and Springston (1993) argue that the practice of public relations might vary depending on each relationship and across time; and that none of the other models should be rejected as unethical or inefficient, as they can potentially be otherwise. The second assumption is that organisations are able to determine unilaterally their public relations approach. Leichty and Springston (1993) consider that the determination of the public relations approach will depend on the specific issues and publics involved (e.g. Pollack, 1986; Shneider, 1985), and not on the will of the organisation to practice the symmetrical model. Leichty and Springston (1993) proposed that the four models of public relations should be understood as the basic descriptive categories of public relations practice. Their relevance, however, is dependent on each relationship (and relationship stage) between the organisation and the public. Thus, they should not be viewed as 'four boxes' into which the complex public relations reality can be forced (Cancel *et al.*, 1997).

Furthermore, several authors (Pearson, 1989c; Murphy, 1991; Cancel *et al.*, 1997) have questioned the ethical superiority of the symmetrical communications model. To argue that the two-way symmetrical model is the most ethical implies that it is always and in any circumstance morally right. Cancel *et al.* (1997) point out that there are circumstances, namely during conflict with a public with unreasonable positions, where symmetrical communication can be considered unethical. They give the example of "engaging in dialogue with morally repugnant publics or offering trade-offs to publics perceived as completely wrong" (Cancel *et al.*, 1997: 38). Hellweg (1989) reinforces this point by arguing that what is 'symmetrical' or 'asymmetrical' depends on one's perspective. For example, an organisation invites an activist group for a meeting, applying a symmetrical form of communication. However, the same group or even a third party can perceive it as a manipulative way of gaining approval. Because accommodative behaviour can be viewed as unethical in certain

circumstances, classifying a situation as symmetrical might require the assumption of moral relativism (Cancel *et al.*, 1997).

Murphy (1991: 121) contributed to this debate on the moral superiority of symmetrical model by analysing the public relations models in game theory terms. The asymmetric model resembles 'zero-sum games', and symmetric communication resembles 'games of pure cooperation' (non-zero-sum games). Just like the two-way symmetrical model, games of pure cooperation are seldom found in the real world (Murphy, 1991: 123). Furthermore, by inference from non-zero-sum games, questions of efficiency and ethics are raised. Just like games of pure cooperation, symmetrical communication may produce unsatisfactory results for both sides because, by trying hard to please the other side, neither side ends up with a satisfactory solution. Murphy (1991: 123) argues that games of pure cooperation are mostly solved by chance or by custom because any 'game' (negotiation) is based on the players' perceptions of each other's moves. Thus, games of pure cooperation tend to happen when there is a great stability of custom and tradition, i.e. in its purest form symmetry might discourage innovation and change. Conflict is considered beneficial to the game as long as it is managed, in this context by public relations practitioners. Murphy concludes that symmetric behaviour should be redefined as mixed-motive behaviour. By conceptualising a continuum from conflict to cooperation, games theory posits that the games (behaviours) that occupy the 'broad middle spectrum' are the most satisfactory:

> "Each side retains a strong sense of its own interests, yet each is motivated to co-operate in a limited fashion in order to attain at least some resolution of the conflict." (Murphy, 1991: 125)

Grunig, J. and White (1992: 46) recognise that symmetrical communication is criticised as being unrealistic because organisations hire PR practitioners as advocates to advance their own interests and not as "do-gooders" who give in to outsiders with a different agenda. J. Grunig follows Tuleja (1985), who does not believe that conflicting interests between the organisation and society makes symmetrical communication unrealistic because organisations consider the norm of reciprocity (Tuleja, 1985; Grunig and White, 1992). Reciprocity implies that an organisation will benefit if it ensures that the publics benefit. However, to assume that public relations practitioners should advocate *both* their organisations and the publics excludes the

situation when the organisation and the publics are in extreme opposition. As Sallot (1993: 45) states:

> "Perhaps it is possible to advocate for two interests when they coincide, but what happens when the advocate is called to 'represent' competing interests of the sponsor and the public?"

Pearson (1989: 67) concludes that in this circumstance the two-way symmetrical model is unfeasible:

> "serving client and public interests simultaneously is the seeming impossible mission of the public relations practitioner."

Van der Meiden (1993c) more fundamentally argues that the concept of 'symmetrical' public relations is an impossibility due to public relations' roots in (American) pragmatism. For the author, there is a free pluralistic communication reality where organisations compete for publics to attain their goals, which inevitably creates an asymmetrical (persuasive) model of public relations. Grunig, J. (1992a) proposes that 'understanding' is the major objective of PR by using 'negotiation' and 'compromise'. Van der Meiden (1993c: 9) argues that public relations, just like other communication disciplines (such as marketing, advertising and propaganda), is a "manipulation force" due to the pragmatic tendency in society, which contends that entities (individuals and organisations) should aim at the "optimum attainable, not the ultimate ideal". Thus, Van der Meiden rejects what he considers to be the assumption behind symmetrical communication, that public relations is 'objective' or 'neutral':

> "PR therefore must be focused on the winning of trust, understanding and cooperation. Not (unselfishly) for the sake of the receiver, but for the sake of self-interest. The interest of the receiver is regarded as a welcome counterpart (complement) of communication." (Van der Meiden, 1993c: 10).

Another criticism of symmetrical theory is that it does not consider power issues. Coombs (1993) argues that both the systems perspective and the rhetorical perspective derive from a pluralistic paradigm which does not acknowledge the influence of power differences on communication. The pluralist paradigm holds the assumption that ideas freely compete with one another in the marketplace of ideas (Entman, 1989) and that ideas have equal access to the policy-making process (Smith M., 1990; Jordan, 1990; Kelso, 1978). Coombs (1993), however, points out that pluralists fail to acknowledge that social actors with greater resources or power (such as organisations)

have less incentive to negotiate and are more likely to use self-interest strategies when negotiating. Therefore, organisations will not be particularly motivated to engage in symmetrical communication. Grunig, J. takes on the pluralist paradigm when arguing that symmetrical communication is forced upon organisations because publics form groups that acquire power to push dialogue (1992a). Coombs (1993) replies that these groups might not end up having as much power as the organisation due to their comparatively limited access to resources (power).

Additionally to the conceptual criticisms of the four models of public relations and of the resulting symmetrical theory, there are strong critiques of the empirical limitations of the models. By reviewing studies that tested the reliability of the four models, some authors (Leichty and Springston, 1993; Cancel *et al.*, 1997) contend that there is not enough empirical evidence to support the view that these models actually represent four different realities. Cancel *et al.* (1997) argue that seven studies (cited in Grunig, J. and Grunig, L., 1990: 33) testing the models' reliability produced low alphas (from .42 to .65), i.e. below minimum standards of reliability.

When later the Grunigs (Grunig, J. and Grunig, L. 1992) improved the reliability scores of the models by using functionary scales, the better results were criticised as reflecting a social desirability bias (Leichty and Springston, 1993). Also, many weak correlations were found (Grunig, J., 1976, 1984; Grunig, J. and Grunig, L., 1989; Pollack, 1986; Schneider, 1985) between factors proposed to affect the four models (including items defining the structure and the environment of an organisation). Also, when correlating the four models and several public relations variables (Grunig, J. and Grunig, L. 1989; 1992), Leichty and Springston (1993) concluded that only the one-way and the two-way models were clearly distinguishable, i.e. the 'craft PR' and 'professional PR' continuum proposed by the Grunigs.

Grunig, J. and Grunig, L. (1992) cited two case studies (Turk, 1986; Grunig, L. 1986) to support the superiority of the symmetrical model. However, Cancel *et al.* (1997) argue that the cases studied situations in which asymmetrical communication failed to reduce conflict, and thus it was *assumed* that symmetric communication would have been more successful. A true theory test with empirical evidence that the organisation

practising symmetrical communication is the most effective was never conducted directly. The two-way models, symmetrical and asymmetrical, also lack evidence to demonstrate that symmetrical communication will not produce asymmetrical results through what Tompkins and Cheney (1985) call 'unobtrusive control'. That is where an organisation uses symmetrical communication with the aim of making its position accepted.

The early contingency perspective (the best public relations model *depends* on the organisation's type of environment) was abandoned for the 'best model' normative theory because some research showed no consistent correlation between the public relations model practised and the environment of the organisation. Leichty and Springston (1993) contend, however, that the reason for such results is that only the conditions for practising the preferred model were considered. Consequently, many researchers have called for a return to the contingency perspective in studying public relations. As Leichty and Springston (1993: 332) put it, this is a change from the "the most desirable public relations approach" to "the most appropriate under the circumstances". Many researchers have proposed continuums between extreme communication positions to explain the variety of choices that public relations offer. Hellweg (1989) suggests a continuum between two-way symmetrical practice and two-way asymmetrical practice. Murphy (1991) suggests a continuum from conflict to cooperation.

II.6.4 The IABC Excellence Study

Grunig's symmetrical theory was originated by the largest-scale research project on public relations, known as the 'IABC Excellence Study'. The project was developed from 1985 to 1995 (Vercic, Grunig and Grunig, 1996) and was sponsored by the IABC (International Association of Business Communication) research foundation to the extent of US$400,000 (Dozier, Grunig and Grunig, 1995). The research team was led by James Grunig and had five other researchers: Larissa Grunig, David Dozier, William Ehling, Fred Repper and Jon White. The IABC Excellence study (Grunig, J., 1992a; Grunig, L. Grunig, J and Dozier, 1994; Dozier, D, Grunig, L. and Grunig, J., 1995) researched (1) how, why and to what extent PR makes an organisation more effective, and (2) what characteristics of PR departments are necessary for them to

contribute to organisational effectiveness. The first results were published in *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management* edited by James Grunig (1992a).

In order to verify empirically that the IABC study results were universal (beyond the Anglo-Saxon setting) it was replicated in a fourth country (Slovenia). The authors (Vercic, Grunig and Grunig, 1996; Grunig, Grunig and Vercic, 1998) argue that ten characteristics of "excellent public relations" departments are generic:

- Involvement in strategic management, bringing about programmes of communication that identify threats and opportunities, and that aim at building good relationships with internal and external *strategic* publics or 'stakeholders' to help achieve organisational objectives.
- A direct reporting relationship to senior management in order to be part of or at least have quick access to the top decision level.
- A separate function from other management functions, such as marketing, human resources or finance. It is argued that placing public relations under the responsibility of marketing will cause the organisation to concentrate on relationships with the consumer public, neglecting important strategic publics.
- All PR functions should be grouped under a single department or be co-ordinated, rather than being subordinated under other departments.
- Application of the two-way symmetric model of public relations as reflecting the strategic management of communication. It goes beyond the one-way communication ('press agentry' and 'public information' models), and beyond the two-way asymmetrical model, which uses research to persuade publics to behave in ways that benefit the organisation only, while the two-way symmetrical model uses research to search for a common basis between the interests of both the publics and the organisation, using communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with publics (instead of trying to persuade them). Grunig *et al.* (1998) admit that the widespread practice of public relations seems to be a mixed model including both two-way *asymmetrical* and *symmetrical* communications, but argues for the superiority of the latter.

- The PR practitioner is in the managerial role. Based on initial research done on practitioner roles (Broom and Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1992), which identified two major practitioner roles -- the manager, who creates and manages strategic PR programmes, and the technician, who writes, edits or produces publications -- excellent public relations departments have at least one communication person in the managerial role; and they also have communication *technicians* who provide technical services.
- Existence of the potential for managing programmes symmetrically. This potential can be accomplished when the department employs practitioners who have learned public relations' theoretical body of knowledge.
- An existing worldview, the way in which people make sense of the world, for public relations. Results of the Excellence study suggest that the world-view held by top management is determinant of the type of public relations that is going to be implemented (or, in Grunig's view, which model or combination of models is going to be implemented). The two-way symmetrical model tends to be implemented when the top management understands public relations beyond its technical function.
- Equal opportunities for men and women. The IABC study found that excellent public relations departments empower women so that they are not limited to the technician's role. This is argued to be of importance because there is a growing proportion of women in public relations who do not accept being discriminated against by being kept out of the management role, as suggested by previous research (Broom, 1982; Broom and Dozier 1986).
- The existence of organisational conditions for excellent PR. Based on systems theory, it is argued that there are certain organisational characteristics that provide conditions for excellent public relations: a participative rather than authoritarian culture and decentralised management processes that allow employees to participate in decision-making. It is theorised that organisations which have turbulent and complex environments will be pressured by activist publics towards excellence.

The authors propose that these ten principles are normative and generic principles of excellent public relations practice, and they argue that the principles are applicable to

diverse contexts in diverse countries (Grunig, Grunig and Vercic, 1998). Following the IABC study's conclusions, the authors theorise that excellent public relations makes an organisation more effective:

> "When individual communication programmes, such as media relations, community relations, public affairs or employee relations are managed strategically -- achieving communication objectives such as an increase in knowledge or understanding, a change in attitude or behaviour, or changes in relationship indicators -- this programmes help to build stable, good-quality relationships with strategic publics such as donors, shareholders, legislators and consumers over time. Thus, not only are individual programmes affected but *they also make the organisation more effective by managing conflict* and reducing the costs of conflict that result from regulation, pressure and litigation." (Grunig L., Grunig, J and Vercic, 1998: 339)

According to Grunig L, Grunig J. and Vercic (1998), when public relations programmes are managed strategically the organisation will became more effective both externally and internally -- externally by preventing the costs of conflict through its management, and internally by promoting job satisfaction through symmetrical communication (Grunig, Grunig and Vercic, 1998).

II.7 Professionalism

Practitioners acknowledge a reputation problem surrounding professional PR activity. Referring to a survey conducted by the American Management Association, Hehir (1996: 21) considers that

> "the most significant finding, as far as PR professionals are concerned, is the low esteem in which they are held by their fellow executives."

The author warns of the threat that the negative perceptions represent and calls for the responsibility of the industry in promoting a necessary change:

> "the issue for the Public Relations industry is its diversity -- both in the range of services it provides and the quality. In the failure of the industry to get its own message across lies the risk that the best elements of its role will be taken up by competitors who will have one thing in common -- to make sure they are not seen as PR people." (Hehir, 1996: 21)

Bernays (1995: xxii) defends the licensing system, arguing that the less favourable reputation of the industry is due to the fact that

> "PR today has all the characteristics of a profession except one. PR lacks licensing and registration by the state with legal sanctions."

Bernays (1995) explains how this fact reflects on the unfavourable perception of PR by stressing that

> "the words Public Relations are in the public domain. Unlike true professions, public relations has not yet been defined by law. Anyone can misuse the term PR. And many people unfitted by education, experience, or ethics use the term to mean whatever they want it to mean." (Bernays, 1995: xxi).

The lack of legal control over the practice of PR is not only reflected in the lack of defence mechanisms against external misuses but also in the internal professional standards. As Cutlip *et al.* (1994: 26) put it:

> "unlike the more established professions, PR does not yet require a prescribed educational preparation, government-sanctioned qualifying exams, and peer review to assume competent and ethical practice. Nor do its practitioners operate in clearly defined roles recognised widely as essential for the common good."

The reputation of PR as a whole is widely influenced by the unprofessional or unethical behaviour of a particular practitioner or agency, and it is not easy to distinguish who are the competent and serious professionals. In the opinion of Brody (1992: 45),

> "the reputation of every consulting firm is compromised, no matter how subtly, when the ethical propriety of another firm is questioned by the mass media."

Brody believes that many practitioners avoid the term Public Relations not to be connoted with its negative implications,

> "the term public relations appears nowhere on their firms' letterheads or business cards or in their literature. Accredited PRSA members often eschew the APR designation, perhaps to separate themselves individually from the discipline as well." (Brody, 1992: 45)

Abbott (1991) identifies four distinct schools of thought in sociology in the study of "professions" as opposed to "occupations": (1) the functionalist, (2) the power perspective, (3) the modified power perspective and (4) the continental perspective. These four schools of thought derive from the original work of Wilensky (1964) and focus on the process by which occupations became professions.

The functionalist school of thought looks at professions in terms of the relationship between the professional and the client. The professionalisation process provides

guarantees for the relationship. For functionalists, professionalism requires education, credentials and codes of ethics, all protective guarantees for the client, which should be assured in the professional/ client relationship (Abbott, 1991). A professional body will have the role of achieving normative consensus to regulate that relationship (Abbott, 1991).

The power theory school also places emphasis on the coalition of professionals in one body, not for relationship control but for the interests of monopoly (e.g. Freidson, 1970; Larson, 1977). For power theorists, professions build an exclusionary power, i.e. they close the profession to outsiders.

The modified power perspective argues that the focus of professions is the importance of knowledge (Freidson, 1986; Halliday, 1987; Abbot, 1988) rather than relationship control or monopoly. It claims that professionalisation depends on the ability of an occupation to construct a knowledge base.

The continental view was built by a European stream of studies of professions. It focuses on the role of the state in the professionalisation process (e.g. Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990). This might reflect the early moves of continental professions towards state-regulated affiliation (Abbott, 1991).

Another group of authors, from within the business world, are more concerned with establishing the differentiating characteristics of professions rather than with the professionalisation process. According to Blau and Scott (1962) and Hughes (1958), a profession is: (a) a vocation founded in a body of knowledge, (b) which when applied solves a vital problem in society, and is exercised as an altruistic service to clients rather than on the basis of selfish motives, (c) and is regulated by a professional body which exclude members who break the code of ethics, which is based on peer assessment.

The traditional approach distinguished occupations from professions by listing the specific features of each. These features were identified, for example, in the case respected professions such as medicine and law. These were the models that led to the belief that a complex and specialised knowledge would conquer the right of autonomy

guided by a code of ethics (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Jackson, 1970; Barber, 1963). This model has been criticised as being too rigid (e.g. Farrugia, 1988), and a new paradigm, proposing a continuum from non-professions to professions, is now more fashionable, since it accommodates many semi-professionalising activities or emerging activities which would be somewhere outside the extreme poles of the continuum. According to Farrugia (1996: 30), an occupation is placed on the continuum according to its degree of: "substantive theory", "validated practice", "operational autonomy", "organisational autonomy" and "prestige and esteem." Recently, Lowendahl (2000) has argued that a profession is an ideal, and thus seeks to replace an either/or stance by a contingent one:

> "Occupational groups may be more or less 'professionalised' along each of the following dimensions: degree to which members are required to have a high level of education; numbers of years of education; extent of co-operation or tightness of link to academic institution; extent of emphasis on altruistic problem solving for client; extent of emphasis on affective neutrality vis a vis a client; extent of emphasis on problems of vital interest to society; extent of professional norms guiding member behaviour; extent of peer reviews; extent to which peer sanctions are enforced against members not respecting norms; extent of limitations on expert authority." Lowendahl (2000: 25)

In the 1970s the traditional altruistic arguments were attacked by sociologists such as Johnson (1972) and Larson (1977), who accused professions of being privileged self-interested monopolies. Since the 1980s, however, it has been assumed that ideas of marketisation, clients' rights and increased competition have come to influence the motivations of the professionalising occupations (Lee, 1995). The traditional approach's suggestion that professionals are motivated by altruism (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933) has also been challenged by an alternative economic view of the role of professions (Larson, 1977), which proposes that professions have a monopolistic motivation for excluding individuals who are considered unqualified to provide a service; that motivation is the defence of their market by exerting control through entry prerequisites, institutionalised academic education, training and experience (Larson, 1977).

Post-functionalists have analysed the strategies that professions develop to raise the prestige of their practice and to claim exclusive ownership of particular areas of expertise (e.g. Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977; Macdonald, 1995). Autonomy in self-

regulation has allowed the setting of standards governing the training, practice and conduct of professions (e.g. Harrison and Schultz, 1989). Professional associations are the vehicle professions use to seek to establish autonomy and authority through the building of boundaries around them (Johnson, 1972). The professional associations ensure that unless the individual satisfies these criteria, membership will not be allowed and certain service practices will be denied. When the exclusive rights for practising the service are only given to certified professionals, the desired professional monopoly is established.

Nowadays, a complex new economic and social context has led to the birth of many occupations with a potentially substantial impact in society, such as management consultants, secretaries and public relations practitioners, who have been aspiring to the status of profession. Contemporary trends are seen by Greenwood and Lachman (1996) as threatening professionalisation. However, Wilensky (1964) predicted that professionalism would eventually embrace everyone who claims specialised knowledge or practice, a statement which, if true, calls for flexible, although rigorous, criteria for assessing professionalism.

II.8 Conclusion

Public relations is still in its infancy as a scholarly discipline. The first years of theory and practice have been largely led by the US experience (Vercic, 2000), which contributed the early practical and theoretical elements that were then further developed in the European context (Nessman, 1995). Until recently, public relations knowledge was mostly derived from its practitioners' accumulated experiences and intuition, but since the mid-1970s scholars have been increasingly interested in studying public relations and making an effort to create its own distinctive body of knowledge. Since the mid-1970s, a new theory-based research branch has emerged on the basis of academic work. Few clear streams of research had been produced in public relations by the end of the 1980s. Nevertheless, since the mid 1990s, public relations practice and academic research has been growing.

For the most part, the public relations body of knowledge has grown by borrowing theories from other disciplines, namely from communication theories, management theories, organisational theory, and US schools of journalism. Today, public relations is bridging these broader areas with public relations-based perspectives which are emerging from specific research areas, namely practitioner roles (Broom and Smith, 1978; Broom and Dozier, 1986a and 1986b; Toth *et al.*, 1998) and the four models of PR (Grunig, J. 1984; Grunig, J. and Grunig, L., 1992; Leichty and Springston, 1993).

The fourth "two-way symmetrical model" represents a two-way dialogue with a public during which all parties are heard. It is a normative theory for what PR *should be*, and refutes the predominant belief that PR is a way of manipulating publics for the benefit of the organisation (Grunig, 1992a). This model was further developed to become a theory of public relations (Grunig, J. and Grunig, L., 1992). Later J. Grunig and L. Grunig (1992) proposed that the theory of models could be improved when conceptualised in terms of two continua: one of "craft" and one of "professional" public relations. While practitioners of "craft" public relations (the press agentry model and the public information model) apply the communication techniques to get publicity and information into media of communication, the practitioners of

"professional" public relations lean on a body of knowledge and techniques to use public relations with a strategic purpose.

Sociologists are mainly concerned with the process by which occupations became professions (Abbott, 1991). The traditional approach distinguished the two by listing the distinguishing features of the professions, such as medicine and law, against the features of non-professions. These were the models that led to the belief that a complex and specialised knowledge would conquer the right of autonomy, guided by a code of ethics (Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Jackson, 1970; Barber, 1963). This model has been criticised as being too rigid (e.g. Farrugia, 1988), and recent paradigms propose that a profession is an ideal, thus seeking to replacing an either/or stance by a contingent one. An occupation would be placed on the continuum according to its degree of: "substantive theory", "validated practice", "operational autonomy", "organisational autonomy" and "prestige and esteem" (Farrugia, 1996). A continuum from non-professions to professions is a more contemporary approach accommodating many semi-professionalising activities or emerging activities, such as public relations. This approach allows room for improvement through a professionalising process, without condemning public relations for not having a similar nature to medicine or law.

Most of the contemporary public relations literature has evolved *in relation to* Grunig's seminal work. Academically, although Grunig, J. constructed a public relations theory, symmetrical communication, and although there is a growing body of empirical and critical research, at present a comprehensive theory of public relations or fundamentally different complete theories cannot be found. Nevertheless, in PR's own literature several embryonic streams of research can be identified, the dominant one being systems theory, which emphasises the relation between organisations and their environments. Undoubtedly, the growth of academic research in public relations will continue, and this will lead to the development of PR's own theoretical foundations, which is the vital first step in PR being distinguished from other disciplines.

There is a movement by PR academics towards the placement of public relation at the management level as opposed to be only considered an activity that is defined by the sum of its technical tasks. This implies that PR activity is broader than a communication technique and broader than specialised PR programmes such as media relations. Most PR scholars reject marketing PR as a subordinate view of the field. Although little empirical evidence exists about the practice of public relations, two key domains of practice in the field seem to exist: marketing public relations and corporate public relations. Marketing PR is the co-ordination of PR with other communication tools in a marketing context (e.g. Kitchen, 1996; Kotler, 1991, Henry Jr., 1995). The second domain is a corporate management function (e.g. Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994) responsible for the overall communication policy of an organisation. Both these approaches have increased in prominence in recent years. One of Kitchen and Proctor's (1991) theoretical proposals is that the two are mutually interactive: both corporate and marketing PR will help organisations to create goodwill among different publics, respectively at the corporate and product or service levels.

Public relations has not yet been able to create a unifying framework which is globally accepted as such by academics and practitioners. Its academic body of knowledge is still under construction, and its professional recognition is still being conquered. Public relations' reputation is a symptom of an emerging discipline that is growing fast but has yet to prove itself as a mature area of knowledge and professionalism. As a relatively new area of research, the PR literature presents numerous gaps. The literature suggests a number of critical theoretical attributes of public relations, but there is not yet enough empirical evidence to identify with confidence its constituent elements.

As long as there continues to be a lack of understanding of what constitutes PR, this will mean that each practitioner and each academic will be able to add his or her own particular and circumstantial definition. Therefore, research into the public relations phenomenon is urgently required in order to enhance our understanding of its core components. This study seeks to help fill some of these gaps by contributing new empirical evidence about the phenomenon through a holistic exploratory study. One

way of studying the phenomenon is to look closely at the development of the PR industry in a specific context. Accordingly, this study will focus on PR activity in the UK, a review of which follows in the next Chapter III.

III. PUBLIC RELATIONS IN THE UK

III.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a summary of the existing empirical evidence on public relations activity in the UK, the research setting and the focus of this research. Then, the origins and development of public relations professional practice and academic education in the UK is described. The different and sometimes opposing views of academics and practitioners regarding the role of education are discussed. The main characteristics of public relations practice in the UK are then considered: its imprecise meaning, its favourable growth against the background of an unfavourable reputation, its practice as a tool of marketing and a tool of management, and the state of evaluation and research developed by PR practitioners. This is followed by a summary of existing studies on British consultancies and the identification of present challenges for the PR industry. The discussion then moves to the question of the extent to which public relations is a universal concept and activity beyond the UK. The various research gaps in the existing literature on British public relations are discussed. Finally, a closing summary is presented.

Public relations originated in the United States (Cutlip, 1995). The UK PR industry is now in second place behind the US in terms of its size. Many UK-based PR firms enjoy a leading role in the top biggest consultancies. PR firms providing external advice to corporations enjoy a 20% annual growth (Black, 1991; PRCA, 2001). The PR industry comprises practitioners working in-house and practitioners working in PR consultancies. The first group of practitioners was not included in this study, which focused on external PR consultants. Consultants are the invisible men and women behind many organisations' PR practice. This study seeks to fill the research gap in the literature by using PR consultants as the sole target population.

External PR firms quickly developed in the UK, many lacking skilled staff of sufficient PR expertise but nevertheless benefiting from the increasing demand for public relations services which motivated an incredible 'boom' of the occupation, particularly in the 1980s (Black, 1991). Knowledge was not consolidated, the industry was largely experience-based, and thus variety was one of the main features of the way PR was perceived and practised (Arber, 1986), a variety which can still be found (Moss *et al.*, 1997). Firms specialise in various areas of expertise, including consumer PR, corporate PR, marketing PR, financial PR, media relations and many others.

From the beginning, PR suffered from a relatively poor image due to both its propagandistic origins and amateurish practice. In the past 20 years, however, many PR agencies have built good portfolios of successful and beneficial practice. Nevertheless, the poor perception persists today (Moloney, 1996; MacManus, 1997). The fact that many mechanisms of professionalisation (Blau and Scott, 1962; Hughes, 1958; Farrugia, 1996) are not in place contributes to this poor reputation. There are no barriers to new entrants; no certification is necessary, and only rarely is large capital investment is necessary. The British public relations industry is particularly interesting to study because of its phenomenal growth (Great Britain Department of Trade and Industry, 1995) in the face of major difficulties. Beyond the most visible attributes of the industry, the study seeks to reveal empirically the key constituent elements of the complex phenomenon of public relations activity.

III.2 Evidence on the Origins of British Public Relations

L'Etang's (1998) archive research and qualitative inquiries provide a valuable account of the origins of public relations in the UK. The author argues that local government, central government and, to a lesser extent, the private sector, were the main contributors to the origins of British public relations. As far as local government is concerned, officials and civil servants contributed in three main ways. First, they developed the earliest key concepts of public relations. Secondly, they provided the first formal definition of public relations (in 1947). Thirdly, they formed the core of

individuals who founded the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in 1948 (L'Etang, 1998).

III.2.1 The Contribution of British Government to the Origins of Public Relations

During the nineteenth century, British local government tended to control local communities rather than serve their welfare needs. In the 1920s, however, there was a determined effort by local government to improve its relationship with local communities, and the officials responsible for that effort developed the earliest key concepts of public relations. As L'Etang (1998: 416) observes, at that time "the term 'public relations' was seen quite literally as relations with the public and the role of providing information". These early ideas on building a better 'understanding' between civil servants and citizens represented the first systematic thinking in the UK on public relations. They appeared in particular in the *Journal of Public Administration* (1923-1938). The Institute of Public Administration (IPA), which owned the journal, also published the first British book to include the term 'public relations' in its title: *Public Relations and Publicity* by J. H. Brebner (1949). However, in this work, there was some overlap between the concepts of propaganda and public relations. The civil servants' first (although provisional) formal definition of public relations appeared in 1947:

> "Public relations means the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain, by conveying information and by all other suitable means, mutual understanding and good relations between a firm, undertaking, statutory authority, government, department, profession or other body or group, and the community at large." (Rogers, 1958, p. 12)

The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) was the outcome of the growth of new specialised activities which led to the emergence of public relations staff in local government. In the early 1940s, these staff needed to improve their status and opportunities for promotion. At this time, the most valued qualification in local government was that of solicitor rather than administrator; and it was this need for professionalisation that led to the foundation of the IPR in 1948.

In examining the contribution of central government to public relations in the UK, various peacetime and wartime propaganda initiatives provided the roots for the

development of PR. Propaganda was a government tool with various internal and external aims, from maintaining the status quo and trying to control social protest to censoring unfavourable information and building alliances in order to maintain political or military support. It was during the First World War (1914-18) that the first moves to develop information policy on a national scale began (Gillman, 1978). Gillman indicates that with the arrival of peace in 1918, despite the formal dismantling of the official information structure, some elements persisted, e.g. government-media relations. This historical period promoted the development of publicity, new ways of working with the press, the diffusion of technological developments in communication (such as using films as a mass medium), and the development of methodologies for monitoring and understanding public opinion. As a consequence of these trends, "The distinction between propaganda, public relations, information, intelligence, persuasion and psychological warfare became harder to draw" (L'Etang, 1998: 427). Thus, from the end of the First World War (1918) to the formation of the IPR in 1948, 'public relations' and 'propaganda' were not clearly differentiated in theory or practice. The first effort to make such a distinction was through the creation of the IPR. This historical association with propaganda explains the widespread negative assumptions, usually unfavourable, about the nature of public relations. This is in contrast to both the academic conceptualisation of public relations and the aspirations of PR practitioners.

III.2.2 The Contribution of the Private Sector to the Origins of Public Relations

Prior to the Second World War (1939), the private sector had only a few press agencies and some international and national organisations with some form of public relations. Advertising agencies also contributed, but to a lesser extent, by developing specialised divisions to deal with the media. Practitioners in the private sector were generally isolated in their activity and were not able to share and debate their ideas on public relations as a group. However, individually some of these early practitioners did become well known. According to Hudson (1977), the first formal acknowledgement of public relations was the appointment of Sir Stephen Tallents (the first President of IPR) to the Empire Marketing Board in 1926. Also, Sir Basil Clarke, who is regarded as one of Britain's first public relations consultants, was active from

1918 to 1935 (Gillman, 1978; L'Etang, 1998). His background included journalism, intelligence work during the First World War, and the civil service (Clarke, 1969). He also founded his Editorial Services agency in 1924. Although his son, Alan Clarke, later stated that his father's agency offered more than press services (Clarke, 1969), there remains some doubt as to whether Basil Clarke actually developed PR activity in the broader sense of that term (L'Etang, 1998).

The first public relations consultancies began to appear after the end of the Second World War (Bowman and Ellis, 1969). Peacetime activities allowed the business community and industries of all kinds to expand, gradually underlining the importance of public relations. By the 1960s and early 1970s, public relations had undoubtedly achieved greater prominence in British industry (Arber, 1986), and in the 1980s there was a phenomenal boom of PR activity. Empirical evidence of this growth was provided by a study of the UK's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) industry with data collected between 1989 and 1991 (Kitchen and Proctor, 1991; Kitchen, 1993; 1996). This revealed a substantial increase in the emphasis and expenditure on public relations, an increase attributed mainly to changing environmental factors (Kitchen, 1993). Thus, the growing use of public relations in the UK and its increasing importance to the business community (see, for example, Moore and Kalupa, 1985) can be attributed mainly to environmental pressures on organisations to act and be seen to act in a more socially responsible way. Better organised pressure groups, increased inspections by state regulatory bodies, and more active investigative journalism (Moss, Warnaby and Thame, 1997) are among the key changes that led organisations to recognise the need for planned communications programmes to prevent damaging relationships or actively build favourable relationships with specific publics. Moreover, the rush of acquisitions and mergers during this period saw public relations being used increasingly to project the corporate and financial aspects of organisations.

There was, however, no consistency in public relations growth, and this led to a remarkable non-equivalence of the occupation across the UK. At one extreme, some organisations had no public relations functions; at the other extreme, some had established PR within their top decision-making level (McKay, 1982). Interestingly,

the most visible practitioners to convey the image of traditional public relations were pejoratively called the 'column inch man' and 'Mr. Fixit' (McKay, 1982). Both were publicity officers, but while the first offered (inexpensive) media exposure (mainly through press releases for product launches) and measured success by the amount of media coverage in column inches, the second offered an extra set of natural endowments such as his/her range of contacts, the organisation of special events, and the ability to write in plain, persuasive English. Hence, in addition to product publicity, the much wider world of social responsibility started to push for new strategic ways of communicating. More sophisticated approaches emerged here and there to deal with several increasingly important publics, and thus areas such as financial public relations and employee communications began to develop.

There were, however, other determinants of PR growth. These included changes in management approaches, especially in terms of the increasing importance of stakeholders (Dibb, Simkin and Vancini, 1996). Companies came under increasing pressure to extend their communication with a variety of publics beyond trade relations, and to pay more attention to the impact of their activities on society. This led many companies to create their own in-house public relations departments or appoint external consultants.

III.3 Public Relations Education in the UK

The need for professional and academic training within the public relations industry is widely acknowledged (Hatfield, 1994; Dibb, Simkin and Vancini, 1996; L'Etang and Pieczka, 1996b), though it seems to be taking some time for this to materialise. Any occupation with aspirations to professionalise finds education an indispensable path to reach that goal. Education helps to define public relations expertise and the scope of its activity, to provide theoretical underpinning for its practice and ethics, and to legitimise its process of social acceptance (L'Etang, 1999). Traditionally, British public relations (both in-house and consultancies) tended to recruit from other professions, such as journalism, law and business, and entrants would subsequently be trained in public relations by apprenticeship (Hatfield, 1994). Thus, the previous generation of practitioners learned by trial and error; and although since the 1990s PR

graduates have been available to the industry, it seems that the industry has been reluctant to modernise and recruit graduates in significant numbers. Furthermore, as only a minority of consultancies have established formal training (Hatfield, 1994; Dibb, Simkin and Vancini, 1996), the industry is faced by a severe shortage of trained professional staff (Black, 1991). For managerial positions education seems to be given more weight than experience, as was shown by Panagyrakis' study on the backgrounds of public relations managers in several countries. This study confirmed that college graduation was the minimum requirement for advancing to a managerial position. The educational disciplines that were perceived to be more important were communication and marketing, and also, increasingly, training with supportive skills in the liberal arts and journalism (Panigyrakis, 1994).

III.3.1 The Contribution of British Professional Associations

In the 1950s, before university courses were established, the IPR set up its own courses and examinations, with teachers being recruited among public relations practitioners (L'Etang and Pieczka, 1996b). From 1969, with the support and monitoring of the IPR and the PRCA, the CAM (Communication, Advertising and Marketing) Foundation offered a certificate incorporating a Diploma in Public Relations (L'Etang, 1999). From the beginning, the lack of trained teachers was CAM's principal problem, and once again practitioners were recruited to perform this role (Hatfield, 1994).

In a strong critique of IPR's contribution to PR education, L'Etang (1999: 284) concluded that the UK's professional association "failed" to accept the opportunity offered by education to raise its members' level of "knowledge and skills to a professional level". One of the main problems is that the various IPR qualifications did not gain members' general acceptance or academic credibility. Another is that the IPR's code of professional conduct is restricted to general ethical requirements. This might be due to the absence of a delineated specialised education on which to *base* specific standards. Thus, despite several attempts to impose a rigorous system of entry by qualification, practitioners' attitudes to education have meant that experience is still regarded as the most valuable requirement.

III.3.2 British Higher Education

Public relations in UK higher education has existed for little more than ten years. Its origins go back mainly to the former polytechnic sector. In 1987 a Diploma in International Public Relations was established at Watford College (now West Herts College) (L'Etang and Pieczka, 1996b), and in 1988 an MBA was established at Cranfield Technical Institute's School of Management with a joint business-public relations programme (Hatfield, 1994). The MBA started with the support of industry and the IPR, and funding from 20 consultancies and other corporations. Also in 1988, in Scotland an MSc in public relations started at the University of Stirling, a more traditional university (Hatfield, 1994). These two UK postgraduate courses had different foci: the English course was more business-based and the Scottish course more interdisciplinary. Undergraduate degrees followed in England at Bournemouth Polytechnic (now University), the College of St. Mark and St John (University of Exeter) and Leeds Polytechnic1. In the 1990s there was quite a rapid growth of public relations courses in higher education. Thus, from the mid-1990s an increasing number of public relations graduates became available for working in the PR industry.

Public Relations education in the UK is characterised by an effort to integrate communication and management (Hatfield, 1994), the rationale being the desire to include public relations at the top decision-making level. Although there is widespread support for the view that public relations is a management process (see, for example, Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984; Black, 1991; Hatfield, 1994), there are also contrary opinions. For example, L'Etang and Pieczka (1996a) advocate more interdisciplinary and generic teaching of public relations, and Moloney (1996) asks for a new focus in political studies. In view of the remarkable increase in public relations activity in the UK, there is a surprising gap in the management curricula and a clear need for public relations to be included in the training of managers (Black, 1991)

1 By 2000, the following UK universities offered public relations degrees: University of Stirling, University of Ulster, Manchester Metropolitan University, Leeds Metropolitan University, University of Central Lancashire, Thames Valley University, Bournemouth University, London Guildhall University, Queen Margaret College Edinburg, Southampton Institute, The University College of St. Mark and St. John, Trinity and All Saints University College and Queen's University Belfast (Queen's School of Management).

The British model of public relations education is closer to the American than the continental European model (L'Etang and Pieczka, 1996b) in the sense that the emphasis tends to be on business and skills. However, the majority of public relations courses in Britain are found in business schools and departments of marketing or advertising, whereas in the US public relations courses tend to be in schools of journalism. Black (1991) surveyed the staff responsible for postgraduate management courses in British Universities, concluding that very few of them had public relations in their management curriculum. He concluded that in reality very few top universities in the UK and elsewhere have public relations. The exceptions cited are American, and these do not generally use the designation 'public relations': The Harvard Business School (with an elective entitled 'Corporate Communications'), and the Business Schools of Wharton, Northwestern and New York (offering MBA courses with 'media relations').

III.3.3 Different Views of the Role of Education: Academics versus Practitioners

Despite the universal agreement that there is a need for public relations education, there is disagreement between academics and practitioners over the precise role of higher education, the nature of the curricula and the purpose of courses. Practitioners are naturally concerned that relevant practical skills should be taught, but they often express doubts about the value of underpinning theory. In 1962 Tim Traverse-Healy, former IPR President (1967-68) stated:

> "In taking on people, degrees don't matter a damn. What does matter is to have critical ability, to be able to assess a situation and the factors affecting it. You must have maturity..." (Anonymous, 1962: 35)

Since the 1960s, there has been no evidence of a fundamental change of attitude by leading practitioners. Another past president of the IPR, Carol Friend, said in an interview to Hatfield (1994: 193): "...I'm bothered about the academics part. Nothing is worse than theoretical public relations". And in 1996 Doug Smith, also a former president of the IPR was cited as stating: "Education is killing public relations -- when it is taught by non-practitioners." There thus seems to be a contradictory understanding of public relations education from the practitioners' point of view. On the one hand, education is seen as a promoter of the occupation's status, and, on the

other hand, it is suggested that education is rather irrelevant and that experience and specific personal characteristics are more important. This is where the biggest controversy with academics arises:

> "Public relations practitioners, whether members of the IPR or not, continued and continue to set more store upon expertise, experience and ill-defined and subjectively assessed 'personal qualities' than upon qualifications attesting to a body of knowledge and a set of skills." (L'Etang, 1999: 283)

It appears that the PR industry perceives higher education as a training school to serve practice, to provide graduates 'who can hit the ground running'. Academics, by contrast, tend to see education (as opposed to training) and academic research as means of contributing to public relations' body of knowledge in an independent and critical way. Academics have expressed concerns that if British public relations education is increasingly required to serve business and industrial interests and to promote a positive image of public relations, it might loose its autonomy and critical duty, thereby making it harder for academics to gain the respect of colleagues in more established areas (L'Etang and Pieczka, 1996b). As in other fields, in academia respect for public relations will have to come from a larger body of academics teaching the subject, and more importantly, from a substantial volume of respected published research.

Practical public relations is regarded more highly than academic public relations probably due to the fewer number of academics and researchers when compared to the number of practitioners. Furthermore, among practitioners only a minority have been educated specifically in public relations.

III.4 The Characteristics of PR Practice in the UK

III.4.1 Imprecise Meaning

Public relations is perceived and conducted in numerous ways and is practised by people under numerous umbrella terms, thereby suggesting that it lacks a precise and unique meaning in British industry. Two studies, one based on data from the mid-1980s (Arber, 1986) and another drawing on data from the mid-1990s (Moss *et al.*, 1997) emphasise the immense diversity of the way in which public relations operates.

The first study was conducted among a number of leading UK organisations, and the second collected data from big UK retail groups. In both cases it is suggested that the views of management are the single most important factor in determining public relations' influence and level of reporting. In other words, the way in which public relations is practised is restricted by the dominant worldview within the organisation.

III.4.2 Favourable Growth versus the Unfavourable Reputation of Public Relations

Public relations encompasses professional practice that seeks to create a good understanding and reputation, but ironically it appears not to have the ability to correct its own reputation. As emphasised by Noble:

> "only one step removed from propaganda, there is no higher a political insult to hurl across the floor of the House of Commons than to dismiss an opponent's statement as merely 'a PR exercise'." (Noble, 1993)

This adverse image can be attributed to the initial stage of public relation history in the United Kingdom, when PR had a strong connection with publicity. There remains a widespread misunderstanding of PR's scope and professionalism amongst some media professionals and corporate managers. The designation "reputation" is defined in the MacQuarie Dictionary (1989) as follows:

> "Reputation - 1. The regard in which a person or thing is held, especially by the public generally. 2. Favourable or good name." (MacQuarie Dictionary, 1989: 880)

Answering the question 'What is reputation?', Smythe *et al.* (1992), wrote:

> "Reputation is assumed to refer to the general opinion about or impression of something, or to the evaluation of it."(Smythe *et al.*, 1992: 9)

Reputation implies an "evaluation" of something that would be positive or negative. Reputation also implies that it is held by the "general opinion" in relation to a person, an organisation, or even an industry.

Thus, the public relations phenomenon in the UK displays an apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the industry has achieved remarkable growth (Worcester, 1987; Watson, 1994; Dibb, Simkin and Vancini, 1996) and more and more people have

become interested in studying public relations (Woods, 1995). On the other hand, there is a widespread unfavourable perception of public relations (Watson, 1994; Dibb, Simkin and Vancini, 1996; Moloney, 1996; MacManus, 1997). As Woods observes,

> "The mass perception of public relations [in the UK] is of a persuasive/manipulative tool used to gain unequal advantage." (Woods, 1995, p. 2) [emphasis added]

The results of a study of the opinions of several British publics towards the public relations industry were presented by the Chairman of MORI (Market and Opinion Research International) to IPR members in 1987 (Worcester, 1987). It was found that public relations has an image problem among its key audiences. Editors of British newspapers, MPs, captains of industry and business and financial journalists in the City all hold unfavourable opinions of PR practice. The fact that the British PR industry has been enjoying an unparalleled expansion (at a rate of over 37% per annum in the early 1980s) makes these findings all the more perplexing. Worcester (1987) revealed another surprising finding: with some exceptions, the better known the industry the more highly regarded it is by the various groups of people aware or dealing with it. Thus, "familiarity breeds favourability" nine times out of ten. However, the study reveals that in the case of public relations there is evidence that familiarity does not breed favourability, but contempt. (This finding is based on opinion results from the most informed publics, AB socio-economic groups, quality press readers, and socio-political activists). Worcester (1987: 25) reasoned: "Whether it is the truth, or misconceptions that have caused these perceptions is for you to decide."

In spite of the increasing number of UK university degree courses in public relations (Hatfield, 1994; Black, 1990b and 1990c), the negative media and public image of public relations has led to what MacManus and Moloney (1992) describe as the "disappointed idealism of students". The authors note that first-year students often feel uncertain about the nature of public relations because of the views they have absorbed from their peers and the media. Students also encounter many diverse definitions of public relations and observe the 'worsening' image of public relations in the UK (MacManus and Moloney, 1992). In an attempt to explain this contradiction,

Woods (1995) examined the interaction between language and people's belief systems. Belief systems derive from the communication of ideas and from personal experience (Bettinghaus and Cody, 1994), both of which, according to Woods, are negative in the case of public relations. The communication of ideas with negative connotations about public relations is rooted in the propagandist origins of PR and is found regularly in the UK mass media, as illustrated in the phrase "it is just a PR exercise" (Woods, 1995) and TV programmes such as 'I hate PR' (Channel 4, 1994). Furthermore, personal experience with public relations exposes people to one-way communication. One suggestion is to replace the term 'public relations' by another term that does not have the same pejorative connotations, but Woods (1995) argues that this would not solve the problem in the long term. Changing terminology, he argues, is not likely to have much effect as long as the activities of PR professionals remain the same. The author therefore proposes moving public relations into a different 'frame of reference' by ensuring that one-way communication activities are excluded:

> "It is proposed that functions (...) only permitting one-way communications activities such as media relations, could be refused shelter under the umbrella term of 'public relations'; this would allow the common experience of public relations to have a much greater chance of positive association, i.e., experienced in the context of two-way symmetry, discourse and mediation of conflicting desire." (Woods, 1995: 66[A14])

Despite the fact that the linguistic association with people's frames of reference might, to some extent, explain the dismissive use of the term 'public relations', the author's proposal to 'de-classify' and 'extract' activities that have traditionally been part of public relations practice, particularly in the case of the example given (media relations) appear difficult to sustain in the real world. The assumptions underlining this proposal do not have any empirical evidence to support them. As the author admits, it is assumed that not only do practitioners accept that genuine public relations excludes one-way communication activities (such as writing press releases), but also that their day-to-day practice will comprehend exclusively two-way communication (such as implementing feedback mechanisms).

Moloney (1997) also acknowledges the negative perception of PR activities in his article "Teaching Public Relations in UK Universities: Teaching about a Practice with

an Unpleasant Odour Attached". The author discusses the uneasy impact of this situation on teachers and students of public relations. As a possible solution, Moloney (1997) proposes that those responsible for teaching the subject should shift the focus from communication theory to political studies. He believes that the latter has the pragmatic advantage of being concerned with the *outcomes* of organisations' activities (Levitt, 1985) rather than with *processes* (of communication). Moloney (1996) also suggests that political studies are more capable than communication theory of tackling the contemporary concern of management with corporate survival. The 'three-circles model' proposed by the Institute of Public Relations Association (IPRA Golden Paper No 7, 1990) and which is applied in UK teaching (Moloney, 1996) and also in the USA and Canada (White, 1985) is criticised by Moloney (1996) for presenting communication theory as central. The model proposes a curriculum that starts with a broad introduction to the social sciences and ends with a focus on technical concerns and processes. Moloney further suggests that there should be *no* division between marketing and public relations, and that courses should be taught in an integrated manner. This is based on the argument that the logic of the market ('subjective individualism') is structural to modern organisations, whose need to survive is the determining force behind corporate communications. Moloney (1996; 1997) is thus another academic who is trying to improve the reputation of public relations by proposing a structural change in focus and approach. However, the fundamental conceptual implications of shifting the focus of public relations from communications to political studies and integrating public relations with marketing are not considered in sufficient depth. There is an implied need to submit the academic concerns of public relations to 'market logic', disregarding the fundamental autonomy of academic theorisation and research.

The contradictions found in the British world of public relations, particularly in terms of the unfavourable reputation of PR, uncover a puzzling inability on the part of practitioners, as a group, to change the present state of affairs. As Woods (1995) puts it:

> "Failure to address the issue of reputation represents a failure to put into practice that which both practitioners and academics preach; the publi profession could be viewed as a crisis waiting to happen or even a pro perpetual crisis; we failed to create an atmosphere of mutual unders reserve of 'goodwill' to be called in times of crisis." (Woods, 1995: 1)

Referring to MORI's study of the image of the PR industry, Worcester (1987) posed some questions to his public relations audience:

> "What has been done to counteract these critical perceptions of PR? Whose responsibility is it to provide your own industry's image? Clearly, a case for taking a leaf out of your own book." (Worcester, 1987: 25)

III.4.3 A Marketing or Management Tool?

The relationship between public relations and marketing has always been somewhat ambiguous and controversial. From the marketing perspective, public relations has tended to be treated primarily as a publicity function whose main role is that of providing tactical support for marketing campaigns (see, for example, Gage, 1981; Shimp and Delozier, 1986; Kotler, 1991; Henry Jr., 1995). However, this view largely ignores what public relations practitioners and academics see as the more strategic role of PR, namely that of managing the relationships between an organisation and those strategically important constituencies -- both customer and non-customer -- within its environment (e.g. Grunig, J. and Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994). Public relations has struggled to gain recognition as a senior management function in addition to its role as a marketing tool (Horner, 1992; Mazur, 1994; Dibb, Simkin, Pride & Ferrell, 2001). Until the mid-1980s it was comparatively rare to find public relations represented at the board level in UK companies (MacMillan, 1983-84: 75) due to the fact that public relations was "not regarded very highly in the organisations". Although there are signs that this situation has begun to change, there is still little evidence to suggest that public relations personnel have been successful in gaining acceptance as equal members of companies' dominant management coalitions.

It is clear that in the UK public relations is perceived mainly as a marketing support tool (Kitchen, 1996; MacManus, 1997) and not as a management-level tool (Moss *et al.*, 1997). Varey (1997) surveyed UK corporate communications managers and concluded that most of their activities are centred on the traditional publics, employees, the media and customers. Moreover,

> "Decision making, planning, and the strategic perspective to management is presently much less likely to be seen within the remit of communications managers." (Varey, 1997: 68)

Kitchen (1993; 1996) found that executives at the corporate and marketing level in fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) firms perceived an interaction between corporate and marketing public relations. Likewise, in a comparative analysis of the perception of public relations (including both in-house and consultancy practitioners) in Austria and the UK, MacManus (1997) revealed a broad agreement that public relations would become more closely allied with marketing. By interviewing a small sample of four retail organisations, Moss *et al.* (1997) identified a strong emphasis on the use of PR as a tactical marketing support activity. Publicity work (press agentry) was found to be the dominant task performed by the public relations function. Customers (or potential customers) were seen as the most important target public; and the public relations function was regarded as highly effective by management in achieving product publicity objectives. There was limited evidence to suggest that retail organisations see public relations as contributing significantly to the achievement of strategic goals, or that public relations personnel are frequently involved in or consulted about the formation of either corporate or business strategies. Due to the strong marketing focus within most UK retailers, some degree of overlap between marketing and public relations was to be expected. However, these studies are not conclusive on the question of how this alleged interaction between public relations and marketing actually takes place.

III.4.4 Evaluation and Research

The first UK study of public relations evaluation was conducted by White (1988), who concluded that the issues inhibiting the use of evaluation among public relations practitioners included (1) a lack of knowledge of methodology, (2) a lack of budget from clients or employers, and (3) a disinclination to apply any methods of objective testing to programme performance. These findings were similar to those of studies in the US (Watson, 1993), suggesting that this state of affairs might be intrinsic to the activity of public relations. Later, in 1992, Watson's survey of (259) public relations practitioners' perceptions and practice of evaluation (with consultancies being almost half of the sample) revealed that most (74.3%) had a total evaluation budget from zero to 5%. The most widely used techniques relied on some form of output measurement of media coverage, and pre-activity research was almost non-existent. Practitioners often relied on experience, knowledge of markets, knowledge of the media, and

client/employer imperatives. Evaluation seemed to be used mainly as a reactive tool, i.e. to present data on which practitioners would be judged, instead of proactively improving or fine-tuning current activity. Thus, although practitioners recognised that public relations suffers when results could not be measured, they also feared evaluation because it could reveal unsatisfactory results. The main reasons for *not* engaging in research or evaluation confirmed some of the previous findings by White (1988): (1) a lack of knowledge of methods, and possibly a disinclination to learn about evaluation techniques, (2) time, and (3) costs (Watson, 1993: 15). The author concluded that most practitioners were 'doers' rather than 'advisers', were more reactive than proactive, and had a limited notion of evaluation. Interestingly, British consultants were found to evaluate more often than in-house practitioners did. The author proposed initiatives to convince practitioners of the importance of research and evaluation to public relations effectiveness and reputation. He stressed in particular the need for professional education and wider, more informed debates on evaluation in the UK public relations industry.

When compared with advertising and marketing, public relations is taking a long time to integrate evaluation and research into its practice (Worcester, 1987; Watson, 1994). Although recognising the difficulties arising from the focused nature of public relations demands more sophisticated research, and from the method of taking PR costs as a proportion of the clients' budgets, Worcester (1987: 20) points out that too many practitioners have tended to "fly by the seat of their pants", i.e. they have utilised informal and unreliable assessment criteria.

III.4.5 British Consultancies

In the 1980s, the importance of external practitioners as an integral part of British companies' public relations practice was confirmed in two studies. A joint project by the Institute of Marketing (a professional association) and Datanews (a marketing consulting firm) revealed that most sampled firms using public relations employed a consultancy (Robinson, 1982; Purdy, 1982). Similarly, a survey of 210 in-house practitioners revealed that 76% used external consultants (Arber, 1986b). These trends emerged in the context of the 1980s public relations industry boom. Since the early 1980s, the industry has grown by about 20% per year (Black, 1991). There is also

some evidence about levels of client satisfaction during this period. Marketing executives (Robinson, 1982) and senior managers (AGB Communications, 1984) who used public relations consultancies said that they were satisfied with the results and that consultancies provided good value. Most of those who were *dissatisfied* with public relations relied on an in-house department, freelancers or their ad agency. The main reasons given by companies for their dissatisfaction were: lack of funds, failure to set a priority, shortage of executive time, and failure to understand public relations. Moreover, poor consultancy work was cited as a problem by companies that paid low annual fee levels (under £8,000) (Robinson, 1982), a fact which might have contributed to that perception. In 1984 a survey of British managers dealing with public relations was conducted by AGB Communications and reported a general sense of confidence in PR. The majority of respondents thought that public relations' potential was generally being acknowledged and saw it as a profession rather than a trade. One could argue that these answers, reflecting the belief that public relations had matured as a profession away from its 'gin and tonic' image, could be biased because the respondents were talking about their own activities. Additionally, respondents were not disposed to indicate specific objectives and strengths of public relations, but referred simply to 'favourable image' to explain what was required of public relations. This suggests a certain lack of understanding of the activity of public relations.

In the 1980s, consultancies were regarded as valuable because of their specialist skills and the contacts they provided, but it was not clear whether their expertise was being applied at the policy level or in the support of tactical plans (Arber, 1986b). A recent study by a leading consultancy (Countrywide Porter Novelli report, 1998) suggests that consultancies might be offering both these facilities. The public relations services bought to consultancies were: media relations followed by corporate/brand reputation and crisis and issues management. Confirming that the most valuable contribution of external providers is seen to be their specialist expertise, Varey (1997) adds that consultants emerge as one of the main sources of support and information for practitioners, allowing in-house staff to acquire additional skills. Varey further contends that one of the main reasons why British managers purchase consultancy services is the lack of internal resources: the internal team is too small and lacks the

necessary facilities, or is overloaded with work, or does not have the required product or service in-house. This view is supported by Ashford and Towers's (2000) research on British small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which suggests that when an organisation grows to become medium-sized, it is faced with a lack of skills for the development of communication within the strategic management structure; and it takes many of these organisations to acquire such skills from outsourced consultancies. On the other hand, the authors identified some reluctance from smaller companies to buy consultancy services unless the perceived financial risk is minimised through personal knowledge of a consultant (Ashford and Towers, 2000). This suggests that public relations consultancies looking to work with SMEs might have to develop a personal relationship with the owner-manager and try to reduce the perceived high risk.

A joint study by the Institute of Marketing and Datanews (Robinson, 1982; Purdy, 1982) revealed that the highest spenders on public relations were the public sector and consumer-oriented companies, while the lowest spenders were those with industrial markets. In 1998, Countrywide Porter Novelli's survey report claimed that clients' perceptions of public relations consultancies had improved. Respondents (marketing and corporate affairs directors of UK leading companies) attributed this to the fundamental change of the public relations industry in terms of three main factors: consultants now adopted a more professional approach to their business; there was a better quality of service; and there was more focus on measurement and evaluation. Consequently, clients expressed their willingness to increase public relations budgets in the short term (Countrywide Porter Novelli, 1998). Most of these studies collected views of large, leading organisations drawing from sample frames such as the 'Times 1000' list or the FTSE Top 1000 companies (MacMillan, 1983-4; Countrywide Porter Novelli, 1998). However, Ashford and Towers' (2000) recent survey of SMEs' managers concluded that "there is an inherent misunderstanding of the role of public relations within *smaller* sized enterprises, and also a level of scepticism about its value" (Ashford and Towers, 2000).

The most comprehensive study of UK public relations consultancies is that by Dibb, Simkin and Vancini (1996). The authors identify a rapidly evolving environment for

the industry and describe some of its key trends: growing competition and consequent increased specialisation; internationalism; the desire for more involvement in clients' business strategy formulation; an increasing requirement to evaluate the worth of public relations; the training and recruitment of quality personnel; the information highway and changing technology in the media; and the overlap with advertising. The authors argue that all these environmentally motivated changes provide public relations with both opportunities (e.g. to become more than a tactical tool in the promotional mix) and threats (e.g. being unable to adapt and the consequent danger of losing out to potential competitors -- management, advertisers and marketing agencies). This study uncovers some of the contemporary difficulties facing the industry: PR has a credibility gap to overcome if it is to play a bigger role in clients' strategy formulation; it is still struggling to establish itself as a legitimate professional service; and it has an adverse image. Thus, today it seems that there is much scope for improvement in the British public relations industry. Dibb, Simkin and Vancini's (1996) study identifies three principal areas that respondents see as vital for improving public relations' efficiency and image. First, there is a need to invest in people (i.e. in recruitment and training) as the most valuable resource in the industry. In particular, better management skills and processes must be developed. The study reveals that employee training accounts for less than 1% of employee costs. In the authors' opinion, investment in people is the best way for the industry to professionalise. Secondly, there should be greater use of PR as a strategic tool as opposed to being simply a tactical promotion tool. Thirdly, there is a need to establish a method for evaluating the results of public relations. These results were reinforced by a 1998 survey by Countrywide Porter Novelli, which identified the three main areas for improvement cited by UK managers dealing with public relations: better commercial awareness by public relations practitioners; better measurement and evaluation techniques; and better on-going training programmes for consultants. Other areas of potential improvement are: product knowledge, quality strategic thinking and flexibility.

One further problem regarding the understanding or misunderstanding of public relations is the need for the client to become more literate in public relations (Countrywide Porter Novelli, 1998). A summary of consultants' views (Varey, 1997),

although based on a very small sub-sample, provides interesting insights into what they see as the major obstacles to effective corporate communications management: the lack of recognition of the role and importance of managed communications, and the overemphasis on media at the expense of people processes (e.g. building relationships and trust).

III.4.6 Public Relations Beyond the UK

Cross-cultural analyses with UK samples suggest contradictory findings in terms of the universal characteristics of the public relations phenomenon. Panigyrakis' (1994) cross- cultural analysis of four European countries (UK, Ireland, France and Greece) suggests that there are no significant differences among the profiles of public relations managers and among public relations practices in consumer goods companies. Respondents had virtually identical demographic characteristics and work histories; and there was no disagreement among the four groups when it came to defining the areas of activity that concerned them most. By contrast, MacManus's (1997) comparative analysis of Austria and the UK points to significant differences in the perception and practice of public relations (among both in-house and consultancy practitioners). These results are not conclusive and the different findings of the two studies might be due to the small sample sizes. Grunig, L., Grunig, J. and Vercic (1998) replicated a study known as the IABC Excellence Research (Grunig, J., 1992a; Grunig, L., Grunig, J. and Dozier, 1994; Dozier, Grunig, J. and Grunig,L., 1995) in Slovenia with the aim of testing if the principles of existing public relations theory are generic beyond Anglo-American countries. The original Excellence research was conducted for the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) in the USA, Canada and the UK. The project produced a normative theory of public relations in the form of a model of excellent two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig, J., 1992a). The major premise of the Excellence theory is that communication is of value for an organisation because it helps to build beneficial long-term relationships with strategic publics. Excellent PR is characterised by participation in strategic management, symmetrical communication, and leadership through communication managers rather than technicians. The study concluded that although non-excellent conditions exist in Slovenia, a country undergoing a transition to democracy and privatisation, the comparative study provides evidence that the same

principles cluster into an Index of Excellence in different cultural, political and economic contexts. However, the study was limited to small sample sizes.

White and Blamphin (1995) developed a delphy study to establish a public relations research agenda in the UK. The final list of 16 research priorities includes, in descending order of importance: public relations measurement and evaluation; the definition of public relations; the need to integrate public relations with other communication functions; strategic planning for PR; the relationship of top management with PR; professional skills in PR; the impact of technology on PR; the image of PR; the expectations of users of PR; PR's role in organisational change; the quality of public relations services; international issues of PR; ethics in public relations practice; the impact of media content; gender issues in public relations practice; and features of the market for public relations service. It is particularly revealing that the definition of public relations is listed as the second major priority for research. The authors also show that British practitioners are generally unaware of the existing academic research on public relations.

III.5 Conclusion

The bulk of empirical research into public relations in the UK is quite recent. Most of it was carried out during the 1990s, reflecting a growing interest in the public relations phenomenon as an object of study. Understandably, these first studies were mostly exploratory and descriptive in nature. Moreover, they tended to build upon the perceptions of in-house managers responsible for, or otherwise involved in, public relations (Ashford and Towers, 2000; MacMillan, 1983-1984; Arber, 1986a and 1986b; Smythe, Dorward and Lambert, 1990; Kitchen, 1993, Panigyrakis, 1994; Moss *et al.*, 1997; Varey, 1997, Grunig, L., Grunig, J. and Vercic, 1998). Few studies included consultants (as opposed to in-house practitioners) in their samples (White and Blamphin, 1995, MacManus, 1997; Watson, 1993). A single study had a sample of *only* public relations consultants (Dibb, Simkin and Vancini, 1996). In addition to the newly growing academic research, some of the available studies into British public relations were developed by public relations consultancies (for example: AGB Communications, 1984; Countrywide Porter Novelli, 1998; Smith Doward and Lambert, 1990). Not surprisingly, these reports tend to present a positive impression of the industry. Nevertheless, it is productive to consider some of the resulting data.

British public relations has its historical roots in the efforts of local and central government to develop better relationships with local communities in the 1920s. The birth of public relations was closely linked with propaganda (derived from wartime and peacetime initiatives of government), an association that prevails today in the widespread negative image of public relations. It was after the Second World War that consultancies stated to appear on a scale that justified the statement that an 'industry' was emerging.

The growth of the industry was fuelled by the investments of the business community during peacetime. Since then the industry has continued to grow, and it enjoyed a boom in the 1980s due to environmental changes including the race for mergers and acquisitions, and increasing pressure on organisations to act, and be seen to act, in more socially responsible ways. Although these changes created new strategic ways of

communicating with specific publics (e.g. in financial public relations), the most visible practitioners were publicity officers dealing mainly with media relations. These 'gin and tonic' men would be known by an array of pejorative terms, as the most visible part of their 'public relations' work would involve the organisation of parties and the use of a fertile list of contacts.

The growth of the PR industry was not steady; it followed many different directions and appeared in many forms. Today, public relations is perceived and conducted in a wide variety of ways, by a variety of people, under a variety of titles. The growth of the industry suggests that consultancies are increasingly influencing organisations' public relations activities, although it is not clear how they are doing so. Thus, consultancies are in an advantageous position to increase the understanding of their clients – corporate managers -- of the potential of public relations, and to diffuse the use of necessary skills. However, the industry has yet to come forward with a significant body of tried and tested underlying principles to guide practitioners and further academic research. Professional education started during the 1950s with the initiative of UK professional associations, but despite these efforts there is still no rigorous system of entry by qualification.

Education is an essential part of the process of professionalisation, which seems yet to be accomplished successfully by the public relations industry as a whole. Traditionally, British practitioners have learned by 'trial and error', and they value 'experience' over qualifications, and subjective 'personal qualities' over specialised and vocational education. It is fairly clear that this method of obtaining knowledge needs to be replaced by formal professional and academic education. Although both educators and practitioners agree that education is important, there seems to be considerable disagreement between them over the precise role of public relations education. Practitioners often express doubts about the value of PR theory and question the usefulness of academic training. Academics complain that in the UK they are usually required to serve the interests of the PR industry.

Public relations in UK higher education has existed for little more than a decade. By 2000, 12 universities in the UK offered public relations at the undergraduate and/or

postgraduate level, although the subject is still rarely found in the leading universities. In the UK public relations education at university level is positioned in business schools and departments of marketing and advertising, and is characterised by an effort to integrate communication and management and to emphasise business skills. Thus, from the 1990s an increasing number of public relations graduates became available to enter the PR industry.

There is evidence that public relations in the UK is perceived and exercised mainly as a marketing tool, i.e. as a publicity function mainly at the product level. Public relations as a management function, i.e. as a strategy for managing relationships between an organisation and its various stakeholders (not just consumers) seems to be rarely used. This is mainly due to both a lack of understanding among managers of the potential of public relations, and a lack of legitimacy and/or preparation on the part of public relations practitioners to offer strategic advice at the board level. Hence, most practitioners do not develop evaluation or research, although consultants seem to be doing it more than in-house practitioners. The practitioners who are involved in some form of 'evaluation' engage in informal assessment procedures. The limitations of this approach are: a lack of knowledge of methodology, a disinclination to apply objective measures to programme performance, and a lack of budgetary resources or a reluctance to subtract costs from the budgets of the clients. Thus, most public relations practitioners have the profile of 'doers' rather than 'advisers'.

What is beyond dispute is that today's rapidly changing environment presents consultancies with both opportunities and threats. Investment in people is undoubtedly the necessary starting-point for the further professionalisation of the industry and the improvement of its reputation. In the future, it appears that the 'differentiator' between competing consultancies will be the quality of their strategic offering. Also, PR consultants need to develop their commercial understanding.

In conclusion, despite clear evidence of the increasing use of public relations in the UK, there remains insufficient understanding of PR as a distinct activity among managers, the general public, and practitioners themselves. Moreover, the lack of universal agreement among academics on the nature and scope of public relations also

points to the need for further empirical research. The most important areas of research for understanding the public relations phenomenon are: the operationalisation and measurement of the concept of public relations, and the evaluation of PR. In particular, the first research priority reveals that public relations is still at an early stage as both an academic activity and as an established practice.

The literature review for the present study (Chapter II and Chapter III) was conducted according to the exploratory nature of the research. The review sought to identify the main variables and constructs involved in the phenomenon of PR activity. It differs from an explanatory literature review, which would be concerned with the relationships between variables that have previously been identified and measured, after which hypothesis can be developed. The next chapter, Chapter IV – Methodology will present the principles and procedures of inquiry followed in this study.

IV. METHODOLOGY

IV.1 Introduction

The previous literature review chapters (Chapter II and Chapter III) revealed public relations as an embryonic area of research, though nevertheless emerging as an independent area of study from other academic disciplines (Pasadeos *et al*, 1999). This chapter (IV) describes the methods used to probe the research objectives of the study, which are exploratory: to provide a preliminary understanding of the public relations activity and to develop measurement scales for further research of the public relations activity. The first was sought through a holistic approach to empirically identify constituent elements of the PR activity and the second through their operationalisation.

A holistic approach was taken assuming that a more substantial contribution could be achieved through a general preliminary understanding of the complex phenomenon, rather than focusing on separate parts without the knowledge of which are the most important. The holistic approach was achieved by using three units of analysis, instead of one, allowing the study of the phenomenon from a variety of angles. They emerged from the literature review and preliminary study as determinant parts of the whole under study: public relations practitioner, public relations consultancy, and public relations industry. The study was also set to operationalize the identified constituent elements and determinants of the PR activity through the development of measurement scales relating to it. It intended to contribute to ground the developing understanding of what is public relations and to aid future research with valid and reliable measurements on attributes of the PR phenomena.

The chapter starts by explaining the research design developed for this exploratory study of the British public relations activity. The research design was constituted by preliminary interviews, a mail survey and follow-up interviews. Then, the various steps of data collection are reported, and the procedures for data analysis are specified.

IV.2 Research Design

Firestone (1987) differentiates quantitative and qualitative research across four dimensions: assumptions, purpose, approach and role of the researcher. First, in terms of assumptions, quantitative research considers that objective reality can be reached through facts while qualitative research considers reality to be socially constructed. Secondly, in terms of purpose, traditionally quantitative researchers attempt to explain causes and consequences, while qualitative researchers tend to press for an understanding of social phenomena. Thirdly, in terms of approach, whereas quantitative researchers tend to use observations, correlational, or experimental designs in which great effort is expended to assure objectivity and accuracy, qualitative researchers tend to use ethnography in ways that permit the reader to understand the world in the same terms as the actors. Fourthly, the role of the quantitative researcher is detached while the qualitative researcher is immersed in the setting. In determining the most appropriate research method to use, many researchers would argue that 'it depends on the research moment', or that elements of both methods should be combined, thus reflecting the belief that an 'either-or' choice is of limited value because it represents a meaningless dichotomy (Cook and Reichardt, 1979; Patton, 1980, Eisner, 1991; Creswell, 1994; Newman and Benz, 1998; Mingers, 1998). Hammersley (1992) puts forward a strong argument for the use of *both* approaches in a single research project, suggesting that the distinction between the two is more a matter of a degree than a simple opposition, and that a specific position on one scale does not necessarily mean a specific position on the other.

In practice, decisions on method are governed by the particular research context, purpose and circumstances. The researcher must carefully consider whether a single approach or a combination of the two approaches will be most useful. It is important

to recognise that each approach has its distinctive strengths and weaknesses, and that it is not a matter of regarding one as superior to the other. Indeed, both quantitative and qualitative approaches have a place in social research. Both can be used to gather the empirical evidence that is needed in a particular research project. For example, Newman and Benz (1998: 20) suggest an 'interactive continuum' on the grounds that 'each approach adds to our body of knowledge by building on the information derived from the other approach.' Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that both the scope and depth of research can be increased by combining qualitative and quantitative methods. They describe the research design followed in this project: alternate the two approaches, with exploratory fieldwork leading to quantitative instruments, and quantitative analysis being followed by further qualitative work. Qualitative research pursuing fewer subjects but investigating in much greater depth, and quantitative research being able to collect considerable data from a representative sample and thus assuring representativeness.

(1) Preliminary research: in-depth exploratory interviews tried to identify key variables and use those in the questionnaire (Appendix 1)
(2) Questionnaire survey probe the population at three levels of analysis: PR practitioner, PR firm and PR industry forces and contribute with valid and reliable measurement scales for further empirical research of the phenomena
(3) Follow-up interviews: to test external validation of new measurement constructs and provide context to the constructs

There were general research questions guiding the research, which were set up in advance, and specific research questions, which emerged as the empirical work was carried out.

IV.3 Data Collection

IV.3.1 Exploratory Interviews

The objective of the exploratory study was to gather preliminary data about the dynamics of the public relations industry. Although partially driven by the literature,

this first stage was mainly inductive. It followed a similar principle to that of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Bailey, 1978, Lincoln and Guba, 1985, Patton, 1990) as a strategy for research (not as a way of analysing data), based on the following rationale: there was no existing satisfactory theory on the topic, and there was not enough knowledge to begin theorising (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The principle is that "the theory emerges from the data, it is not imposed on the data" (Patton, 1990). The data-collection process was thus guided by the main research question: what is public relations, and what were its characteristics in England at the end of the 1990s according to public relations consultants? There are two main areas to question the public relations industry in the UK and the public relations concept in the mind of PR practitioners. A start was made at the empirical level in order to end up at the conceptual level (Patton, 1990). In this respect, the researcher paid particular attention to the point made by Miles and Huberman (1994), that one of the key characteristics of qualitative research is to offer a 'holistic' overview of the context under study by capturing data on the perceptions of the research subjects from the inside.

A total of 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews were carried out with public relations practitioners in England during the end of 1997 and beginning of 1998 (Table IV-1). The sample included male and female practitioners involved with, or responsible for, the public relations function across a variety of agency sizes and specialities in four locations in England (London, Birmingham, Leamington Spa and Bournemouth). A major aim was to achieve diversity of firm type in order to achieve a good variety of perspectives. Thus, eight interviews were conducted with various sized public relations consultancies and one with an independent consultant. Two in the professional associations for public relations (IPR and PRCA) in the UK, and International Institute of Communication, one in a marketing consultancy, and two in advertising agencies (one with a public relations department, one without). On average each interview lasted an average of one hour and 30 minutes, and, with the interviewees' permission, all the interviews were taped for subsequent analysis.

The researcher took an interview guide (see Appendix 2) containing several 'grand-tour' questions (Spradley, 1979: 86-87; Werner and Schoepfle, 1987: 318-343). First, there were biographical questions about the respondent and his or her company, and these were followed by open, non-directive questions to allow respondents to talk more freely. After several interviews, some recurring themes were identified, and these were subsequently framed as questions only if the interviewees did not mention them spontaneously.

Table IV-1 -Preliminary interviews respondents

Interviews with professional associations and other institutes			
Position	**Institution**	**Duration**	**Date**
Director	PRCA – Public Relations Consultants Association	120m	10/11/97
President (Ex-President of IPRA)	IIC– International Institute of Communication	60m	4/12/97
President	IPR – Institute of Public Relations	80m	13/02/98

Interviews with public relations practitioners (in-house and consultants)				
Position	**Institution**	**Location**	**Duration**	**Date**
Independent consultant	--	London	120m	16/01/98
Managing Director	Small PR firm	Birmingham	85m	23/01/98
Director of Corporate Affairs (Ex-President of IPR)	Large company (Energy Sector)	London	60m	03/02/98
Vice Chairman	Leading PR firm	London	80m	03/02/98
Managing Director	Small PR firm	Leamington Spa, Coventry	90m	05/02/98
Managing Director	Small PR firm	Bournemouth	75m	11/02/98
Executive Director	Medium sized PR firm	Birmingham	40m	17/02/98
Director of Corporate Communications	Large company (Pharmaceutical)	Manchester	20m	26/02/98
Managing Director	Large PR firm	London	40m	20/02/98

Interviews with other communications practitioners				
Position	**Institution**	**Location**	**Duration**	**Date**
Executive Assistant to the CEO	Large advertising agency	London	20m	03/02/98
Managing Partner	Large advertising agency	Southampton	35m	10/02/98
Chief Executive	Large marketing consultancy	Manchester	50m	26/02/98

IV.3.2 Main Survey

After identifying the key issues of the industry through exploratory interviews, a questionnaire survey was developed in order to probe data on the characteristics of public relations practice, generalisable to the British industry. The survey had the objectives of (1) offering a holistic view of public relations, by exploring practitioners' opinions about public relations at three levels or units of analysis: practitioner, firm and industry, and (2) creating measurement scales of identifiable dimensions of the public relations phenomena.

IV.3.2.1 Survey sampling

According to Gravetter and Wallnau (1999: 4), any sampling process is 'intended to represent the population in a research study'. Thus, the method of selecting a sample influences its representativeness. Taking as a basis the total population [N= 2308] (the sample frame was the Hollis Directory 1998/99), a questionnaire survey (Appendix 1) was mailed to 1,000 managers of public relations consultancies in England. Budget limitations did not allow for the inclusion of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was not expected that a survey of the whole of the UK would significantly change the core findings, although it would be expected to highlight regional differences. Control of double entries was made in order to minimise duplication of companies in the sample.

IV.3.2.1.1 Stratified random sampling

The 1,000 PR firms were selected through stratified random sampling. Eight strata were selected according to the geographical location of the PR firms. Among the various possible criteria, geographical location was used because, contrarily for example to size criteria, such as number of employees or turnover, this information was fully available in the Hollis Directory. Furthermore, sampling through the geographical criteria might be adequate if it is taken into account that the PR industry is highly influenced by the nature of businesses it serves, so just as with the size criteria, it is acceptable to expect that a PR consultancy in London differs from a PR consultancy in Warwickshire. Similarly to reports on the distribution of PR firms

(PRCA Yearbook 1998), the geographical distribution of the population in the sample frame is higher in London.

According to Wayne and Terrel (1995), stratified sampling consists of two operations, the determination of the total sample size and the allocation of sample sizes to strata. The formula for the stratified random sample is as follows.

Equation IV-1: Formula for stratified random sample (Wayne and Terrel, 1995: 871)

$$n = \frac{z^2 N \sum_{h=1}^{L} N_h S_h^2}{N^2 d^2 + z^2 \sum_{h=1}^{L} N_h S_h^2}$$

N (population size) = 2308
$N^2 = 5326864$
N_h = nr of units on the h*th* stratum
N_1=858
N_2=299
N_3=351
N_4=166
N_5=139
N_6=154
N_7=210
N_8=131

z (probability error assuming standard normal distribution) = 1.96
$z^2 = 3.8416$

d (level of confidence desired) = 0.95
$d^2 = 0.9025$

μ (population mean) = population size/ number of strata = 2308/ 8 = 288.50

S^2 (sample variance) = $\frac{\sum (N_i - \mu)^2}{N-1}$

S_h^2 = (the variance of the units contained in the h*th* stratum)

$$S_{h1}^2 = \frac{\sum (858 - 228.5)^2}{2307} = 140.585$$

$S_{h2}^2 = 0.0477$

$S_{h3}^2 = 1.6932$

$S_{h4}^2 = 6.5046$

$S_{h5}^2 = 9.6880$

$S_{h6}^2 = 7.8414$

$S_{h7}^2 = 2.6711$

$S_{h8}^2 = 10.7526$

Thus, n = 212.38.

After the first operation, 212 responses were established as the minimum number of questionnaires for the sample to be representative, for a 95 per cent confidence level.

The second operation was set to establish the minimum *n* for each of the eight strata. The formula for calculating the sample size for each stratum is as follows.

Equation IV-2: Allocation formula for stratified sample (Wayne and Terrel, 1995: 871)

$$\boxed{n_h = \frac{N_h}{N}(n)}$$

$$n_1 = \frac{858}{2308}212 = 78.9 \text{ (London)}$$

$n_2 = 27$
$n_3 = 32$
$n_4 = 15$
$n_5 = 12$
$n_6 = 14$
$n_7 = 19$
$n_8 = 12$

In conclusion, Table IV-2 shows that the sample obtained for the study exceeds the minimum required for both the overall sample and each stratum.

Table IV-2 – Stratified Sampling: cases obtained for each stratum

Geographical distribution of population (N)		Minimum required for a level of confidence of (d =) 0.95	Sample actually obtained	Difference
London	($N_{i=}$) 858	79	82	+3
Home Counties	299	28	40	+12
South East	351	32	42	+10
South West	166	15	31	+16
North East	139	13	25	+12
North West	154	14	29	+15
Midlands	210	19	33	+14
Eastern	131	12	15	+3
TOTAL	*2,308*	*212*	*297*	*+85*

A total of 297 completed questionnaires were analysed, equivalent to an effective response rate of 29.7 per cent. For item analyses of previously untested items (of up to 40 or 50 variables), a sample size of 300 is considered good (Gorsuch, 1997).

A further 11 questionnaires were undelivered for various reasons (address unknown, firm moved, or addressee deceased), and five questionnaires were excluded from the analysis because less than 50 per cent of answers were completed. Telephone calls and letters were received from a number of firms indicating that participation was not possible due to company policy or time constraints.

IV.3.2.1.2 Chi-square test of proportion adequacy

The chi-square test was used to check if the sample proportions fitted the population proportions as specified by the null hypothesis (Ho). The null hypothesis (based on a known geographical distribution of the population) states that the population is divided in the following proportions among eight geographical categories:

London	Home Counties	South East	South West	North East	North West	Midlands	Eastern
37.17%	12.95%	15.20%	7.19%	6.02%	6.67%	9.10%	5.68%

Table IV-3- Stratified sampling: expected frequencies

Known values of the population		Population percentages *(p)*	Sample individuals obtained *(n)*	Expected frequency $f = pn$
London	N1= 858	*p1*= 37.17%	n1= 82	110.39
Home Counties	N2= 299	*p2*= 12.95%	n2= 40	38.46
South East	N3= 351	*p3*= 15.20%	n3= 42	45.14
South West	N4= 166	*p4*= 7.19%	n4= 31	21.35
North East	N5= 139	*p5*= 6.02%	n5= 25	17.88
North West	N6= 154	*p6*= 6.67%	n6= 29	19.81
Midlands	N7= 210	*p7*= 9.10%	n7= 33	27.03
Eastern	N8= 131	*p8*= 5.68%	n8= 15	16.87
Total:	N = 2308	*p*=100%	n = 297	

The test demonstrated that for an alpha level of (α=) 0.01, X^2 (7, n=297) = 20.52 is higher than the critical value of 18.48. In conclusion, the populations have different shaped distributions (Ho is rejected), but the sample size and response rate were more than adequate to represent the total population being studied.

IV.3.2.2 The Development of the Survey Instrument

The generation of the questionnaire items (Appendix 1) for the scales relied on both preliminary research results and theoretical notions of public relations practice (Lichtenstein *et al*, 1990). Based on the findings of the preliminary interviews, which revealed important recent trends and issues, and considering the scarcity of knowledge in the literature, a new research instrument was developed. The emerging issues can be grouped into three levels of analysis, which were translated into three units of analysis: public relations consultant, public relations consultancy, and public relations industry. This allowed to pursue a holistic view of public relations by looking at the same problem from a variety of angles. The final version of the questionnaire (Appendix 1) included the following sections: public relations activity; links between public relations and other communication disciplines; professionalism and professional associations; training; competition; academia; research and evaluation; clients; the profile of the agency; and the profile of the respondent (Appendix 1 - Questionnaire).

The questionnaire was developed through a multi-stage process. First, the literature was studied to confirm the scarcity of verified scale items that measure dimensions relating to public relations practice. Secondly, five public relations practitioners helped to refine the draft questionnaire. Frequently mentioned issues were converted into items (Lichtenstein *et al*, 1990). Likert scales ranging from [1] 'strongly disagree' to [5] 'strongly agree' were used for most items (Floyd, 1998), and continuous data were recoded into this format. Thirdly, a pilot survey was sent to 15 agencies. Only one response suggested the need for further improvement. Therefore, at a fourth stage, in order to assess the content validity[1] of the items the questionnaire (Appendix 1) was sent for feedback to three public relations practitioners (including the single respondent to the pilot survey) and six academics (business PhD students and staff), who were asked to fill in the questionnaire and to identify the items that should be retained (Bearden *et al*, 1989). As a result, a clear and more easily readable version of

[1] Content validity is "a subjective measure of how appropriate items seem to a group of reviewers who have knowledge of the subject matter" (Litwin, 1995: 35). Although it is not a scientific measure, it allows a bases for assessing a survey instrument's validity.

the questionnaire emerged. Fifthly, the face validity[2] of this new version was assessed by four people who had no knowledge of public relations. Based on their feedback, minor changes were made. This process improved the questionnaire by facilitating the inclusion of new items that had not been identified from the literature review or the qualitative exploratory research. The final questionnaire was mailed on 22 February 1999.

IV.3.2.3 Data-collection Procedures

The data collection involved three phases. In the first phase, a personalised cover letter, one questionnaire, and a pre-paid reply envelope were sent to each respondent. Complete confidentiality was assured and a summary of findings was offered to each person who returned the completed questionnaire. In the second phase, one week after the initial mailing, a personalised reminder letter and a pre-paid envelope were sent to those who had not responded. Telephone calls were also made to practitioners in those geographical areas where the number of returned questionnaires fell below the stratified sampling level, prompting the practitioners to return the questionnaire. Some additional questionnaires were mailed upon request.

IV.3.3 Follow-up Interviews

While the initial interviews aimed at facilitating the subsequent quantitative approach by providing background information and aid scale construction, the final interviews aimed at explaining the factors underlying the broad relationships that the quantitative approach established (Punch, 1998).

Sixteen in-depth interviews were carried out. Sampling was aimed at selecting respondents that would be in position to offer views from different contexts, so as to provide external validity to the main findings. Size was the criteria to select PR practitioners. During preliminary interviews size emerged as a very important contextual factor to practitioners views. Size was also the construct which correlated

[2] Face validity is considered to be "the least scientific of all validity measures" (Litwin, 1995: 35). However, by showing the questionnaire to individuals who have no knowledge of public relations, some extremely useful

the most with other constructs (Table VII-6). Three large, four medium and four small PR firms and one independent consultant, which did not take part in previous stages of the research, were randomly selected through Hollis Directory (2000). A second criteria of expertise or recognised knowledge about the public relations world was used to select non public relations practitioners. Members of both professional associations and two editors of leading professional publications were also interviewed. A visual representation of the main findings (Figures VIII-1 and VIII-2) was used to discuss the validity of the data and respondents were asked for their contextual situation to discuss the extent to which they would identify those as the main issues and why. The follow-up interviews were used to inform the discussion (Chapter V).

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feedback can be obtained.

Table IV- 4 - Follow-up interviews respondents

Interviewee job title (used in text)	PR firm size	UK turnover (2000)[1]	Location	Membership	Date (2001)
Interviews with managers of PR firms					
Chairman of large public relations consultancy	**Large public relations consultancies**	£25,707,000	London	PRCA	9 April 90 minutes
Chairman of Corporate Division at large public relations consultancy		£25,924,000	London	PRCA	2 April 80 minutes
Chief Executive of large public relations consultancy		£3,580,000	London	PRCA	28 March 120 minutes
Managing Director of medium sized public relations consultancy	**Medium public relations consultancies**	£513,000	Winchester, Hants	PRCA and IPR	26 March 90 minutes
Managing Director of Medium sized public relations consultancy		£500,000 – 1 million	Birmingham	PRCA and IPR	17 April 60 minutes
Head of Public Relations of medium public relations consultancy		£780,000	Birmingham	None	17 April 50 minutes
Managing Director of medium marketing and public relations consultancy		£500,000 – 1 million	Worcestershire	--	3 April 50 minutes
Marketing Manager of small sized PR consultancy (part of larger group)	**Small public relations consultancies**	£326,000	London	None	12 April 80 minutes
Director of small sized consultancy		Up to £500,000	Worcestershire	None	3 April 90 minutes
Managing Director of small/medium sized consultancy		£706,000	Warwickshire	IPR	29 March 120 minutes
Manager of small sized consultancy		Up to £500,000	Warwickshire	None	30 March 80 minutes
Independent media and marketing consultant	**Independent consultant**	--	Warwickshire	IPR	18 April 120 minutes
Interviews with Professional associations and PR experts					
Member of IPR's Board of Directors	**IPR – Institute of Public Relations**				10 April 90 minutes
Member of PRCA's Board of Management	**PRCA – Public Relations Consultants Association**				28 March 60 minutes
Editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in PR	**Expert on British PR**				2 April 90 minutes
PR Editor in one of the UK's leading professional publications in marketing	**Expert on British PR**				19 March 120 minutes

IV.4 Data Analysis

IV.4.1 Interviews

A four-step method of inquiry (from the particular to the general) was used to analyse the interview data. First, each utterance was analysed in itself (ignoring its relationship with other aspects of the text) and an 'observation' was created. Secondly, the observation was examined in relation to the text. Thirdly, the second-level observation was examined in relation to the literature review. Fourthly, patterns of inter-theme consistency and contradiction were determined. Fifthly, the patterns and themes that emerged from the interviews were subjected to a final process of analysis. The objective of this analysis was to determine the categories, relationships and assumptions that would allow to characterise view of the world in general and of the topic in particular of each respondent. Three sequential goals were followed: describing, classifying, and connecting concepts (Dey, 1993: 30)

IV.4.2 Questionnaires

The data for multivariate analysis were scrutinised to meet the assumptions of the method. They were checked for outliers and missing data. When the normality or linearity assumptions were violated, variables were transformed by being inverted, or their square root or logarithms were taken when appropriate (Hair *et al*, 1998). All missing values were replaced with the statistical mean.

A three-step approach to data analysis was adopted. First, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was conducted to examine the component structure of the data for the construction of scales. Secondly, the reliability of the emerging components was evaluated to further refine the scales. Thirdly, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was performed in order to give a truer estimation of reliability and formally test the unidimensionality (a group of measures representing a unique construct) of the scales.

IV.4.2.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis

As explained by Gerbing and Anderson (1988: 189), EFA 'is particularly useful as a preliminary analysis in the absence of sufficiently detailed theory about the relations of the indicators to the underlying constructs'. According to Floyd and Widaman (1995: 286), *explanation* is one of the exploratory uses of factor analysis (the other being data reduction) and is used when 'the investigator has no firm *a priori* expectations based on theory of prior research about the composition of the subscales, and thus the analysis is used to discover the latent variables that underlie the scale'. In other words, EFA is employed to reveal the underlying constructs between variables within a data set (Churchill, 1979). This is done by constructing scales on the basis of the resulting factor loading. The use of this technique helps to identify components that are independent from each other, thereby enabling the understanding of the structure of a specific field (Hair *et al*, 1998). EFA is an independence technique in which there are no dependent or independent variables, as all variables are simultaneously considered. Using SPSS 8.0 (1997), the EFA was developed with principal components analysis (PCA) (based on the covariance matrix) and was performed with Varimax rotation. Principal components are the most common method for extracting the components (Hair *et al*, 1998). Most applications using the other available method -- common factor analysis -- will give essentially identical results if the number of variables exceeds 30 (Gorsuch, 1990). Varimax rotation was chosen, as in this study most components are orthogonal (uncorrelated) (Floyd and Widaman, 1995). If the subdimensions are in fact related, the strength of these relationships could not be anticipated *a priori*.

At the second stage of the analysis, the coefficient alpha was computed to assess the reliability of the components and of each item within the components in order to further refine the scales. Coefficient alpha remains the most widely used measure of scale reliability (Peterson, 1994).

IV.4.2.2 Confirmatory Factor Analysis

CFA is more rigorous and more parsimonious than the traditional forms of EFA -- coefficient alpha and item-total correlation -- and thus provides more rigorous conclusions about the acceptability of a scale (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988). Despite the popular use of CFA as a truly 'confirmatory' approach to test pre-specified theoretical models, it can also be used for exploratory purposes (Gerbing and Hamilton, 1997). As stated by Gerbing and Anderson (1988), 'exploratory factor analysis can be a useful preliminary technique for scale construction, but ... subsequent confirmatory factor analysis would be needed to evaluate, and refine, the resulting scales'. While EFA is guided to a certain extent by intuition and *ad hoc* rules, CFA tests the quality of the factor solution (Kelloway, 1998). CFA tests the unidimensionality of a scale initially developed by EFA (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). Unidimensionality refers to the existence of a single construct underlining a set of measures (Hattie, 1985; McDonald, 1981). As Nunnally (1978: 274) states, 'items within a measure are useful only to the extent that they share a common core - the attribute which is to be measured'. When using EFA, each component is defined as a weighted sum of all observed variables. Thus, the emerging components in EFA do not correspond directly to the constructs represented by each set of indicators. Therefore, the construction of scales based on the analysis of the size of the factor loadings does not allow an evaluation of unidimensionality (Gerbing and Anderson, 1988; Jöreskog and Sörbom, 1993). CFA also provides a better estimation of reliability than coefficient alpha (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). While coefficient alpha assumes that different indicators have equal component loadings and error variances, CFA takes into account the differences between the existing indicators (Styles, 1998).

A series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) were estimated with the programme LISREL 8.3 (Joreskog *et al*, 1999) for measuring validation (Bagozzi *et al*, 1991; Bollen, 1989). Data were analysed under the exploratory aim of the research through a rigorous reliability and validity test of the proposed measurement scales.

IV.4.2.3 Triangulation

Triangulation checks the findings of one type of data against the findings of another type (Mathison, 1988) with the aim of enhancing the overall validity of the findings (Punch, 1998). The advantage is that since both quantitative and qualitative research can present validity threats, triangulation is advised as it "reduces the risks of systematic distortions inherent in the use of only one method" (Maxwell, 1998: 93) and 'enhances our belief that the results are valid and not methodological artifact' (Bouchard, 1976). The underlying assumption is that triangulation allows to compensate for the weaknesses of each single method with the strengths of other methods. In the present study, it became possible to combine analytic generalisation with statistical generalisation, and consequently to reduce bias and check the external validity of the study (Brannen, 1992). Denzin (1978: 301-302) distinguishes between 'across methods' and 'within-method' triangulation. 'Across methods' triangulation, as used in this study, means the use of multiple methods to study a particular dimension of the research problem. 'Within-method' triangulation uses multiple techniques to collect and analyse data within the same method. Morse (1991) suggests that triangulation between qualitative and quantitative approaches can be done in two ways: 'sequential triangulation', used in this project, allows the findings of each phase to help the planning of the next phase; 'simultaneous triangulation' (not used here) means that the researcher answers qualitative and quantitative research questions at the same time, and the results are reported separately (Morse, 1991: 121).

IV.5 Conclusion

This chapter described the methodology used to develop the exploratory study. The research design used a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods in order to answer to different research questions. Exploratory interviews were followed by a questionnaire survey, after which follow-up interviews were performed.

The first objective of this research is exploratory, to provide a preliminary understanding of the public relations activity. It was sought through a holistic approach to identify constituent elements of the PR activity, about which no preliminary empirical evidence was available. Therefore, the preliminary study was done through 15 in-depth exploratory interviews and a general exploratory interview guide was used. Respondents discussed issues previously identified by the literature and identified new issues relevant to it. After the analysis of the preliminary study, the topics and variables were associated with the public relations activity levels -- practitioner, consultancy and industry forces --, which were translated into units of analysis and used to construct the research instrument for the main survey.

Similarly, the questionnaire survey was aimed at the exploratory objective of providing preliminary understanding of the public relations activity through generalisable descriptive statistics. In addition, the questionnaire survey was aimed at a second objective of developing measurement scales for further research of the public relations activity. The questionnaire was mailed to 1,000 managers of public relations consultancies in England, which were selected through stratified random sampling from a 2300 sample frame. A chi-square test demonstrated the sample was adequate to represent the population under study. 297 valid questionnaires (29,7% response rate) were analysed through exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with the programme SPSS 8.0 to examine the component structure of the data. EFA was followed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) estimated with the programme LISREL 8.3 (Joreskog *et al*, 1999), in order to test nine scales and their link with the three dimensions of PR activity: practitioner, consultancy and industry forces.

Follow-up interviews (16) were developed in order to on the one hand test external validity and on the other obtain insights about what 'these' constructs, present in the final measurement scales, meant to their particular context. And on the other hand, about why certain constructs correlated with each other in order to obtain a preliminary understanding about the co-existence of elements in each dimension of the PR activity phenomenon.

Following this chapter's description of the methods used to collect data in order to address the research questions, data analysis is going to be presented throughout the next three chapters: Chapter V presents the preliminary findings, Chapter VI presents a descriptive overview of the survey findings, and Chapter VII presents the multivariate analysis of the survey findings on the British public relations industry.

V. *EXPLORATORY FINDINGS*

V.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the preliminary study. The preliminary study was developed through 15 semi-structured in-depth interviews with PR practitioners (both in-house and consultants), leaders of PR professional associations and advertising and marketing practitioners (Table IV-1). Preliminary interviews were set to identify key issues or major themes, and to assist the development of a survey instrument totally constituted of public relations items. Respondents discussed issues previously identified by the literature and identified new issues relevant to the PR activity. All the direct citations provided as evidence in this chapter refer to the preliminary interviews.

The preliminary study searched for what were the variables involved and several exploratory topics were used to guide the interviews (Appendix 2). Given its exploratory nature, the preliminary study was *not* searching what are the relationships between the variables which have been previously identified or measured after which hypothesis can be developed. Thus, the following two research questions guided the preliminary study: How is public relations conceived by PR and other communications practitioners? And, what, in the view of those practitioners, are the key issues for public relations activity?

V.2 What is Public Relations?

> If you could achieve an understanding of what PR actually is, and I was the Queen, I would give you a knighthood! (*laughs*)
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

'What is public relations?' appears to be an extraordinarily difficult question for both academics and practitioners. Interviewees expressed some doubts about the accuracy of the designation 'public relations' to describe their activity.

> It [PR] is very difficult to term. I don't know if PR is the right term – it is because you are working with the public, I suppose.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

Two main reasons for this uncertainty emerged. The first is that 'public relations' evokes different senses, failing to provide a unifying meaning. The second is that the term has pejorative connotations. Despite these doubts, however, 'public relations' was the expression used by majority of interviewees to refer to their activities, although they interpreted the term in different ways.

V.2.1 Public relations domains: communication, marketing and management

With few exceptions, interviewees found it difficult to answer the question 'What is public relations?' They suggested diverse and apparently unrelated meanings for the term. However, further analysis of the exploratory data suggests some common ground. The interviewees place PR in three broad domains: communication, marketing and management, although individually they make different associations with these domains. Some consider PR to be synonymous with communication; some see communication as much broader than PR. Some see it as synonymous with marketing; some as a tool of marketing. Some see it as a tool of management; some suggest that there is no such association.

This lack of agreement explains why practitioners seem to encounter difficulties in explaining what it is that they do:

> One of the biggest problems I've had is that people ask 'what do you do?'. I say I'm a PR consultant -- people ask 'what is that exactly?' It is very difficult to explain.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Bournemouth]

Despite this ambiguity, there is general agreement that communication (more than marketing or management) is an essential part of PR:

> PR is what we mean by communication. We are here to do something logical, planned. We are about communications structure. We have to try and explain to them [clients] that a PR consultancy covers quite a few services – about a dozen kinds, called communications.
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

Communication was generally seen as the core of PR, but was not seen as the core of marketing nor management.

V.2.2 Corporate PR and marketing PR

Three categories of communication were emphasised by the interviewees: 'technical communication', 'the management of communication' and 'communication as a marketing tool/support'. Additionally, two implementation levels were identified: when PR is practised at the organisational level – corporate public relations; and when PR is exercised at the service/product level – marketing public relations:

> Corporate means that you are working on the company rather than on the individual products – so we are talking about Cadbury Schweppes, we're not talking about Bourneville chocolates -- that is marketing support.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

The first type, corporate PR, accommodates the first two communication categories: technical communication and the management of communication. Some respondents stated that the industry is experiencing an expansion – more than a substitution – from the practice of technical communication to the management of communication:

> The bulk of PR consultants spend a lot of their time on press relations and marketing. It is only recently that the area I call corporate communications has started to develop: what I call strategic work, where you deal with all aspects of every stakeholder.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

The second type, marketing PR develops communication to support marketing. In this context, public relations is frequently used together with the other disciplines of the communications mix. PR is seen as a marketing tool by most interviewed consultants -- except for representatives of professional associations -- and by all the other communications professionals, i.e. advertisers and marketers, who were interviewed:

> PR is a marketing tool, it's helping a brand or service influence a consumer. It's part and parcel of a brand touching its ultimate consumer.
> [Managing Partner of a large and established advertising agency, London]

> PR support in the launching of a range of products can be quite effective.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Interviewees frequently mentioned that corporate PR and marketing PR are differentiated by their target audiences (or publics). While corporate PR typically deals with all the internal and external publics (e.g. the community, suppliers, customers, government), marketing PR commonly focuses on consumers and customers.

The exploratory study provided evidence that public relations has at least two different areas of action: corporations and products or services, which determined different types of practice. Interviewees suggested that at the corporate level public relations is used as a management tool.

V.2.3 PR as a management tool

There was no agreement among respondents on the relationship between public relations and management. Majority of respondents reported that PR is increasingly developed as a management tool; many acknowledged that PR is used as a management tool in certain specialised areas but do not recognise PR is not a tool of management *per se*.

Generally, there is a perception of change. Clients are perceived to have an increasing need for strategic advice and to have an increasing awareness of the contribution of PR at the management level. And thus PR is perceived to be changing from an exercise that would be requested occasionally to something that is part of the organisation's management exercise.

> I've been in the business a long time and I think it has very definitely changed – it is now more organic in terms of being part of management. PR used to be something that was added on. It wasn't part of the total approach to management. And I think it is now. Companies realise that it does have a role to play.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Bournemouth]

As the strategic end seems to be growing as a profitable business opportunity, there are PR firms that are developing the capability to offer it. This implies that the

strategic end of PR is new and under development. Other than the leading PR firms, it is not clear whether most consultancies are preparing to conquer the profitable strategic end of the market.

> There is a growing demand for high-level strategic and management expertise; companies are prepared to pay a premium price for this, especially at times of crisis management, but in calm as well. And you can see that a number of companies such as ours are developing, within their overall capacity, the capacity to provide senior staff with a broad range of experience and expertise at strategic and management levels.
> [Vice-Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

On the other hand, other interviewed PR practitioners do not recognise PR as a tool of management. They perceive the suggestion as an attempt to upgrade the activity to a more highly regarded domain, to which it does not belong. Though acknowledging the useful input of management disciplines, these interviewees did not consider public relations to be a component of management:

> I don't think we want to get above ourselves, any more than a lawyer thinks he's a management consultant. You know we are ultimately providing a specialist tool, which I believe can build a business's revenue line. But I don't think we want to be telling clients how to be running their businesses.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

> We've hired a lot of management consultants who bring management disciplines to the communications field. This is obviously applied to an understanding of the business environment that our clients work in. But I think that is very different from saying we are part of the management process.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

Despite the debate on PR's status as a management tool, there was some agreement among respondents, which repeatedly described PR as an 'umbrella' activity to suggest that PR is simultaneously corporate PR and marketing PR, respectively working at the corporate and product levels.

> The way we see it and explain it to our clients, you have the umbrella of PR (ad agencies would hate us saying this) in terms of the corporate reputation, credibility. Under individual sections are advertising, direct mail, sponsorship, marketing. We provide the unifying message and then work together with them at the individual products.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

The most elaborate answer to the question 'what is public relations?' positioned public relations as a very particular form of communication: two-way communication at the organisational level and with all the organisations' stakeholders or publics.

Again, the evolution of clients' needs towards 'dialogue' and 'the management of relationships' seems to be promoting a major change in public relations:

> The big development in the field is happening as corporations switch from being communicating one-way to communicating two-way, which means they've got to reach all their stakeholders. To have a dialogue, that's what that's all about -- relationships! It *isn't* about sending a press release -- it is about what is the relationship between the customer and company, or the shareholders and the company, or the local community and the company, or Greenpeace and the company. It is about managing relations.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication -- and Ex-President of IPRA – International Public Relations Association]

This interviewee sees public relations as a two-way communication (dialogue) requiring strategy. He illustrates that the significance of public relations is not in sending a press release, but on the relationship behind it. In addition, the quotation highlights public relations a management function: 'managing relations' through the use of research (to learn, through measurement, beyond what shareholders or publics 'think' to what they 'expect'). This idea of *managing relationships* between an organisation and its publics through two-way communication is quite close to some of the more recent academic definitions of public relations (Brunig and Ledingham, 1999; Hutton, 1999), which include research-led PR and evaluation. Thus, whether PR is a management tool is debatable, there is evidence that many consultancies have actually been selling strategic communications at the management level to their clients.

V.2.4 Agreement on the main goal of public relations: reputation building

There was considerable agreement when it came to identifying the primary goal of PR. Most interviewees stated that it is reputation building. This term suggests a favourable perception or opinion that a public has of a person or organisation. There were, however, different views on the best process of achieving this goal. Interviewees mentioned three different ways in which PR seeks to achieve a favourable reputation: knowledge (mostly by providing information); opinions; and relationships. Each implies a different level of complexity, but it was not made clear by interviewees how the process of communication would develop from each one.

V.2.5 The degree of market sophistication as a determinant of PR type

The degree of market sophistication - associated with clients' needs and their understanding of public relations – appear to be a key determinant of the type of PR that is developed:

> I wouldn't say we offer 'strategic management expertise'... There is a difference with what I imagine is a more sophisticated marketplace with very sophisticated audiences down in London and the South East.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Preliminary data suggest that in the more sophisticated markets there is a higher probability to use *managerial* communications, and in the less sophisticated markets there is a tendency to practice more *technical* communications. The findings also suggest that the most widespread practice across all markets is media relations, which is itself developed at different levels of complexity.

V.2.6 The diversity of the areas of practice of public relations

One of the most significant features highlighted in the exploratory research data was the diversity of public relations' areas of practice. This diversity covers a large spectrum of activities:

> PR covers all sorts of stuff from media relations to lobbying to... you name it! PR is a pretty wide discipline.
> [Chief Executive of a large marketing consultancy, Manchester]

Furthermore, at each extreme of the spectrum one can find quite dissimilar attributes:

> PR is a number of disciplines – everything from lobbying to the local garage having a relationship with the local newspaper advertiser.
> [Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London]

This diversity of activities under the designation 'public relations' creates 'sub-disciplines' of public relations. In the opinion of one interviewee, communication is their common feature:

> There are a lot of special sub-disciplines of PR, such as investor relations and lobbying. But at the end of the day it's all coming down to the same thing, which is trying to use communication to change people's perception, to create more awareness, and affect behaviour.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

How, then, should we distinguish public relations activities from other forms of communication? It is in fact not easy to establish the boundaries of PR. This difficulty arises from the sheer multiplicity of practices at dissimilar levels of sophistication and requiring quite contrasting skills. The 'sub-disciplines' of public relations that interviewees mentioned most frequently were 'marketing PR', 'lobbying', 'investor relations', 'crisis management' and 'media relations'.

V.2.7 Integration with other communication disciplines

Beyond communication, marketing and management, respondents mentioned other disciplines with which PR frequently deals. Most of the time PR works with other disciplines from the communication mix when it is used as a marketing support tool. All interviewees claimed to practise integrated communications. For some, it means working simultaneously with other disciplines, while for others it means working with communications in as coherent a manner as possible:

> Integrated communications strikes me as a buzzword, actually. Yes, we offer a fully integrated approach to communications. I don't think I've thought these things should be anything other than integrated.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Some consultants stated that marketing should lead the integration process when public relations is used along with other disciplines from the communications mix. Other consultants suggested that PR is the 'overall umbrella'. But most believe that it works best when clients are the ones leading the integration process:

> When the client is in control of the situation is the best thing, rather than a discipline. He or she can be the brand guardian because he or she is the hub – with an advertising spoke in one agency, a PR spoke, a packaging spoke, a design spoke. Everyone comes with a discipline that brings expertise.
> [Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London]

There is also evidence that public relations works together with other disciplines from the communications mix, and that the potential for competition is lessened if the integration process is managed by the client instead of a discipline.

V.2.8 Public relations and advertising

Advertising was the discipline that was seen by respondents as being most frequently mistaken with public relations. Interviewees acknowledged that clients sometimes

perceive an overlap between the two disciplines. This seems to be partly related to the traditional location of PR as part of an advertising agency, and partly to the fact that clients tend not to distinguish boundaries among communication disciplines when working with teams:

> The advertising department and the ad agency contained public relations and I think there is some old-style thinking still that sees public relations as part of advertising.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

It was pointed out by interviewees that if there is a conflict between public relations and advertising, this is generally due to the inevitable competition for clients' budgets rather than any necessary overlap between the two areas. This competition has been fuelled by a general shift of budgets from advertising to public relations, as an evidence of the increased awareness of the contribution and affordability of public relations:

> It is more of a business conflict because they are competing for budgets – where moneys which should go to an advert are going to PR.
> [Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London]

> I think we are seeing clients' budgets being switched from advertising to PR. There is a greater realisation of PR and what it can do and that it is not overcharging like advertising.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Nevertheless, advertising continues to command substantially larger accounts than public relations,

> If I am a large marketeer, even if I have a large PR budget, it is unlikely to be anywhere near as big as my ad budget.
> [Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London]

Advertising is still maintaining the biggest share in the communications mix used by organisations by a considerable margin. Notwithstanding, PR is perceived as steadily gaining ground, adding to the idea that this is a period of change for the discipline. It seems to be moving towards the strategic end of the continuum, it seems to be increasingly accepted in the management board, and it seems to be gaining terrain to other more established disciplines of the communications mix.

V.3 The UK PR industry: evolution and contemporary characteristics

V.3.1 Evolution

The 1980s were a turning point in the evolution of the public relations industry in the UK. There was a great boom in the growth of the industry, which bought with it greater awareness of public relations services, but at the same time an array of amateur practitioners which would start a PR business without any prerequisite,

> The industry went through a period of very rapid growth in the 80s -- I mean *massive* growth.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

> Basically, in the 1980s if you could turn up on time in a meeting and write basic English... you had a PR job! And you probably had a client base.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

Consequently, a very visible number of players had low standards and at that time PR consolidated a very poor reputation, which persist today. In the words of one advertiser:

> There was the 80s overload: 'Dolly and Ab-Fab2', 'I'm in PR, darling' – all about getting coverage by 'dolly-birds with accents and blonde hair, journalists, freebies, and parties.'
> [Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London]

During the 1990s for better or worse, the PR industry became more visible to business and the public. On the one hand, the awareness of how the activity could contribute to organisations increased, and on the other hand, confusion about its precise function preserved. Public relations was vastly exposed by the UK media both as a high profile powerful and mysterious activity, especially in the British political scene. But the same media would expose how responsibly corporations reacted to mediatic disasters, drawing attention for the role of communication for crisis management.

> [In the UK] especially over the last 10 years, PR has come to be much more in the public arena, even on things like the Royal Family, and successful Tony Blair election show the art of PR (they call them spin doctors). So recently we have examples not only of how things have been handled extremely well, but also those which have been done extremely badly because -- and this is very important -- the media now not only report on events as they happen, but how

> the organisations respond to them. There was a rail crash, an aircraft crash, BSE, pharmaceutical problems -- that's increased the understanding... or at least awareness of it.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

> If you talk about political PR and spin doctoring, it has been much more in the public domain. Mandelson and the demon eyes Saatchi did for the Tories brought it to the fore.
> [Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London]

This for better or worse disclosure of the 1990s is nevertheless perceived to be positive when compared with the past. During the 1990s PR was legitimated by its has successful commercial existence, which is perceived to have a future. More are organisations aware of its existence and valuing its contribution than before. PR is seen to have conquered a 'credibility barrier' in the past and to going to conquer a credibility barrier in the future.

> I think the 90s have been a period of consolidation — the 80s was like the wild west. I think the 21st century we will be very much part of the mainstream of commercial operation.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

> The industry is bigger, and as a whole has gone through a sort of credibility barrier, since -- certainly 20 years ago -- many companies, many senior executives neither understood PR nor saw any value in it. I don't think there is any doubt that many major companies see communications in the broader sense as a proper and legitimate professional task which needs some amount of PR.
> [Director of Corporate Communications of a large company, Manchester]

One of the interviewees pointed out that, in the 1980s, public relations was by definition a second chance career, and the existence of formal education and the gradual consolidation of the industry is steadily transforming it into a career of first choice:

> I think in the early 80s, PR was still very much the industry of the second chance – people who had tried politics or journalism or financial analysis in the City, or whatever. If, for any reason, they did not like their chosen career, PR was the industry of the second chance. My degree was in Economics at UCL; then I got involved in Politics and I lost my seat in 1979 – that's how I got into PR.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Despite all of the acknowledged advances, there are certain characteristics of the contemporary UK PR industry as a whole which remain difficult challenges. Although the industry is in many respects considered one of the leading public relations

industries in the world, with continuous growth, it is still marked by confusion for what it stands for, unequal professional standards and an overall negative reputation.

V.3.2 Growth

The current growth of the British public PR industry is remarkable: The continuous growth of the public relations industry seems to defy the problems still to be resolved within itself. The rate of growth of PR suggests that increasingly organisations need and search for the various services that are considered to be part of public relations:

> If you think of how quickly public relations has grown in the last 15 years, it really has -- in England -- gone from being a very small cottage industry to an industry that is now very successful and has large multi-million pound clients.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Respondents are optimistic about the future. Most believe that organisations will increasingly need public relations due to growing environmental pressures for accountability and transparency. Consultants believe that they will have a key role to play in helping organisations to communicate effectively with publics and deal with external pressure:

> We live in society where the demand for transparency and accountability is growing, and for companies that manage it carefully, it rebounds on their general reputation, the general confidence people have in them. [They] need the help from us as PR professionals – so again I see a rosy future for the industry.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Although interviewees seemed to be reassured that there is a market for their services, they also questioned whether the PR industry is prepared to win the many challenges.

Respondents described the UK's PR industry as the second most developed in the world after the US, and pointed out that many world leading PR firms are UK based,

> I think that it [the UK] is the most sophisticated marketplace outside the United States; although clearly less developed than the United States. What is quite intriguing about the British PR industry is that two of the world's three biggest players are British owned and managed.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

> I would say the UK and the US are the most mature markets. I would not say the US is better than the UK/Continental Europe, although it started in the US after the war.

[Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

V.3.3 Unequal professional standards across the industry

The British public relations industry is characterised by greatly varying professional standards to such an extent that many respondents identify more than one PR industry. One interviewee proposed three distinct parts: the world leading international PR firms, the elite financial PR firms, and the bulk of the industry representing varying degrees of quality. This was mostly attributed to the fact that the industry is still immature and in the process of consolidation:

> And I think there are really two [PR] industries. I think there is a top echelon of international firms, like Burston-Marstella, Shandwick, and Hill & Knowlton, who are offering real corporate counsel to multinational international firms. There is also an elite group of agencies (there are probably five such firms in London, and three or four in the United States) which are serving mainly the financial communities in London and New York. And they all operate at the highest standards of performance. I think there is then a general layer of the industry, which has characteristics of highly variable professional performers.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

> It covers in this country a range of professional skills [...] -- it's not like the law or one of the ancient professions. It's still growing and trying to define itself.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Many interviewees perceived that a range of standards can be found across the public relations industry and that only a minority of PR firms is in position to guarantee high standards. Size is perceived as relating with standards, with the biggest firms in a better position than the smallest ones:

> The mainstream players – they are very professional. I think what you've got -- and don't get me wrong – is some medium consultancies, some smaller consultancies and some individuals who are not able to provide a certain service. I am not knocking them, but the truth is the standards of some of the smaller consultancies are not the same as the larger ones in all services.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

The concern with the quality standards of the industry as a whole reflects a worry that a majority of the PR firms, which are small, does not yet achieved those.

V.3.4 Negative reputation

Respondents stated that the poor reputation of the industry is partly an inheritance of the past, partly a misrepresentation of PR by the British media, and partly the

responsibility of unprofessional PR firms. All damage the reputation of the industry as a whole:

> Years ago it used to be gin and tonic and lunch – I used to get so annoyed. That doesn't happen – not for 15 years. Now, the truth is that the image is still there to an extent.
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa)]

> All these high-profile people -- some help the understanding of PR, but most well-known ones are just adding to the confusion. The spin doctors such as [*name*], who sticks up all these stories about ministers. He's sometimes called 'a PR' – he's actually a publicist! But people don't see the difference, do they? Generally PR people are actually transmitting the truth and trying to conciliate interests. Yes, they may actually pull out the odd negative, but they are not actually telling a lie.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

> You only need a couple of consultancies to over promise, not having the guts to say: 'sorry, that is not my expertise'; then they can't deliver and here you are: it brings down the reputation of everyone.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham)]

The unfavourable reputation of public relations seems to emerge at two levels: the nature of the public relations activity itself and the professionalism of the industry as a whole. Public relations is frequently perceived as manipulation of truth, biased persuasion, and image-driven rather than substance-driven. The lack of a clear definition of what PR is, or of a clear explanation of its different areas of expertise, encourages a perception of it as something mysterious and disingenuous. Despite external circumstances, the responsibility for a change in the reputation of public relations is responsibility of the industry to clarify its mission, improve standards and tell it to the world. The reputation of the PR industry requires PR for itself.

V.4 The main challenges for the industry

Among the challenges to be overcome by the industry, two main issues emerged in the preliminary study: (1) the lack of unambiguous agreement by the industry as a whole on what public relations is; and (2) the recognition that the PR industry is not yet at the same professional standard as other industries. Thus, despite growth and improvements, some key problems remain, as one of the interviewees commented:

> In the early 1980s it was such an immature industry. Very easy entry, quite a vague description of what people actually did... I think there are elements of that still in the industry.

[Managing Director of a small PR firm, Bournemouth]

V.4.1 The need for high professional standards across the industry

Respondents argued that the main challenge for the public relations industry is to achieve high professional standards across the industry:

> I would like to think the PR industry is much more professional – I am not sure that it is in all areas. I think that we won't grow as rapidly in the next few years if we don't put in place unquestionable professional standards.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

The achievement of 'unquestionable professional standards' requires the establishment of clear performance criteria. The resolution of this critical issue would result in a significant enhancement of the reputation of the industry:

> As any PR expert would tell you, you cannot change the image of the industry just by a basic image campaign. You have to do it by gradually improving working standards; the world has to see it! Years and years to go yet – research on how to evaluate PR; strengthen and convey the body of knowledge...
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

Professional standards require the concerted effort of the industry as a whole, but professional associations have a particularly important contribution to make.

V.4.2 The contribution of professional associations

In the UK there are two professional associations representing public relations practitioners: the IPR (Institute of Public Relations) and the PRCA (Public Relations Consultants Association). The IPR represents mainly in-house practitioners and accepts individual memberships, while the PRCA represents consultancies. Many interviewees proposed a merger between the IPR and the PRCA to form a single, stronger body:

> Some people think that the PRCA and the IPR ought to merge. Well, I think in principle it is a good idea because -- although the industry has grown very rapidly -- it is still quite a small industry compared to banking or law or accountancy to have two professional bodies.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

The existence of two associations representing two groups of professionals suggests lack of unity. The interviewees observed that there are significant differences between

consultants and in-house practitioners, although they can unite under a common agenda,

> Intellectually there is no reason why the two organisations could not combine. Culturally and emotionally it's maybe because we represent in a sense different sides of the industry. For many years it was considered to be adversarial... that if you worked in-house then you had to watch out for consultants because if you were a consultant you had to try and manoeuvre your way around.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Many comments seemed to imply that PR professional associations are not as strong as interviewees would like them to be:

> I would rather see a single body, a chartered institute of public relations, that would represent right across the industry ... a chartered institute which would be a guarantor of standards, which would bring a meaning to the membership when hiring someone: Are you a member of the IPR? What are your qualifications? Have you ever been before an IPR disciplinary panel?
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Accreditation, or the act of certifying that a practitioner maintains suitable standards, is not seen to be enforced by professional associations in the near future:

> We should have a powerful professional body governing the industry – universally recognised as the setter of standards. Those who could not meet them would simply be excluded! People talk about the IPR becoming the chartered institute – like accountants or lawyers -- but I think we are some way off that. Maybe within the next 20-30 years...
> [Director of Corporate Communications of a large company, Manchester]

Professional associations were considered to have contributed to professional standards principally through the training courses they provide to practitioners and managers. However, the majority of respondents felt that more should be done. According to an ex-President of the IPR, there is a need for the enforcement of qualifications, the representation of the interests of the industry, and a defence against unqualified entrants:

> Well I think there are three things to be done. One, to raise standards by evaluation, by examination, by qualifications, by regulation. I think secondly they can represent the industry better, and by that I mean there is a tendency to think that the best representative of public relations is, for the sake of argument, someone like [*name*], who has been involved in lots of high-profile cases involving celebrities. Why? Because actually no one organisation speaks on behalf of the public relations industry and actually says: 'here is the value of public relations, this is what it delivers, this is of benefit!'. And thirdly, a defensive role, to actually make sure that new entrants can't break into the market without actually fulfilling certain professional criteria.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Another respondent suggested that the professional associations' defence role should include a public defence of the industry against attacks on their members:

> Public relations practitioners are insulted daily! You can say whatever you want against the profession! Who is there to defend us, to sue for calumny? It should be them, the trade bodies. Tell me, would anyone dare to insult a lawyer on prime time TV? You might joke that lawyers are vultures, but the truth is they have strong defences.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

For the Director of one consultancy set up in a small town, membership of a professional association should be a means of gaining more clients:

> We are a member of the PRCA and I'm a member of the IPR. My opinion? They are essentially bureaucrats. We want them to pass on leads primarily. We have massive rows in the Midlands because all the business is in London and we don't get much. So does being a member means we have quality compared to the non-members? If that is true - where's the business?
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

When talking about professional associations, some interviewees asked the interviewer to switch off the tape. Speaking freely about the issue, representatives of small-sized consultancies stated that they are not treated equally due to their size and geographically remote location. They also raised some concerns about the lack of clear standards to judge the competence of a PR firm.

V.4.3 Entering the boardroom

Despite some disagreement among practitioners on whether public relations is a management tool, there is no doubt that much of public relations practice depends on support from management. Interviewees reported two levels of public relations engagement with management. The first is the need for public relations to be acknowledged as a valid function by management:

> Changes over the last 10 years – I would say the main success is that the industry has managed to get through to chief executives and directors of organisations and make them appreciate the benefits that can result from practising PR in an organised, planned way.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

The second is the need of PR to be acknowledged as a *part of* management:

> The prudent company will take as much PR advice as legal or financial advice when making decisions. So in that respect PR has won the battle for credibility in the market place. Now, whether the communications director is on the level of the finance director yet – no, I don't think so.

[Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Respondents suggested that the first of these needs is now being met, but the second remains an aspiration:

> In the UK, PR is seen as being a support service rather than being part of senior management. In this country there have been PR directors who have been on the main board, but quite often it is knocking on the door of the main board rather than being on it.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Two of the main barriers preventing PR from entering the board room are its lack of credibility as a management discipline, and the fact that managers – and many practitioners – lack the knowledge of how to practice public relations at this level:

> The PR industry needs to become more sophisticated if it is to get into the board room. It can improve if the client forces management and business skills on the industry. And doing more in the academic world [...] to teach on MBAs, management courses, about where PR fits in to manager's thinking – in their language.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

If indeed public relations areas such as crisis and issue management are increasingly valued by organisations, one could expect more and more clients seeking advice:

> I think that is a growing trend in the industry – helping companies to look ahead, crisis and issue management. The thing is the industry isn't yet credible as a management tool.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

The management of communication in pursuit of long-term relationships that result in an enhanced reputation demands specific managerial skills such as strategic thinking and evaluation. Unlike technical skills, these can only be acquired by either formal education or intensive training, but most of all by a specific understanding of what public relations is and how it should be practised.

V.4.4 Higher education

In the UK, the PR activity fascinates and attracts many young graduates.

> We're among the most popular choices for advanced graduates in the UK.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

> Without a doubt, people do want to get recruited by this industry. As a consultancy we get inundated -- maybe three or four letters a week -- with requests. Without any recruitment adverts, just out of the blue.

[Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

However, graduates who choose PR do not seem to have a competitive advantage in seeking to enter consultancies:

> I'm not against them having a degree, not at all – I believe we should have a graduate but not necessarily in PR. Other candidates coming from a degree in something else can actually be better.
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

The representatives of some firms suggested that the work they did was not sufficiently complex to be handled by someone with a university education. Thus, the view that a graduate is not necessary seems to be linked to the particular type of public relations practised by a consultancy:

> I don't think having a degree in PR matters. PR is all about techniques you pick up. Because I think that the key thing in our business is being able to get on with people. And in consulting two things are very important: first, there is the personality factor; secondly, there is being able to write -- not novels, but putting information together in a coherent way.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Bournemouth]

> We do mainly media relations. I don't think we need a graduate to do that, honestly.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

Generally, personal skills are often seen to be more important than having a degree in public relations:

> There are people who are comfortable in the media, who look good, who are articulate, who can see the angle... Certainly this firm is not prepared to waste time teaching people who don't have those intrinsic qualities. So we are looking for naturals.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

The larger consultancies are concerned that PR graduates often come from universities of questionable quality, which makes them less desirable despite the vocational choice.

> I think we need to continue to attract not only graduates in general, but the *best* graduates. Unfortunately many PR graduates are from universities that are not particularly high quality, and a company like ours needs to attract 'A' level candidates who might be otherwise going for management consulting or other established professions.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR firm, London]

Some comments clearly revealed a negative attitude towards the contribution that academic institutions could make to the industry, which reveals depreciation for

theory and academics. And, by rejecting PR as an academic subject, reveals depreciation for the discipline itself.

> I don't think we have a lot to learn from the academic world because it's often a soft course. It's often taught by people who've not made it in our industry and would never make it in the industry. What we are doing here isn't brain surgery.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

Nevertheless, there were some consultants with a different opinion about hiring public relations graduates. They suggested that the vocational factor that leads someone to choose to study public relations is a competitive advantage:

> I think it's a waste that consultancies don't recruit graduates who chose PR as their vocational area. We have four here. I guess that because they came from PR my expectations were higher. The truth is their writing skills were not particularly impressive, but they understand PR and love it. I would have to teach writing to any other graduate anyway; it is better to be someone with a vocation for it.
> [Executive Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

These interviewees also felt that a reluctance to hire graduates specifically from public relations shows that some consultants feel threatened by their own lack of qualifications in public relations or see graduates as competitors:

> I think that many consultants don't want to hire public relations graduates, not because they're not good enough but because they fear they might be confronted with their own shortage of training. They feel threatened.
> [Executive Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

The concern over whether PR graduates are adequately prepared, e.g. in terms of their writing skills, points to the need for a better dialogue between public relations academics and practitioners. An industry striving for higher standards should be able to derive benefits from the positive achievements of higher education, and from the available people which chose public relations as their first choice and hold a particular knowledge about it.

V.4.5 New technology

The new technologies are seen by most respondents to offer valuable opportunities. They make more communication channels available to communication practitioners, organisations and active publics. They hasten the exchange of information and are changing the way people and organisations communicate. Technology is increasingly available not only to organisations but to publics as well. And as publics become more

sophisticated and predisposed to take actions and to press for change, organisations have to be able to clear misunderstandings, acknowledge responsibilities and respond effectively:

> Companies have to understand they need to be accountable and be quick enough on their feet to have their communications in place at any time. Particularly in the situation where you might have a crisis or issue that affects one part of your business, technology -- modern communication -- means that news and information can be across the world literally in seconds.
> [Director of Corporate Communications of a large company, Manchester]

Leading PR firms see technology-driven changes as an opportunity for PR, by creating new communication challenges to be solved.

> The increase in information and its speed of transmission contribute to a need for professional help in assimilating all that. New technology brings new PR problems. We were talking to a large company the other day that was being targeted by a pressure group through the internet. They were worried about how to handle such an attack – how you respond, how to monitor... it's a real opportunity.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Interviewees pointed out that new technologies also mean changes in the way practitioners work. The availability of databases and statistical programs provides new ways of disseminating and presenting information:

> The way you can organise information through technology has made a huge difference. You know the days of having to wade through hundreds of pages of press cuttings or back copies of newspapers and magazines have really gone.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Most interviewees recognised that in order to understand technology and its implications for corporate communications, consultancies have to invest in technology and know-how. By achieving that understanding, they will gain a competitive advantage:

> I'm not really sure if the whole industry is aware of how important it will be; and what a competitive advantage it will be to understand the new technology. Trying to understand the new field meant we have invested a lot of money. Again, the truth is that big companies and some specialist niche operators will operate in this field, whilst others continue to make a living – albeit less glamorous -- in bread and butter PR.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

If indeed the understanding of new technologies is dependent on financial resources, smaller consultancies with fewer resources might miss out on this important opportunity.

V.4.6 Competition

Interviewees believe that the PR industry is substantially more competitive today than in the past. Two types of competition were mentioned: cross-competition within the industry and competition from outside the industry. The first is largely stimulated by the low barriers to new entrants of the industry. PR does not require any formal training or any proof of qualification. It is perceived by many as an easy activity to develop, requiring little or no initial investment, and no elaborate knowledge. One interviewee the non-existence of barriers to new entrants into lighter form by arguing that is an inevitable feature of an immature industry and that the market logic will preserve only the most competent:

> It is an immature industry, one which is still growing and defining itself. Not something which is worth worrying about because it is a fact of life – an industry such as ours has relative ease of access. There are no professional qualifications or bodies which have to be satisfied before you set up in PR. I believe the market takes care of that in the long run, because it is easy to enter but not as easy to survive.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Despite the self-regulatory forces of the market, interviewees agreed that the absence of entry requirements is damaging for the industry as a whole. There are no means to prevent incompetent and unethical practice:

> Here in the Midlands -- and I believe this is the same elsewhere -- we have witnessed a substantial number of small PR companies - many are one-man bands -- being formed. Some are not ethical or competent.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Increased competition within PR was seen by a respondent in two lights: a positive one, because it pushes standards up; and a negative, because it drives fees down:

> There is an increase in laying off for small players — many agencies appeared and some also disappeared just as quickly. There is a complaint that competition is driving fees down but on the other hand it is good because it is pushing up quality and standards.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Increased competition from other areas is seen as a serious threat to the PR industry -- particularly competition from advertising, marketing and management consultancies, which are seen as potential winners of common business areas due being more established:

> One threat I see which is increasingly getting bigger is management consultants. What they do is that they have access to top executives and they have the credibility.
> [Executive Assistant to the CEO, representing the Chairman of a leading advertising agency]

For example, specialist PR areas like the profitable financial PR face potential competitors who are more established, namely accountancy firms:

> There is another big challenge to public relations with the more established disciplines. We could find ourselves competing with law firms and accountancy firms, all of whom may feel that they can do financial PR.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Access to the upper-level of the industry is not as easy, mainly due to the higher investment effort in qualified personnel and financial resources. The more established public relations consultancies do not seem to fear large competition, probably because a few of them will be direct competitors for the same market. There seems to be a belief that a the natural forces of the competitive market select the best and reject the worst:

> I'm not that worried about competition. I think that in London perhaps the market is a bit more competitive in a way, but it is also more sophisticated and therefore the market really determines who is successful and who isn't.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

In addition to the issues that affect the industry as a whole -- obtaining higher professional standards for the majority, education, new technology and competition -- several other challenges facing consultancies emerged from the interviews, as we will now see.

V.5 Main challenges for consultancies

V.5.1 Research and evaluation

The importance of evaluation was reported by *all* PR practitioners interviewed,

> I don't think evaluation is a buzzword. One of the real problems with PR is how do we justify it, how do we measure it. Without evaluation you - we - in public relations will be judged by other people's standards and what they think is good or bad public relations.
> [Director of small PR firm, Bournemouth]

Research-led PR and the evaluation of its results are recognised as being particularly important for practitioners implementing public relations as a management tool. They feel under pressure when working side-by-side with more established disciplines against whom PR has to prove itself worth of investment,

> We have to show the client we've delivered. We have to put the numbers on the table just like marketing does, just like advertising does. The multinational client would not just take your word for it.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR firm, London]

The interviewees described evaluation as a vital, reassuring sales-weapon for a field of practice that was often perceived, even by practitioners themselves, as intangible. They stressed that the benefits of research-led public relations and evaluation for the efficiency of the whole public relations exercise had not been sufficiently recognised. Nevertheless, evaluation is seen as a *business* tool by most interviewees, as a way of proving to clients that public relations does work, rather than being seen as improving effectiveness:

> We have to ask ourselves what is the purpose of evaluation. The purpose of evaluation is really to make sure that the industry can justify its commercial viability.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

> You can do all these things [evaluation techniques] which give you a *feeling* of whether a PR message is getting through, but it remains an imperfect science -- measurement is extremely difficult. Now, anyone who can produce it for clients has a competitive advantage. Why staff [in this company] have put so much effort into it is that it is a selling point to clients to say: 'We can evaluate it.'
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Despite global recognition of the value of evaluation, at least as a business weapon, the existing difficulty of evaluating the outcomes of PR efforts was felt by many interviewees as either an obstacle or an impossibility,

> The problem is that PR by its very nature is more difficult [than advertising] to measure. If you spend some money on advertising a product and sales go up by 10%, it is reasonable to assume that it is the result of advertising. People are less willing to believe the exact correlation between PR and the end result even if PR is specific to a product. Now, it is more difficult to measure the impact of a PR campaign on reputation.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Cost was reported by interviewees as the main obstacle to evaluation.

> Part of the research issue is cost sensitivity: who will pay for it?

[Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

> There are all sorts of ways and means. The cheapest way is just to look at the standard of media coverage. Is it positive or is it negative? It's very basic but not that expensive to do. Then you can get more sophisticated with formal research on specific target groups. That's a lot of effort and it does come out pretty expensive.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Beyond cost, the following obstacles to evaluation and research that were mentioned by interviewees: unwillingness to pay the necessary costs, perceived as very high; absence of well-defined objectives; and scepticism about the value of research. These can be attributed both to the practitioner and to client, although the second tends to be blamed by practitioners:

> The big issue is that companies need to become more sophisticated than they are -- otherwise there is no point in researching and evaluating. And companies rarely have tight enough objectives. There is no point in doing research in a vacuum.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

A further obstacle to evaluation is the lack of sophistication in developing public relations, namely its understanding and practice as a short-term activity:

> I think we must move people away from the idea that public relations is about short-termism. It is not. Public relations is about sustained programmes that have an impact over a period of time.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Further analysis of the preliminary data suggests that a lack of knowledge and skills and practitioners' lack of confidence in being held accountable are potent obstacles to evaluation, probably hidden by social desirability:

> We should be able to be self-confident enough as an industry to know that we have a competitive advantage and we have got to crystallise it, and evaluation is one way of doing that.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Traditionally, PR evaluation is developed by counting column inches after exposure in the mass media. It offers the advantages of being the least complicated and least expensive evaluation technique. Despite the obvious advantages, interviewees were well aware of the obvious limitations of the basic and unreliable practice. It does prove the existence of an outcome but does not provide a dependable assessment of

that outcome. It is therefore of limited use for a research-led PR process, which relies on evaluation to make decisions and corrections.

> There is a tendency in public relations to be simply a function of how much press coverage you get for your clients. Well, that is a very, very narrow definition.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

> Traditionally, the only way to do it was some attitude research prior to starting and 18 months on to evaluate how it was doing. They would add up column inches: 'we've got you "x" inches multiplied by 3 times the ad value equals "x" thousand' -- absolute nonsense! It is very difficult to evaluate it.
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

> One of the mistakes I think the industry often makes is that we assume that by getting a press article published, we can in some sense influence opinion... Well, what you've done is you broadcast a message which may or not be received. If it is received, it may or may not be interpreted in the way that you want.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

Leading consultancies do seem to be developing research-based public relations and evaluating PR through more sophisticated methods and seem to be made itself voluntarily accountable:

> As a firm, we do take the research-led approach. And I think we are quite good at agreeing performance parameters with the clients in advance. And indeed we return fees if we don't deliver.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

> So actually tracking attitudes is a vitally important part of what we do. We do quite a lot of communications research on what audiences think.
> [Director of Corporate Communications in a large company, Manchester]

Leading firms' client corporations are willing to pay for evaluation in order to access the return on their large investments. Furthermore, leading consultancies also possess the necessary resources to conduct research and evaluation -- from money to know-how:

> My experience has been that it certainly is a good selling tool in that it can, especially for a bigger contract, be a comfort factor for would-be purchasers.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

> We bought the know-how to be able to research. That work is actually headed by an Oxford PhD who runs effectively a research function within the firm.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

Acknowledged or not, obstacles to research and evaluation should be tackled by the industry as a whole, according to most interviewees. Probably with the exception of the leading consultancies, individual PR firms find it difficult to win those obstacles to evaluation on their own. Investment is needed by the industry to discover and agree on a common approach to evaluation:

> We as an industry don't make any investment really in our industry other than obviously encouraging people to be members of the IPR and join the PRCA. We have to go further than that!
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

> I think the [PR] industry needs to spend more time and money on working out formulae for evaluation; just like they have to spend money on educating and training staff.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

Investment is also needed by individual practitioners in terms of the time and money required to learn and apply research and evaluation:

> You need investment [in evaluation] at two levels. It needs the investment of the industry itself to be prepared to put funds into finding a common measure. It also needs investment from those who offer public relations services to take the time and trouble to understand the evaluation model that the public relations industry wishes to be measured by.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

The difficulties associated with the use of research-led PR are closely related to the understanding practitioners have of PR itself. It is only a justifiable approach if public relations is conceived and implemented as a strategic discipline with quantifiable objectives. If a practitioner accepts this assumption, he or she still has to acquire the specific knowledge of how to plan, implement and analyse a research approach. Thus, the widespread use of research-led public relations cannot become a reality without education in a particular conceptualisation of public relations and also training in research skills. Although there are similar difficulties in promoting the widespread use of evaluation techniques, this does seem to be a more feasible task because it is not as dependent on a particular conception of public relations and it is easier to learn. Furthermore, evaluation is seen as providing a business competitive advantage and also something that more and more clients will demand.

V.5.2 Training provision

Most contacted firms do not provide their own formal public relations programmes to their staff, with the exception of the leading consultancies:

> Personally, I don't think we actually do enough here [in training]. The weak areas are strategic skills and then very specific skills like constructing two-way channels for the client's internet site. Now we do encourage people to go on certain courses, to participate in IPR events and seminars, to read and to listen...
> [Executive Director of a medium sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Consultancy size (in terms of the number or staff and operations) and lack of resources are the main raisons given for consultancies not making a formal training effort:

> Another limitation is that most PR companies are very small operations... Even the biggest – and this office employs 80-90 -- struggle to develop good PR training programmes. And that is where one has to rely on the IPR and other bodies to provide the training programmes.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

The firms that do not have formal training try to transmit knowledge and skills from senior to junior practitioners:

> We don't have a formal training programme as such. Having my experience, I teach my staff most of the skills they need.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Birmingham]

At the upper-end of the industry, among the biggest and more competitive consultancies, the mobility of personnel is a feature. For these PR firms, one of the barriers to training is the belief that soon after being trained, staff will leave to join a competitor:

> The very nature of this industry is of a merry ground – people get restless after two or three years. On the swings and roundabouts we know that we are training someone who may get approached, but we also know that we get the benefit from people who have trained elsewhere.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

> 'Why should we train for other people to poach?' For the big firms it is worth training because they need the qualified staff anyway.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Training is frequently provided by the professional bodies: the IPR and the PRCA. All the larger consultancies interviewed had used these facilities and generally found them to be beneficial.

V.5.3 Clients Perceived Understanding of PR

Despite some recent improvements, most interviewees consider that the majority of clients do not fully understand or appreciate public relations. Like practitioners, clients are perceived to have diverse opinions about PR:

> The understanding of PR by clients depends on the type of firm. If you were talking about a major consumer goods manufacturer, PR would essentially be aligned to marketing. Other large companies would use it as a reputation-builder at the corporate level. People in smaller companies, which are not so consumer focused, [...] would immediately think it's about being heroic.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Bournemouth]

Most organisations see PR as a means of carrying out technical tasks or call for PR only in times of crisis. Management rarely views public relations as a proactive activity:

> In all fairness to PR, I think top management needs to learn about it. They still look at it as technical: Can you get me on the cover of the FT? If I have a crisis I'll come to you, otherwise I'm not interested. It's one-way, not a dialogue. What 'I' want to get out of it, what 'I' want to tell people.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

> Top management still looks at PR as a defensive tool: 'I'll hire someone who has got good contacts in the government, or in the press, or who can help my share price.' They don't see it in its totality, as what a PR person should be doing in terms of total reputation.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

Practitioners have encountered a range of client expectations. Some organisations do not appreciate the full potential of PR. Other organisations have an inflated expectation of what PR can achieve.

> As a general rule, the PR industry – I'm talking about the UK – still has to convince management that it is worth using the function.
> [Chief executive of large marketing consultancy, Manchester]

> My direct experience with some clients was they had an expectation of the efficacy of PR far beyond its limit. [...] sometimes a communication make-up is not enough and they do have to make some fundamental changes. We can provide the means for identifying the source of the problem and maintain the dialogue channel open... They call us as if we were wizards with a magic wand – 'abracadabra' and the PR problem is gone.
> [Managing Director of a small PR firm, Bournemouth]

Some interviewees attribute the lack of understanding or misunderstanding of the full potential of PR to an education deficiency of the typical managers. The traditional training of a future manager does not usually involve the management of communication to corporations:

> Managers are ill prepared to understand PR. This is partly the fault of the PR industry, but not totally. The whole education process needs to be much improved. Managers training -- MBAs, management, marketing -- do not properly promote the benefits of strategic corporate communication. I know that because have had that training.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

Hence, from the consultants' perspective, most clients, i.e. managers, do not fully understand the benefits of PR for their organisations. Also, many clients are only partially aware of the benefits of PR or actually see the whole PR enterprise as questionable.

V.5.4 Information management

Interviewees referred to the increasingly important role of information management. The quantity and complexity of information are now overwhelming, and this leads to the question of how best to manage information and thus, to one more business opportunity:

> One of the major trends is the ability to manage future information and to bring back a package that is accurate, logical and ready to bring a message that is easily understood by audiences.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

> Apart from the image and the problem of lack of training, the biggest issue for PR is how to manage information.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

Respondents considered writing skills to be especially important in dealing with the management of information, which is generally seen as an intrinsic part of the public relations practice.

V.5.5 Internationalisation

Some respondent consultancies, excluding the small-sized ones, reported that more and more clients are internationalising and asking for global campaigns. Again, it

seems that the leading consultancies are in the best position to exploit this business business opportunity:

> The other factor is the fact national companies are organising PR on a global basis. They tend to look for just one agency -- international offices -- for the whole world to put out a consistent message.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

> Now, if you are Shandwick or Burston-Marstella or Hill and Knowlton, you can provide an international dimension. So you can say to me I can provide you with the same quality of public relations advice in Portugal, France, Germany, Italy, Russia or wherever it is, and then I will be interested as a client because I would not have to do that myself.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Similarly, the preliminary data suggest that specialisation is becoming an important trend at the upper-level of the industry.

V.5.6 Specialisation

Specialisation demands high levels of expertise, which are more readily found among larger consultancies. Providing a narrow specialised service depends not only on adequate market sophistication but also on sufficient market size:

> I think you have two different situations: London/ the South East and the rest of the country. In London they tend to be specialists and they are much more expensive. This doesn't mean to say that there aren't specialists in the regions -- they just can't be depended on in the regions. Any generalist company -- like ours -- will be serving the region in which they are based and serving a wider range of organisations.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham]

Thus, smaller consultancies or consultancies outside the main urban centres are inclined to offer generalist services. Larger consultancies with bigger clients tend to be specialist or both specialist and generalist:

> We are involved in what we call providing a *full service* for them: it's media relations, community relations, employee communications, crisis PR, publications, special events, product launches, all sorts of things. And a lot of marketing support in there.
> [Director of a small PR firm, Leamington Spa]

> As a leading consultancy you have the advantage of providing specialised service, as well as the ability to be everywhere in a way. (What a great marketing statement -- I will have to remember that.)
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Larger client organisations are increasingly seeking external expertise in very specialised areas where they do not possess in-house knowledge. An in-house practitioner, Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation suggested this option is more cost effective. He argued that there is a difference between advisory work and execution work, and that organisations such as his (a large firm) will do their own in-house execution work but buy-in specialised advisory work:

> For a long time, companies felt they needed to have public relations advisors to help them with certain PR tasks, I don't know, sending out press releases or arranging meetings with journalists or helping design brochures. Now most people have woken up to the fact that that is a waste of money. So there is a difference between advisory work and execution work, and there is no point in spending money on execution work when you can do that yourself. What you have got to buy in is expertise that you simply don't have within your organisation.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Another motivation for specialisation is the money involved, particularly when the expertise area is at the strategic or managerial level:

> There has been a wave of growth in niche sectors. In our area, the financial communications area, of the top five firms, four didn't exist ten years ago. And a number of people in our industry have made tens of millions of pounds... by setting up a firm that operates rightly brewing up management consultancy that happens to operate in communications, media relations, investor relations field.
> [Managing Director of a large PR firm, London]

Despite the evident demand for specialisation, exploratory data suggests that the lack of qualified people is a major obstacle:

> Certainly over the next five or ten years, specialist operations like financial PR will be easy to set up by high-quality individuals. And I don't think there is any evidence of structural over-capacity. I do think there is a capacity constraint in the sense that there are a limited number of good people.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR firm, London]

Again, the largest PR firms seem to be best equipped to rise to the specialisation challenge. Some smaller PR firms consider themselves to be specialised in specific technical services, but they lack the resources to engage in more complex areas of expertise.

V.6 Main challenges for individual practitioners

V.6.1 Technical PR versus managerial PR

Preliminary interviews suggest that practitioners are engaged in at least two different types of public relations, technical public relations and managerial public relations. The first involves the more traditional, technical communications that are offered to organisations. When dealing with internal publics such as employees, this can involve, for example, editing a newsletter; and when dealing with external publics, mostly media relations, it can involve, for example, writing a press release. Practitioners developing managerial PR -- mainly in larger public relations firms -- will be more involved in the strategic planning of communications programmes and advising management:

> What is happening in the industry is that there is a kind of stretching out of the range of its traditional services. There are some practitioners who quite legitimately deliver standard communications services. They know how to write a press release, how to arrange a news conference, how to prepare someone for a TV appearance, how to edit an internal publication, and those services are needed and bought in large quantities. At the same time, there are practitioners who are looking at the whole kind of strategic direction of the company, but with a communicator's mind and eye, and it is those people I think who are needed in the boardroom. But I think these are still a minority, although a high-profile minority. They are able to look at an issue from a communications point of view. Its consequences -- political, reputation -- are not always fully considered when important decisions are made.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

Interviewees seemed to be clearly engaged in either technical or managerial public relations, depending on their size and type of clients. However, this does not exclude the possibility of practitioners doing both.

V.6.2 Education and training

For an industry where professional standards are still an issue, practitioners' education and training are an essential means of acquiring the necessary skills and therefore raising standards. Interviewees suggested that practice is expanding from technical tasks to more strategic tasks, partly due to market demand, partly due to a more complex understanding of what public relations is and what it ought to deliver. This evolution has led to increased pressures on individual practitioners to adapt by learning new skills. The skills most often mentioned by interviewees were business

skills, strategic thinking and evaluation. In consultancies with larger clients, management skills are included; and for in-house practitioners, an understanding of other interdisciplinary disciplines is included. It is felt that if practitioners are to be listened to by management, then clients and employers must speak the same language. In spite of practitioners' increasing recognition of the importance of their preparation, they remain resistant to acknowlege the value of qualifications and to making qualifications compulsory. For example, they are still reluctant to recruit public relations graduates, because they place more emphasis on experience and personal skills. In addition to education, training is also very important in the acquisition of new skills, especially those linked to new technologies, and particularly for practitioners who lack formal education in public relations. However, this requires a bigger investment in people, either through formal training or through courses run by professional associations. As one of the interviewees put it, investment in people is one of the key methods of ensuring that the whole industry will be able to meet its challenges:

> I am quite optimistic, providing we get the education, training and evaluation.
> [Member of the IIC – International Institute of Communication (Ex-President of IPRA – International PR Association)]

V.6.3 PR practitioners self-perception

Practitioners seem to assume that other communication practitioners, managers and public opinion in general have a negative perception of them.

> The PR man is destined not to be as loved [as established professionals], partly because he is seen either as a jackal or a tick-bird.
> [Vice Chairman of a leading PR consultancy, London]

However, the perception of public relations practitioners that they are lowly regarded by other practises was not confirmed in the preliminary study. Interviewed practitioners from other disciplines revealed a more positive view of PR activity. For example, one advertiser expressed the view that PR is no different from any other industry. Similarly, one marketeer stated that PR is a valuable activity that will in future be better understood, and that is exactly what happened to marketing:

> You don't respond to PR's reputation as an industry, you respond to your direct dealings with PR practitioners – the good ones are fantastic, others are not. Just like in any other industry.

[Managing Partner of a large, established advertising agency, London)

> Public relations is a very important tool, and I don't think people disregard it, although they might not fully understand it. PR reminds me of marketing in its early days, and look where it is now.
> [Chief Executive of a large marketing consultancy, Manchester]

Some interviewees raised the question of practitioners' own lack of confidence in themselves and their industry. For example, one respondent stated that other professionals with whom he deals frequently are generally felt to be better prepared than public relations people:

> I think there is a degree of professional lack of confidence. Sometimes people in public relations believe that people, particularly in advertising and in management consultancies, are somehow better trained or better able to command high fees or better able to influence clients. We do ourselves a disservice if we don't change that.
> [Director of Corporate Affairs of a large organisation, in-house practitioner (Ex-President of the IPR)]

Another PR consultant observed that practitioners themselves do not value public relations activity as much as they should. For him, the promotion of PR worthiness should begin with practitioners:

> I feel we don't actually recognise the contribution we can make to a client. If we could get that across and talk to ourselves first, and convince ourselves of the way organisations can benefit from our work – that would filter to the outside world. I would love to see us on a par with the more respected professional firms.
> [Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, Birmingham)

The negative self-perception of some practitioners seems to be at least in part related to his or her lack of qualifications, and a belief that the rest of the world disregards PR activity. This, it seems paradoxical that practitioners continue to resist the idea of formal education and do not seem to engage in frequent training.

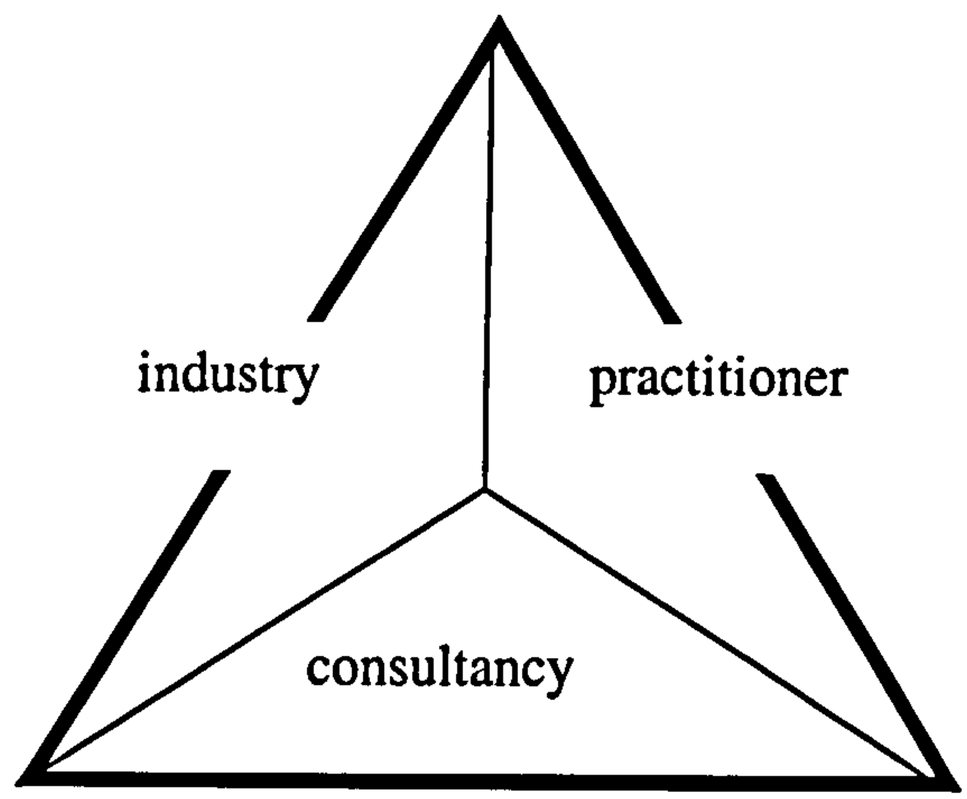
V.7 Summary and Conclusions

The two research questions that provided the basis for the preliminary findings were: (1) How is public relations conceived by PR and other communications practitioners? (2) What, in the view of those practitioners, are the key public relations practice issues?

Regarding the first questions, there are many interpretations of the nature and scope of public relations -- the preliminary study furnished no straight answers. PR is seen as a component of communication, marketing and management. However, only communication is seen as being intrinsic to PR. Moreover, PR is seen to deal with three basic forms of communication: technical communication, the management of communication, and communication as marketing support. The first two are practised at the corporate level – corporate PR -- while the second is practised at the marketing level – marketing PR. Corporate PR and Marketing PR have emerged as two apparently distinct activities in which communication is developed according to different objectives. The practice of PR as a management tool is particularly important for consultants, as it is perceived to offer a great business opportunity. Although there was agreement among interviewees that some PR practice requires communication to be managed, there is no agreement on the broader issue of whether and how PR is a part of management. Similarly, PR is variously seen to deal with 'information', 'perceptions' and 'relationships', each of which has its own degree of complexity. There is such a wide heterogeneity of sub-areas of public relations activity that it is very difficult to develop a unifying description of PR. One tentative proposal could be that public relations uses communication at different levels - technical, managerial and marketing - with the objective of building a favourable reputation for the client.

Turning to the second research question, the key issue of public relations may be grouped into levels of PR practice: the industry as a whole, the consultancy and the practitioner (see Figure V-1).

Figure V-1 - PR practice: a holistic view



The British public relations industry as a whole is characterised by uninterrupted growth and is the second most developed PR industry in the world after the US. It is an immature industry with varying professional standards and an unfavourable reputation. Following the 1980s boom, the excesses of the industry raised awareness of the role of public relations but also created a negative stereotype of how the industry operated. Many challenges now face the industry, especially increasing competition from other more established activities and the introduction of new technologies. Competition within the industry is caused mainly by the low barriers to new entrants of the industry. Competition is perceived by interviewees as both raising standards and driving consultancies' fees down, The most urgent priority for the industry is to achieve high professional standards across the industry. Respondents perceive that only in some of the largest and medium-sized consultancies are high standards implemented. That is why the contribution of professional associations is vitally important, and many respondents call for the unity of the industry under a stronger body that would enforce tighter regulations and protect competent practitioners. Higher education can help to raise standards. The views of many interviewees suggest that a better dialogue between industry and academia is needed. The industry also faces the challenge of gaining access to the boardroom. Once PR is

in a position to manage communication effectively by its participation in top decision making, PR can become much more sophisticated. In general, respondents are optimistic about the future of the British PR industry, because there is evidence that organisations will increasingly need and look for public relations expertise. It is believed that the growing external pressures for transparency and accountability will put public relations at the top of companies' agendas. Even so, success will depend on the ability of the industry to respond to the challenges it faces.

At the level of consultancies, further specific challenges have arisen, in particular the use of research and evaluation. Too few consultancies practice PR evaluation, although the latter is certainly a very good sales tool, and even fewer have developed research-led PR. These failings remain major obstacles to the establishment of public relations as a management tool. Many barriers exist to the widespread use of research and evaluation: lack of specific knowledge and training, perceived high cost and consequent accountability. Moreover, few firms presently offer formal training to their staff. Investment in training would be yet another way to improve standards. Most clients do not fully understand public relations and have to be made aware of its potential and limitations. This fact raises the concern that company managers are not receiving enough training about the value of communications in building the reputation of a firm. The main trends for consultancies are internationalisation and specialisation: clients are increasingly internationalising and asking for global campaigns. Internationalisation requires heavy investment abroad, and only the upper-end of the industry is ready to exploit this opportunity. Specialisation is another key trend for the industry, but is presently found only among the largest PR firms. It requires heavy investment in qualified people and a sophisticated and large enough market. Highly specialised firms, particularly at the strategic and managerial level, are at a premium.

The main challenges for individual practitioners are the consolidation of existing sills and the acquisition of new ones. Additionally, there is evidence of an ongoing evolution of PR from a technical to a managerial function, and this requires the acquisition of more complex skills and a more elaborate conception of PR. Education and training are among the best methods of providing the desired standard of

performance. However, there appears to be some scepticism among interviewed practitioners about whether PR is sufficiently developed as a discipline to be taught in a formal manner, particularly at degree level. There is also some suspicion towards the idea of academic worthiness. Training is also important in raising standards, but there are many pragmatic barriers to setting it up effectively on an in-house basis. An alternative is to utilise courses offered by professional associations. Some interviewees also mentioned that PR practitioners often have a very negative self-perception and believe that the external perception of PR is also poor. Yet other communication practitioners disputed this argument and felt that PR is not generally regarded in such a bad light.

Respondents discussed issues previously identified by the literature and identified new issues relevant to the PR activity. The topics and variables were associated with the public relations activity at three levels -- practitioner, consultancy and industry forces – (Figure V-1) and were used to construct the research instrument for the main questionnaire survey, the results of which will be presented in the next two Chapters. Chapter VI will start with a descriptive overview of the survey findings, and Chapter VII will present their subsequent multivariate analysis.

VI. DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW OF SURVEY FINDINGS: BRITISH PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY

VI.1 Introduction

This chapter (VI) presents a descriptive overview of the survey finding relating to the British public relations industry. The previous chapter (V) presented the results of the exploratory interviews that structured the data into three levels: the practitioner, the PR firm and the PR industry (Figure V-1), a framework which guided the descriptive statistics presented in this chapter. Descriptive statistics are used as "techniques that take raw scores and summarise them in a form that is more manageable (...) including tables and graphs" (Gravetter and Wallnau, 1999: 5). These are analysed with the guidance of general and specific research questions. The most general research question to which the survey data contribute for is: How is public relations conceived by British public relations consultants? The specific objective of the descriptive data of the survey was to get a holistic view of public relations by exploring practitioners opinions on public relations at the three identified levels. At the practitioner level, how do respondents perceive what is public relations, and what are the (PR) activities they execute? At the consultancy level, what are the characteristics of PR consultancies in England? And at the industry level, what are the social processes affecting contemporary English public relations industry?

The population of this study are managers public relations consultancies in England. From a sample frame of N=2308 (Hollis Directory 1998/99) 1,000 managers were selected through stratified random sampling and mailed a questionnaire survey. The

sample obtained for the study exceeds the minimum required for both the overall sample and each stratum (Table IV-2). The final sample included male and female practitioners involved with, or responsible for, the public relations function across a variety of PR firm sizes and specialities in four locations in England. A total of 297 completed questionnaires were analysed, equivalent to an effective response rate of 29.7 per cent. A chi-square goodness of fit test (Chapter IV) demonstrated that the resulting sample was adequate to represent the total population under study.

This chapter will start with an overview of respondent and company profiles, followed by a descriptive analysis of findings per questionnaire section (Appendix 1) on the main topics. The sections comprise data on the issues emerging from the preliminary findings as the most relevant to the public relations industry: respondents' perceptions of the public relations activity; its link with other communications disciplines; respondents' use of research and evaluation; in-house training in respondents' agencies; type of clients of respondents' agencies; respondents' views and evidence on public relations professionalism, industry competition; and practitioners relationship with academia.

VI.2 The profile of the respondents

This section presents the profile respondents in two ways: the profile of individual practitioners and of their respective PR firms.

VI.2.1 The Public Relations Practitioners

The respondents are public relations practitioners of English consultancies in 1999.

Table VI-1: A Profile of the sampled respondents: managers of British PR consultancies

Dimension	Range	All respondents (n= 297)
	Age of the respondent	**(%)**
	up to 25	.3
	25-30	5.4
	31-40	20.9
	41-50	33.8
	51-60	27.7
	60 +	11.8
Gender		
	male	58.1
	female	41.9
Education (a) highest qualification[1]		
	'O' levels	4.7
	'A' levels	27.3
	Degree	43.8
	Higher degree	10.1
	Other	1.7
	(Missing)	(12.5)
Education (b) professional qualification		
	Professional qualification	44.4

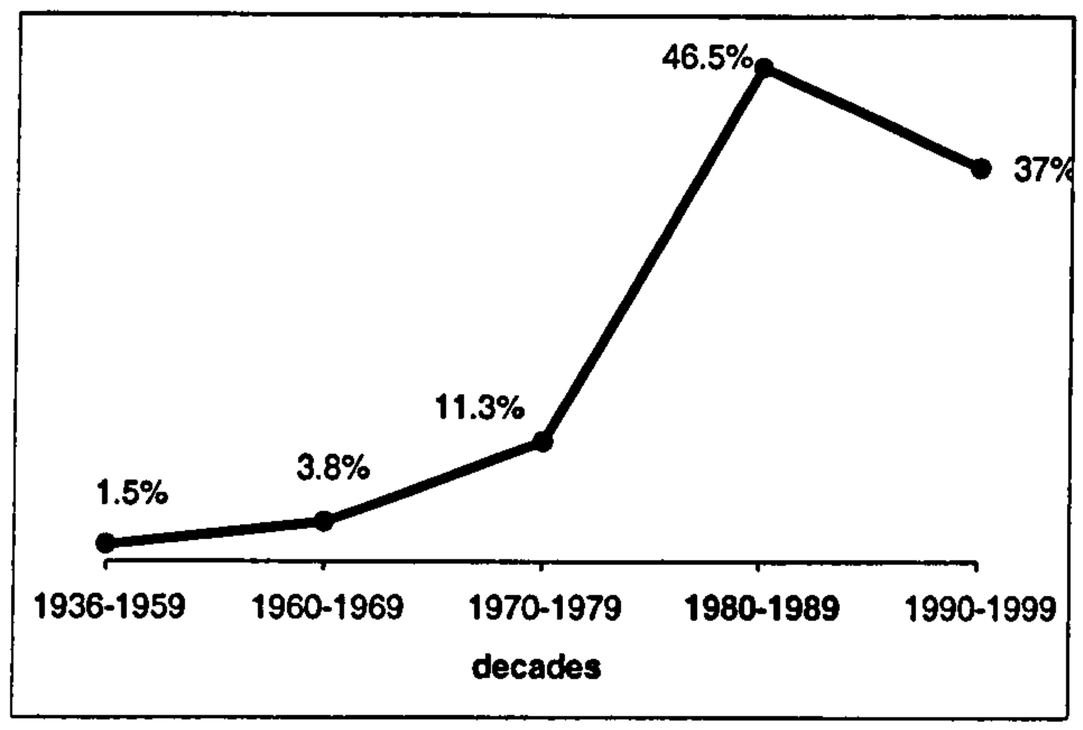
Note: All figures are valid percent of frequencies and missing data are excluded, [1] except for results on 'Education-highest qualification'

By analysing the age profile of respondents, it was found that they are spread across three central age ranges: 34% are aged between 41-50 years-old, 28% fall into the 51-60 range and 21% are aged between 31-40 years (Table VI-1). Fifty-eight per cent (168) of the respondents are male and 42% (121) are female. While a high number of respondents are female (121), there are more men (168), reflecting the traditional ratio of women to men of the public relations industry. Half of respondents reported having a degree as their highest qualification; 54% had completed "A" levels; 10% claimed a higher degree; and close to 57% have "O" levels/ GCSE . Forty-four per cent have a professional qualification. More respondents have a degree (approximately half) than a professional qualification (44%).

VI.2.2 The Public Relations Consultancies

The oldest PR firm in this study was founded in 1939. The youngest was founded in 1999.

Figure VI-1: Public relations consultancies foundation date



By analysing each decade, it can be observed that most agencies were founded during the 1980s, totalling 47% of the sample (Original Table in Appendix 3). During the 1990s, 37% of agencies were started up, that is, agencies that are less than 10 years old. Twenty-eight per cent of agencies were created before 1994, and only eight per cent afterwards. Figure VI-1 represents the boom experienced by the public relations industry of Great Britain during the 1980s and reveal a decline in the growth of the industry during the last few years.

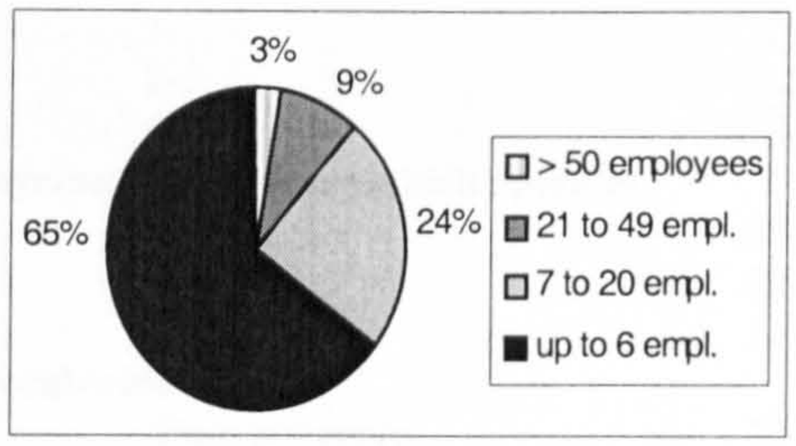
Most PR firms are either business-to-business (47%) or both business-to-business and consumer public relations organisations (39%), (Table VI-2) thus providing support for the chosen focus of this study on business-to-business public relations. More agencies define themselves as generalist (55%) than specialised (45%).

Table VI-2: Types of consultancy

Dimension	Range	All respondents (n= 297)[1]
Type of service		
	Business-to-business PR	46.9
	Consumer PR	14.2
	Both	38.9
Type of agency		
	Generalist	55.2
	Specialised	44.8

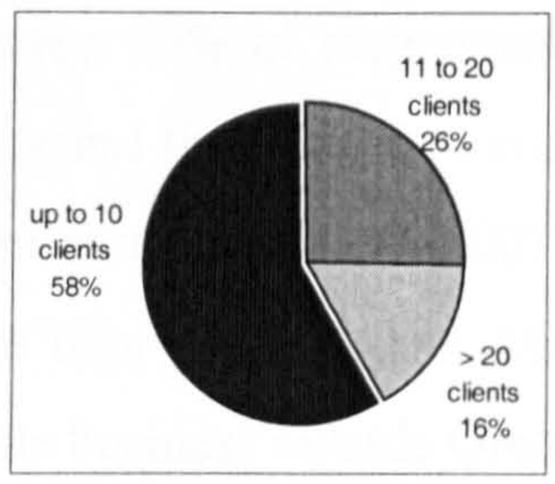
Sixty-five percent have up to six employees (Figure VI-2). Of these, 21% have one or two employees. And overall, 86% of public relations agencies have up to three directors (41% of agencies have one director).

Figure VI-2: Number of employees



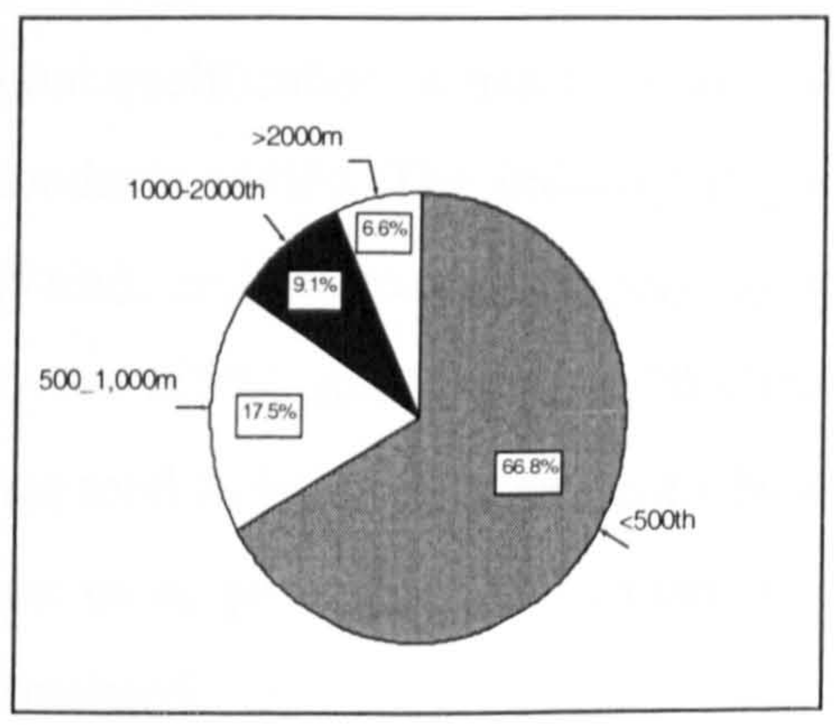
When considering public relations agencies' clients in Great Britain, 58% confirm having up to 10 clients (Figure VI-3).

Figure VI-3: Number of clients in the UK



The majority of public relations agencies (67%) reported turnover below £500,000 (Figure VI-4).

Figure VI-4: UK Turnover



Most respondent public relations agencies are small sized, either in terms of internal structure (number of employees and directors) or national turnover (Figures VI-2, VI-3 and VI-4).

Table VI-3: Internationalisation

Dimension	Range	All respondents (n= 297)[1]
Number of clients abroad		
	None	51.4
	1	13.7
	2-5	27
	6+	7.9
Number of overseas countries in which operates		
	None	58.3
	up to 6	30.5
	6+	11.2
Turnover world-wide		
	'Does not apply'	79.2
	up to £5, 000, 000	14.6
	£5,000, 001 - £20,000, 000	3.8
	More than £20,000, 000	2.4

More than half of agencies reported that they do not operate outside Great Britain (58%) and have no clients abroad (51%) (Table VI-3). Not surprisingly, when asked about their world-wide turnover, 79% of respondents selected the option "Does not Apply". Fifteen per cent answered that they do have a world-wide turnover of up to £5,000,000. Just four per cent earn from £5,000,001 to £20,000,000; merely two per cent of agencies make more than £20,000,000. Most agencies are nation-focused, without substantially profitable business outside Great Britain.

In conclusion, detailed information on both the respondents and their agencies was gathered. Respondents are mostly male (58%), senior practitioners on their forties or fifties (62%) and hold a degree (44%) or 'A' levels (27%) as their highest qualification. A professional qualification seems to be as important as a degree for the same proportion of respondents (44%). The industry is young (73.5% of PR firms were created after the 1980s), and constituted largely by small sized firms, mostly with less than six employees (65%) and less than 10 clients (58%) and a turnover below £500, 000. Agencies tend to be more business-to-business oriented (47%) than consumer oriented and are more generalist (55%) than specialised. The majority of agencies are not internationalised.

VI.3 Public Relations: concept and practice

The first section of the questionnaire collected public relations practitioners' views and opinions of their own activity. It intends to discover how public relations was conceived by practitioners' minds and how they implement it in order to analyse it against the academic theory in the next chapter.

VI.3.1 The ultimate goal of Public Relations

The most popular option in citing the ultimate goal of public relations was "to build a favourable reputation", chosen by 75% of respondents (Figure VI-5).

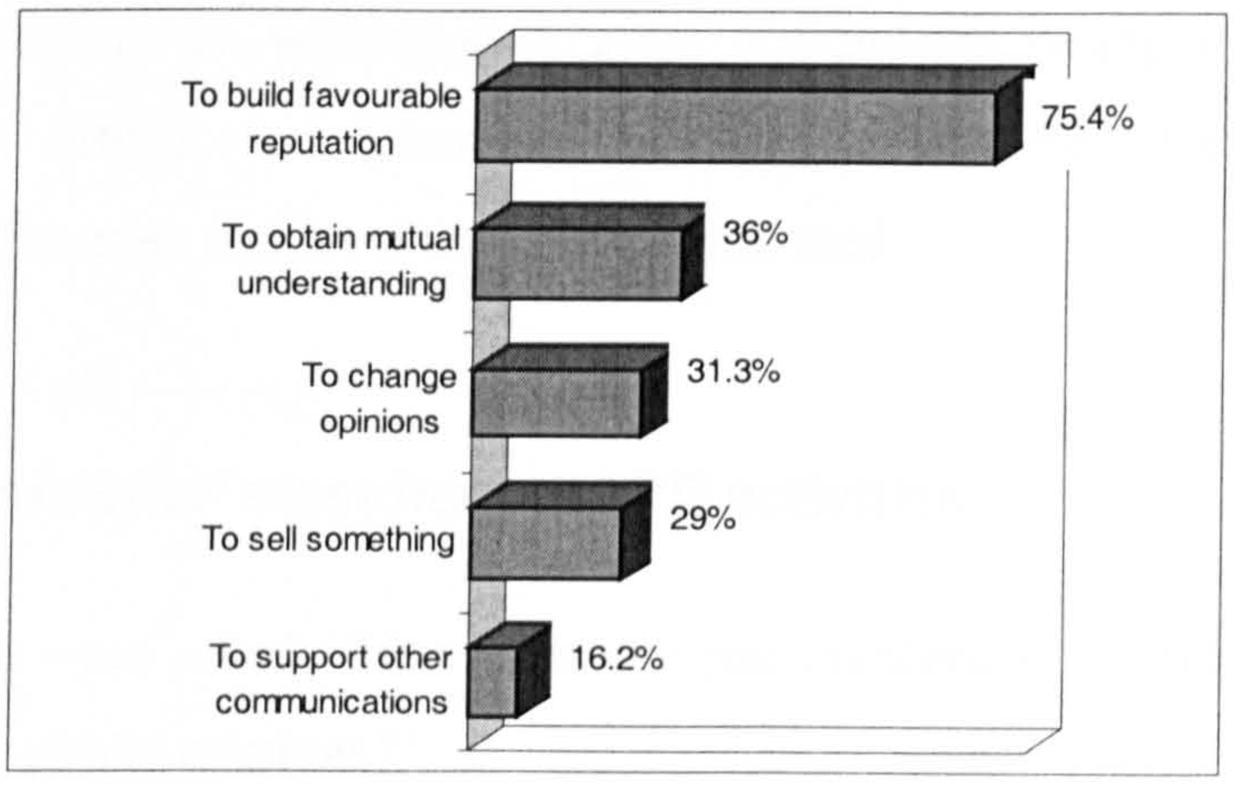


Figure VI-5: The ultimate goal of public relations

The second most frequently chosen option, somewhat behind, was "to obtain mutual understanding" (36%). This was followed by "to change opinions" (31%), "to sell something" (29%) and "to support other communications activities" (16%). This evidence shows how, in most practitioners' view, public relations' central issue is reputation.

VI.3.2 What is Public Relations about?

When asked "considering your day-to-day experience, would you say that public relations is about...", respondents placed their opinion on a five-point likert scale (see

Table VI-4). For easier data reading, two columns were added to Table VI-4, with both opinion extremes being crunched, respectively under 'negative' and 'positive'.

Table VI-4: What respondents think public relations is about

PR is about:	Not at all (%)	A little	*Neg.*	Moderately	*Pos.*	A lot	Entirely (%)
Informing an audience	.3	.3	*.6*	3.8	*95.5*	53.4	42.1
Persuading an audience	1	3.1	*4.1*	19.8	*76*	59	17
Planning a programme	.7	7.7	*8.4*	30.2	*61.4*	49.8	11.6
Implementing a programme	.7	3.1	*3.8*	20.3	*75.9*	55.6	20.3
Counselling management	7.1	19.4	*26.5*	30.4	*43.1*	33.9	9.2

Overall, respondents consider public relations is about all of the listed activities. Nonetheless, there are some nuances. Respondents considered that public relations is more about "informing" (96%) than "persuading" (76%) an audience. On the negative spectrum of responses, "counselling management" was considered the least that PR is about (26.5%), among the listed (Table IV-4). Programming is also strongly a part of what public relations is, with slightly more respondents seeing it as being about "*implementing*" (76%), than "*planning*" (61%) a programme. Overall, respondents seem to see PR as more technical than managerial tool.

VI.3.3 Respondents' most frequent PR activities

The respondents were asked: "How often are you involved in the following activities when practising public relations?"

Table VI-5: Most practised activities by respondents

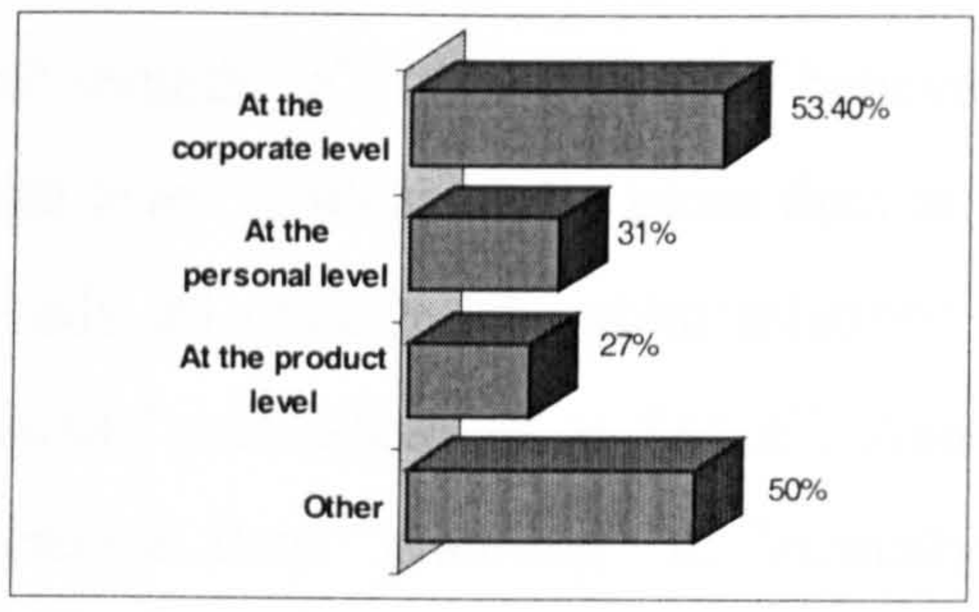
How often you practice the following activities in PR?	Never (%)	Rarely	*Neg.*	Sometimes	*Pos.*	Often	Always (%)
Writing	-	-	-	4.4	*95.6*	39.6	56
Setting strategic goals	.3	3.8	*4.1*	25.3	*70.5*	40.4	30.1
Editing	.3	5.5	*5.8*	26.8	*67.3*	45	22.3
Assessing progress periodically	-	4.2	*4.2*	24.8	*71*	40.9	30.1
Setting quantifiable objectives	.7	11.1	*11.8*	26.3	*62*	36.7	25.3
Co-ordinating resources	.7	5.2	*5.9*	23.8	*70.3*	45.5	24.8
Defining a target audience	.7	3.1	*3.8*	14.1	*82.2*	37.5	44.7
Making presentations	1	11.4	*12.4*	34.8	*52.8*	35.2	17.6
Deciding on communication policy	1.7	9	*10.7*	23.8	*65.6*	42.8	22.8
Contacting the media	-	2.1	*2.1*	9.6	*88.3*	40.2	48.1

Not surprisingly, 96% of respondents stated that they *write* 'often' or 'always'. "Contacting the media" is ticked as the second most frequent activity (88% stated to do it 'often' or 'always'). 'Often' or 'always' frequency was selected in relation to the

other activities showing they are frequently practised by the majority of respondents. Media issues are practised by nearly all respondents. After 'writing' and 'contacting the media', most respondents seem to engage in apparently managerial-related tasks, such as "defining a target audience", "assessing progress periodically" and "setting strategic goals". Among the listed, the least frequent activity was "making presentations".

VI.3.4 Public Relations at the corporate, personal or product level

Figure VI-6: Public relations is more effective...



Fifty-three per cent of respondents ranked public relations effectiveness first option at the "corporate level", 31% selected "personal level" as most important and 27% "product level" (Figure VI-6). Half of respondents (50%) selected a fourth, 'other' option. Practitioners view public relations as being more effective at the corporate level than at the personal or product levels.

VI.3.5 Important business skills for Public Relations practitioners

Ninety per cent of respondents selected "understanding the client's market place" as the most important business skill for a public relations practitioner. When asked about the two most important business skills, 56% of respondents selected "understanding the client's market place" and "setting business strategy".

VI.3.6 Is Public Relations a profession?

The next question inquires about the sentiments of respondents on two statements, namely:

Table VI-6: Public relations is...

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	*Neg.*	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	*Pos.*	Agree	Strongly Agree (%)
Public relations is a vocation	9.3	28.4	*37.7*	34.2	*28*	20.6	7.4
Public relations is a profession	1.1	5.7	*6.8*	8.2	*85*	39.3	45.7

Despite some divergence of opinions on whether public relations is "a vocation", 85% of respondents 'agree' or 'strongly agree' that public relations is "a profession".

Concluding, majority of respondents consider that public relations ultimate goal is "to build a favourable reputation" (substantially more than "to obtain mutual understanding" or "to sell something") More than half believe public relations is most effective at the "corporate level" (substantially more than at the "personal" or at the "product level"). Practically all considered public relations is about "informing an audience", more than about "persuading an audience". And that PR is more about "implementing" a programme than "planning" it. Virtually all respondents chose "writing" as their most frequent activity. And media relations seems to be the most widely practice public relations technique (88%). Probably highly related, it is possible that writing to the media is the widespread practice. Finally, public relations "is a profession" for 85% of respondents. Seven per cent of practitioners do not believe PR is a profession.

VI.4 Relationship with other disciplines of marketing communications

The aim of this section was to look closer at the relationship of public relations with other communications disciplines, particularly considering its independence or otherwise towards them.

VI.4.1 Independence and overlap of Public Relations with other communications disciplines

The statement that "public relations practice is at its best when practised independently from other communications disciplines" was disagreed with by 73.5% of respondents. On the contrary, the statement "The overlap of public relations with other communications disciplines is inevitable in practice" was agreed with by a substantial 95% of respondents.

Table VI-7: Independence and overlap of Public relations with other disciplines

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	*Neg.*	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	*Pos.*	Agree	Strongly Agree (%)
Best public relations practice = independent from other communications disciplines	26.8	46.7	*73.5*	14.3	*12.2*	7.3	4.9
Overlap of public relations with other communications disciplines = inevitable in practice	.3	1.7	*2*	3.1	*94.9*	49.7	45.2

VI.4.2 Frequency of work with other communications practitioners

In response to "How often does your company work with practitioners that have expertise in other communications areas (e.g., advertising, sales promotion)?", 77% of respondents selected 'often' or 'always'.

Table VI-8: Frequency that respondents work with other communications practitioners

	Never (%)	Rarely	*Neg.*	Sometimes	*Pos.*	Often	Always (%)
"How often your company work with other communications practitioners?"	–	2.7	*2.7*	20.5	*76.8*	57.3	19.5

This finding reinforces the argument for an interdisciplinary approach to the public relations practice.

VI.4.3 Leadership of integrated communications process

When asked who should lead the process of integrated communications (if communications activities were to be integrated), 44% of respondents answered "both", (i.e., the client and the public relations agency), 29% selected the client and 22% felt that the agency should lead the integration process.

Summarising, respondents not only consider public relations' overlap with other communications disciplines unavoidable in practice, but also that its *best* practice does not occur independently. This opinion might be rooted in the report that most practitioners work frequently with practitioners from other communication areas.

VI.5 Professionalism

The issue of professionalism provides one of the main debates in the public relations industry and academia. This section was intended to collect the views of practitioners on the state of the professionalism of their practice as well as on the role of the trade bodies of the industry in promoting it.

Table VI-9 shows that there is no agreement on whether public relations practitioners are skilled in strategic thinking or credible in providing the board level with advice. On the contrary, an overwhelming majority (92%) of respondents believe that the public relations body of knowledge is "based on practice". However, there is no consensus on whether public relations has a "clear" body of knowledge.

Table VI-9: Degree of agreement with statements about professionalism indicators

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	*Neg*	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	*Pos.*	Agree	Strongly Agree (%)
Most PR practitioners are skilled in communication' strategic thinking	2.1	31.8	***33.9***	28.1	***38***	31.8	6.2
Most PR practitioners are credible in providing the board level with communications advice	1	30.5	***31.5***	32.2	***36.3***	29.8	6.5
PR has a body of knowledge based on theory	1.7	32.4	***34.1***	32.8	***33.1***	29.3	3.8
PR has a body of knowledge based on practice	-	1.7	***1.7***	6.8	***91.5***	68.7	22.8
PR has a clear body of knowledge	2.1	19.6	***21.7***	42.3	***36.1***	30.6	5.5
The PR industry as a whole has a clear code of ethics	6.1	36.5	***42.6***	24.6	***32.7***	28.3	4.4
The PR industry as a whole has a clear standard of performance	11.3	47.8	***59.1***	25.4	***15.5***	13.4	2.1
Formal qualifications should be made compulsory for one to practice PR	13.3	34.1	***47.4***	17.7	***34.9***	21.2	13.7

Most respondents (59%) disagree that the public relations industry has a clear standard of performance, one of the professionalism indicators, and there is also a negative tendency in the answers concerning the industry having a clear code of ethics. More respondents disagree (47%) than agree (35%) that formal qualifications should be made compulsory for one to practise public relations.

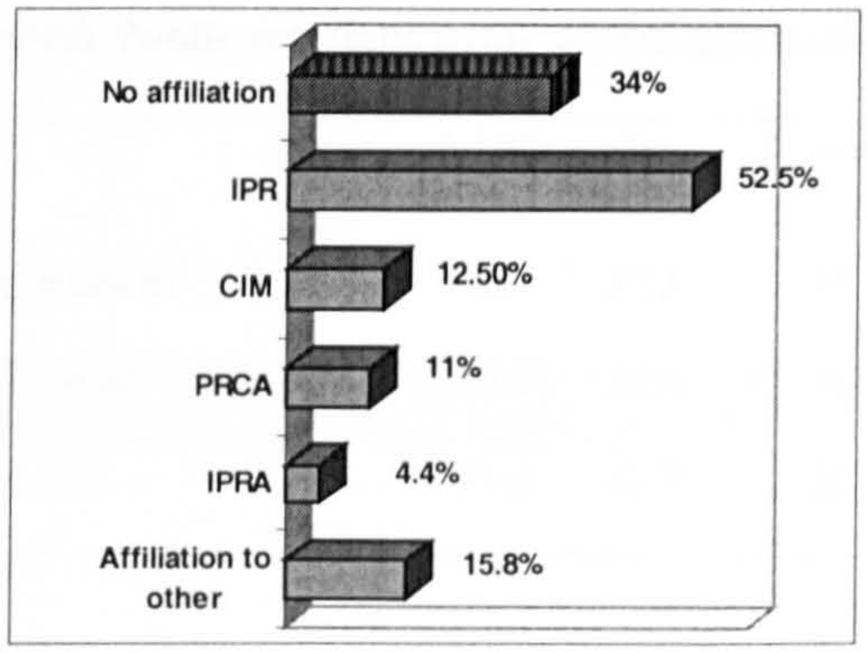
Respondents were asked to indicate their feeling towards statements on professionalism indicators, revealing that in their view, the overall picture is more negative than positive. There is no substantial agreement on whether public relations has a clear body of knowledge. More, it is unquestionably believed to be based in practice rather than theory. Similarly, there is no substantial agreement on whether the industry has a clear code of ethics and the majority considers it has no clear standard of performance.

VI.5.1 Trade bodies and associations

The objective of this section was to collect information on trade body membership and the views of the respondents on the role of public relations professional associations in Great Britain.

VI.5.2 Membership of Professional Associations

Figure VI-7: Affiliation to Professional Associations



Around 34% of respondents have no affiliation to any professional association (Figure VI-7). The affiliation distribution between the two British professional associations reveals that more than half of respondents (53%) reported affiliation to the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) and substantially less (11%) are affiliated to the Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA). Compared with the PRCA, a high number of practitioners (13%) reported affiliation to the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM).

VI.5.3 Respondents' opinions about Public Relations professional associations (PRCA and IPR)

When asked "how beneficial is membership of a professional association?", 41% answered 'a little beneficial' or 'not at all beneficial'.

Table VI-10: Membership benefits of a Public relations professional association

	Not At All Beneficial (%)	A Little Beneficial	*Neg.*	Moderately Beneficial	*Pos.*	A Lot Beneficial	Entirely Beneficial (%)
"How beneficial is membership of a professional association?"	15.8	25	***40.8***	37.3	***21.9***	14.4	7.5

The following questions were intended to collect the opinions of respondents on the performance of the two existing professional associations, the PRCA and the IPR. Table VI-11 indicates that there is a higher opinion of the contribution of the IPR to the development of professional standards than of the PRCA. More, with regard to whether the PRCA represents the interest of the whole of the consultancies/agencies, a majority (64%) indicated 'a little' or 'not at all'.

Table VI-11: British Public relations professional associations (IPR & PRCA)

	Not At All (%)	A Little	*Neg.*	Moderately	*Pos.*	A Lot	Entirely (%)
How much did the PRCA contributed to professional standards?	16.3	21	***37.3***	43.3	***19.5***	18.7	.8
How much did the IPR contributed to professional standards?	7.2	18.4	***25.6***	38.3	***36.1***	33.9	2.2
How much the PRCA represents the interests of all?	30.1	33.6	***63.7***	28.2	***8.1***	6.9	1.2

Overall, personal affiliation (IPR) of individual practitioners is substantially greater than agency affiliation (PRCA), and the IPR is also better regarded than the PRCA in its contribution to the professionalisation of the industry.

VI.6 Training

This section collected information on the training practices of the firm in public relations, as it is an important aspect of the industry overall.

VI.6.1 Staff training programme(s)

One of the main findings is that a total of 66% of the agencies do not have their own formal staff training programme. The remaining 35% of respondents who claim to run staff training programmes do it more for simpler activities such as writing skills (28%) and presentation skills (27%) rather than management skills (18%) or business skills (17%).

Forty-two per cent of respondents state that a senior partner of their PR firm attended a conference or workshop on public relations (excluding client-related events) during the last year. Only a small percentage of respondents (17%) have never attended any conferences or workshops on public relations (excluding client-related events).

VI.6.2 Company training structure

More respondents (36%) agreed than disagreed that their company has a clear career structure and that it runs formal training for new entrants (30%) (Table VI-12). Substantially more respondents (36%) agreed that their firm attracts more qualified personnel than five years ago.

Table VI-12: About PR firms' personnel policy

My company...	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	*Neg.*	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	*Pos.*	Agree	Strongly Agree	Does Not Apply (%)
has a clear career structure	2.4	9.4	***11.8***	17.8	***35.9***	28.2	7.7	34.5
has a structured training programme for new entrants	3.1	16	***19.1***	12.2	***29.9***	24.7	5.2	38.7
is attracting more qualified personnel than five years ago	1	8.7	***9.7***	17	***36.1***	29.5	6.6	37.2

VI.7 Competition

VI.7.1 Competition within the PR industry

Competition is another important indicator of the public relations industry state-of-the-art. For 84% of respondents, public relations is more competitive today than it was 10 years ago (Table VI-13).

Table VI-13: Competitiveness of public relations

	Much Less Competitive (%)	Less Competitive	*Neg.*	No Change	*Pos.*	More Competitive	Much More Competitive	DON'T KNOW (%)
Compared to 10 years ago, how competitive is PR today?	-	1.4	*1.4*	9.2	*84.4*	53.9	30.5	5.1

VI.7.2 Competition from other industries

Looking comparatively at the agencies/people considered to compete with public relations (Table VI-14), it is found, in descending order: marketing agencies/people (53%), advertising agencies/people (40%), sales promotion agencies/people (21%) and management consultancies (19%).

Table VI-14: Competition from other practitioners

	Not at all (%)	A little	*Neg.*	Moderately	*Pos.*	A lot	Entirely (%)
Advertising agencies/ people	6.5	19.5	*26*	35.2	*39*	35.2	3.8
Marketing agencies/ people	3.4	13.3	*16.7*	30.4	*52.9*	49.5	3.4
Lawyers	67.4	21.8	*89.2*	9.5	*1.4*	1.4	-
Management consultancies	22.3	36.4	*58.7*	22.3	*18.9*	16.2	2.7
Sales promotion agencies/ people	18	29.6	*47.6*	31	*21.4*	19.4	2

All of the major disciplines in the communications mix seem to compete with public relations. Although, traditionally, advertising is considered to be closer than marketing to what public relations practitioners offer their clients, Table VI-14 shows that marketing agencies or/and people are competing with public relations more than advertising.

VI.8 Academia

This section gathered public relations practitioners' views on public relations academics and students. The relationship of both worlds influences many of the other issues under study, from the concept of public relations in practitioners' minds to professionalism.

VI.8.1 Relationship Between Public Relations Academics and Industry

Fifty-five per cent of respondents answer "How would you rate the relationship between public relations academics and the public relations industry" by selecting

'neither good or bad'. A further 22% hold the opinion that 'no relationship exists' (Table VI-15).

Table VI-15: Relationship between public relations academics and practitioners

	Very Bad (%)	Bad	*Neg.*	Neither Good Nor Bad	*Pos.*	Good	Very Good	No relationship exists (%)
Rate the relationship between PR academics and industry	2.5	7.1	*9.6*	54.8	*13.2*	12.1	1.1	22.4

We seem to have evidence that it is more probable that academics are concerned with practitioners rather than the other way around.

VI.8.2 Public Relations Academics

Approximately 65% of respondents (practitioners) consider that public relations academics should spend more time "developing more practical issues", 12% think that academics should spend more time researching and only approximately five per cent feel that academics should spend more time developing public relations theory. These findings conform with a traditionally practice-oriented industry.

VI.8.3 Importance of academic training for practice

Respondents are divided in considering academic training important (38%),'moderately' important (37%) or not important (25%) for public relations practice (Table VI-16).

Table VI-16: Importance of academic training

	Not At All Importan (%)t	Unimportant	*Neg.*	Moderately Important	*Pos.*	Important	Very Important (%)t
How important is academic training for PR practice?	5.5	19.5	*25*	37.2	*37.9*	29.4	8.5

VI.8.4 Perception and recruitment of Public Relations graduate students

Quite consistently, between 27% to 29% of practitioners indicated "don't know" when regarding public relations graduates' skills (Table VI-17). Similarly, between 30% to 38% considered public relations graduates' skills 'neither good nor bad'. This

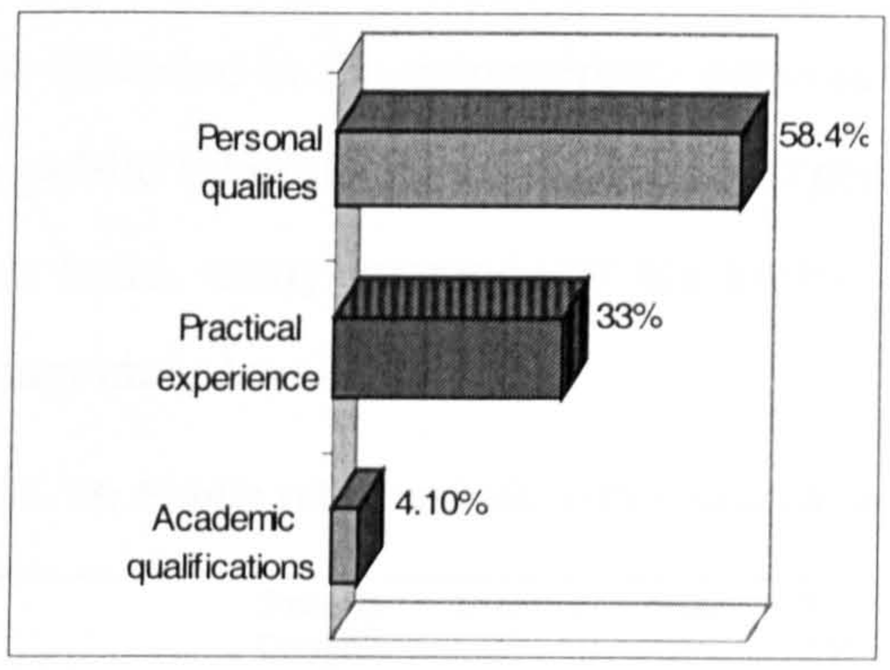
tendency is reflected in the concluding statement on the public relations graduates' overall preparation to work in the industry.

Table VI-17: Quality of public relations graduates

PR graduates'	Very Bad (%)	Bad	*Neg.*	Neither Good Nor Bad	*Pos.*	Good	Very Good	Don't Know (%)
Writing skills are:	3.1	19.5	***22.6***	30.3	***20.2***	18.8	1.4	26.8
Speaking skills are:	1.1	7.4	***8.5***	38.5	***25.1***	23.3	1.8	27.9
Strategic thinking is:	4.5	12.9	***17.4***	35	***19.2***	17.5	1.7	28.3
Management skills are:	4.2	23.1	***27.3***	35.3	***8.3***	8	.3	29
Overall preparation to work in the public relations industry is:	2.8	16.3	***19.1***	37.5	***16.6***	15.2	1.4	26.9

The majority of respondents (58%) feel that personal qualities are the most important factor to consider when recruiting. This is ahead of practical experience (33%) and academic qualifications (four per cent).

Figure VI-8: Most important factors for recruitment



Respondents consider that the best practitioner depends on individual personal abilities rather than experience-base knowledge and much less than theoretical-based knowledge (Figure VI-8).

VI.9 Research and evaluation

Currently, public relations research and evaluation is one of the most debated issues both in academia and the industry. The aim of this section was to learn whether practitioners use evaluation and research, and about their views on their practice.

A surprising total, 83% of respondents, claim to undertake some type of public relations evaluation, against 17% who admit that they do not do any type of public relations evaluation. The majority of respondents (72%) compile "press clippings" or "radio-television mentions".

Table VI-18 show that an overwhelming majority, 83% of respondents, consider that public relations is more experience-based than research-based as well as more intuition-based than research-based (54%). Nonetheless, a majority of 75% disagree that it is impossible to evaluate public relations. Respondents disagree (58%) that public relations can be included in the management process without research.

Practitioners still see public relations more related to experience and intuition than to research. On the other hand, many respondents are aware that research might play a bigger role at the management level.

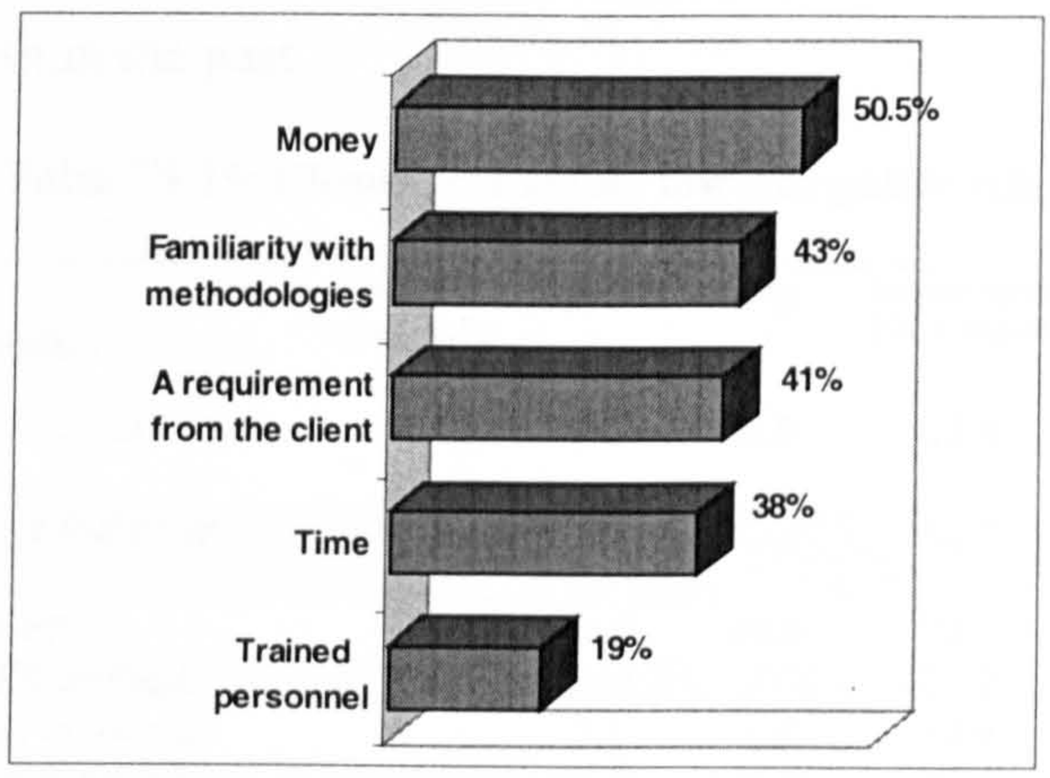
Table VI-18: Public relations link with research and evaluation

	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	Neg.	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Pos.	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know (%)
PR is more experience-based than research-based	.3	3.4	3.7	12.5	83.4	59.7	23.7	.3
PR is more intuition-based than research-based	2.1	16.8	18.9	26.1	54.3	44.7	9.6	.7
It is impossible to evaluate PR	18.7	56.1	74.8	14.9	10.4	6.2	4.2	-
PR can be included in the management process without research	12	46.2	58.2	18.2	20.9	18.5	2.4	2.7

VI.9.1 Most important aspects in developing research/ evaluation tools

Figure VI-9 shows that half of respondents (51%) indicated money as the most important aspect when developing research or evaluation, followed by "familiarity with methodologies" (43%). The third most popular option (41%) was "a requirement from the client". Fourth was the "time" factor (38%). Finally, "trained personnel" was most important for 19% of respondents.

Figure VI-9: Most important factors when developing public relations' research and evaluation



VI.9.2 Sub-contracting Media evaluation agencies

Seventy-seven per cent of the agencies involved in the study do not sub-contract a media evaluation agency. From the agencies that do sub-contract a media evaluation agency (23% of total), most use the service of post-campaign market research (84%) as well as pre-campaign market research (80%). Thirty-three per cent buy self-assessment.

VI.9.3 Evaluation and research expenses

Approximately the same amount of respondents, 24%, had no expenditure on either evaluation and research. When comparing evaluation and research expenditure, no significative differences were found. Approximately half of respondents spend less than £1,000 or up to £5,000 on evaluation and research.

VI.10 Client needs

The objective of this section is to know the respondent clients' needs which directly or indirectly shape the industry.

Table VI-19 indicates that, on the one hand, the majority of respondents (76%) agreed that their clients include communications in their management agenda. On the other hand, clients need to be made aware of the potential of public relations (67%). Further, clients still do not understand entirely what public relations is (61%). Fortunately, the majority of respondents (77%) consider that clients understand public relations better than in the past.

Table VI-19: Clients positioning towards public relations

The majority of my clients...	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree	*Neg.*	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	*Pos.*	Agree	Strongly Agree	Don't Know (%)
include communications in their management agenda	.7	9.2	*9.9*	12.6	*76.1*	54.9	21.2	1.4
need to be made aware of the potential of PR	1.4	19	*20.4*	12.2	*67.4*	45.6	21.8	-
understand entirely what PR is	6.1	54.8	*60.9*	24.5	*14.6*	12.9	1.7	-
are realistic about what PR can achieve	3.7	36.3	*37*	21.7	*38.3*	34.9	3.4	-
understand PR better than in the past	.3	7.1	*7.4*	14.9	*77.4*	67.6	9.8	.3
are developing international campaigns	9.2	28.7	*37.9*	24.2	*31.7*	26.6	5.1	6.1

VI.10.1 Most frequent target audiences

Nearly all respondents (97%) said that the media are a target audience (sometimes, often of frequently) (Table VI-20). Following, consumers (75%) and clients (73%) are a frequent target.

Table VI-20: Main target audiences of clients

How frequently do your clients deal with the following audiences?	Never	Rarely	*Neg.*	Sometimes	*Pos.*	Often	Always
Local community	2.9	17.9	*20.8*	37.3	*41.9*	30.1	11.8
Media	1	1.7	*2.7*	6.5	*90.8*	23.3	67.5
Environmental groups	11.6	30.5	*42.1*	39.3	*18.6*	16.4	2.2
Clients	2.5	5.4	*7.9*	19.1	*72.9*	43.7	29.2
Employees	3.6	12.2	*15.8*	39.4	*44.8*	35.8	9
Consumers	5.6	7	*12.6*	12.9	*74.5*	38.5	36

Clients relate public relations mainly with media relations. Media exposure seems to be what most clients want from a public relations agency.

VI.10.2 What clients ask of Public Relations agencies

Approximately half of respondents (51%) indicated that clients ask the agency to get involved in their strategic planning (Table VI-21).

Table VI-21: What do clients ask for

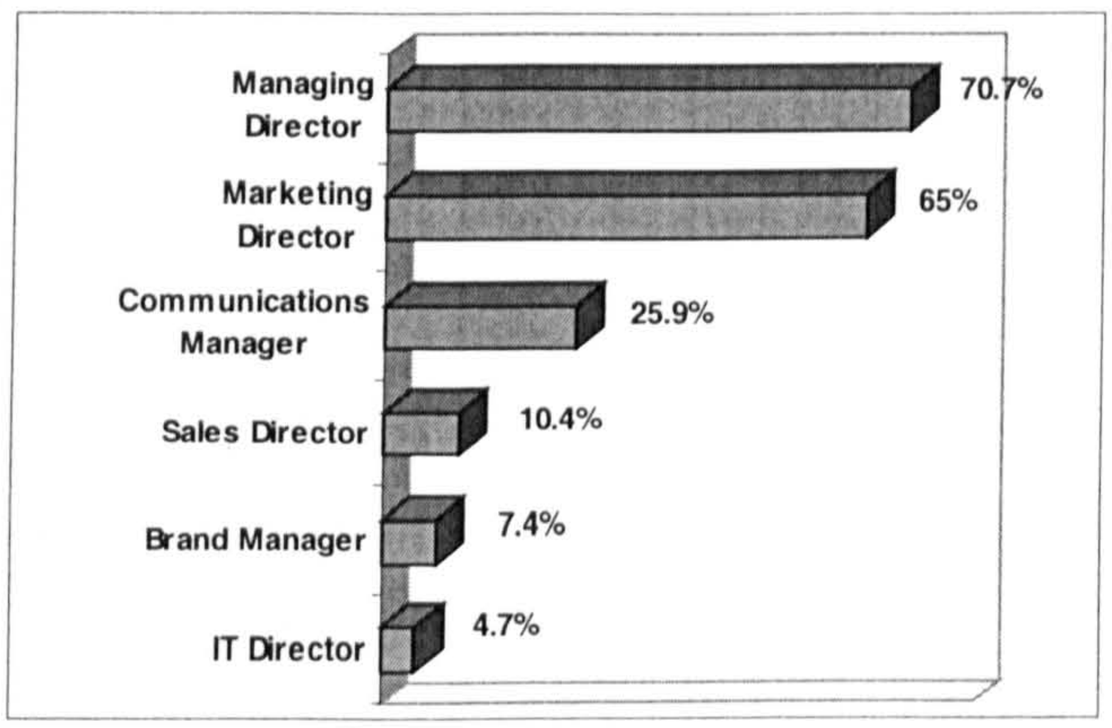
How often do the majority of your clients:	Never (%)	Rarely	Neg.	Sometimes	Pos.	Often	Always (%)
ask you to get involved in their strategy planning	2.7	8.5	11.2	37.4	51.3	40.8	10.5
ask for communications programmes that go beyond public relations	2	10.8	12.8	33.4	53.7	46.3	7.4
ask for evaluation of communications programmes	5.1	31.7	36.8	37.9	25.2	20.8	4.4
ask for researched-based programmes	14.8	40.9	55.7	31.3	13	12	1
ask you to liase with their other communications agencies/suppliers	3.4	9.8	13.2	39.3	47.4	42	5.4
pay for evaluation costs	29.9	24.4	54.3	26.1	19.6	10	9.6
pay for research costs	24.6	21.8	46.4	31.4	22.2	12.3	9.9

Only 25% of respondents' clients ask them for evaluation of communications programmes and only 13% ask for research-based programmes. A total of 54% say clients 'rarely' or 'never' pay for evaluation costs; the same goes for 46% regarding research costs.

VI.10.3 With whom do Public Relations practitioners deal

When dealing with clients, 71% of respondents liaise with a "Managing Director", supporting the claim that public relations occurs at the board level (Figure VI-10). Practitioners deal substantially more with a "Marketing Director" (65%) than with a "Communications Manager" (36%).

Figure VI-10: With whom public relations companies work most frequently (in the client's company)



Reinforcing findings on competition, these results show a close link between public relations and marketing.

VI.11 Summary and Discussion

This chapter started by showing the adequacy of the sample size. The data obtained are profuse and representative and therefore inferences to the population, British managers of PR consultancies, can be made with a high degree of certainty (Chapter IV).

The respondents' profile (Table VI-1) shows that most of the managers of British PR firms are in the 40 to 50 year age range. Approximately 30% are in their 50s or 60s, and are highly representative of the ex-journalist approach to PR, mostly media relations. On the other hand, approximately 30% is under 40 years old, and probably represent a new approach, about which not much is known yet. Half of the respondents hold a degree as their highest qualification and many (44%) hold a professional qualification. Generally, respondents are mature PR professionals with extended experience and without a PR-specific qualification. Forty-two percent of PR firm managers are female, which provides evidence for the weight of female practitioners in the industry, when compared with other industries.

What is PR in respondent's minds? Most practitioners (75.4%) consider that to build a favourable reputation is the ultimate goal of public relations (Figure VI-5). The next most selected goal was to obtain mutual understanding (36%). Both the most voted goals are somewhat ambiguous, intangible and therefore hard to specify and measure. This confirms the account of interviewees during the preliminary study that the nature of PR present practitioners with difficulties. When reporting what PR is about (Table VI-4), respondents tended to select more technical than managerial activities. Of these, counselling management was considered the least that PR is about (26.5%), and informing an audience the more PR is about (95.5%).

What is PR in practitioners' execution? The most frequent activities of public relations practitioners are writing, contacting the media and defining a target audience. These are technical tasks and together suggest that media relations is a frequent and

widespread practice for PR practitioners. Respondents perceptions of PR together with the technical nature of the tasks respondents practise most frequently suggest that PR is mostly carried out at the technical level.

Respondents further consider that PR is more effective (Figure VI-6) firstly at the corporate level, secondly at the personal level and lastly at the product level. Two times more respondents considered Corporate PR as more effective than product PR, which is generally associated with marketing PR. The PR industry is still young, as most agencies have been founded since the 1980's when there was a growth boom. This might explain the choices of most for non-specialised areas, but it does not explain why consumer PR is not practised higher, considering that most interviewees in the preliminary study would argue PR is a part of marketing.

Public relations' overlap with other communications disciplines is considered inevitable in practice and majority (74%) disagree that best public relations practice is independent from other communications disciplines, maybe because the majority of respondents (77%) frequently work with other communications practitioners. Anyway, practitioners do not seem to share the academic concern for independence of PR in relation to other disciplines.

The consultancy profile indicates that the majority of British PR firms have up to six employees (65%); up to ten clients (58%) and a turnover below £500,000 (67%). The fact that more than sixty per cent of the British PR consultancies are small and micro sized is of great implications for the whole of the PR industry. More of PR firms sell business-to-business public relations (47%) than consumer PR (14%), and more sell a generalist (55%) rather than specialised service (45%). The PR industry is comprised with mostly small or micro sized firms most probably because it holds low barriers to new entrants, which can easily set up a PR business without a many human and financial resources, particularly if they stay away of specialised areas, such as financial PR or crisis management. The industry tends to operate nationally as more than half of surveyed agencies (58%) do not operate outside Great Britain.

A majority (85%) consider public relations to be a profession, despite the fact that most respondents consider that the industry does not have a clear standard of performance (60%) and many consider that it does not have a clear code of ethics (43%), and despite the fact that a large majority (92%) perceive that it has a body of knowledge based on practice (91.5%) rather than theory (33%). Further, formal qualifications should not be made compulsory, according to half of the respondents. This contradiction might have to possible causes, either the answer that PR is a profession reflects social desirability or PR practitioners are not aware of what being a profession requires.

Around 30% of respondents have no affiliation with any professional association. Of those that do, half report individual affiliation to the IPR and around 11% to the PRCA. Interestingly, 13% are affiliated to the CIM – Chartered Institute of Marketing. Membership of a professional association is considered weakly or moderately beneficial by most. The IPR is regarded more highly than the PRCA when considered in terms of its contribution to the development of professional standards. A majority (64%) considered that the PRCA does not represent fully the interests of all public relations firms. A total of 66% of the PR firms involved in the study do not have their own staff training programme. Those that prepare training do so mainly in developing writing and presentation skills.

The vast majority of respondents (84%) indicate that within itself public relations industry is more competitive now than it was 10 years ago. Marketing and advertising agencies/people were found to be those who compete most with public relations firms.

Generally, practitioners seem to be either indifferent or unknowing in relation to public relations academia. The public relations academics/ practitioners relationship is classified as neither good or bad (55%) or none (20%). The importance of academic training for public relations practice was acknowledged by few respondents (38%). This attitude towards academic issues seems to reveal some devaluation of the academic contribution. This might be explained by the view that, when recruiting, personal qualities (58%) are considered the most important factor than practical experience (33%) and, quite far behind, academic qualifications (4%) (Figure VI-8).

According to the preliminary interviews, the dart of talent and improvement of standards were two of the most pressing issues for practitioners. It would seem adequate to expect practitioners to welcome and value formal qualifications, namely academic. However, PR practitioners do not seem to consider the recruitment of PR graduates as the path to achieve those collective goals.

More fundamental to public relations than research are experience (83%) and intuition (54%). A surprisingly high number of respondents (83%) claim to undertake public relations evaluation, mostly compiling press clippings or radio-television mentions (72%). Money is considered the most important aspect when developing research or evaluation, followed by familiarity with methodologies.

Respondents perceive that although many of their clients include communications in their management agenda (76%), many need to be made aware of the potential of public relations (67%). The most frequent of clients' target audiences are the media and consumers, which might reflect the practice of marketing PR. Approximately half of respondents' clients ask PR consultancies to get involved in their strategic planning, which is interesting, considering the pro-technical profile of the practice. This is a young industry apparently moving towards the consolidation of knowledge about public relations and better standards. After this initial descriptive overview of the survey findings which provided a picture of the momentum of contemporary British PR industry, additional multivariate data analysis of the survey findings followed in order to attain the research goals of operationalisation and is presented in the next chapter VII.

VII. MULTIVARIATE ANALYSIS OF SURVEY FINDINGS

VII.1 Introduction

Following the descriptive overview of the survey findings, this chapter (VII) intends to present the results of the multivariate analysis of the survey findings. A three-step approach was used for the multivariate analysis (chapter III – Methodology): (1) exploratory factor analysis, to reveal the underlying constructs between variables within a data set (2) coefficient alpha, to measure scale reliability and (3) confirmatory factor analysis, in order to validate the refined scales referring to the three dimensions of PR activity: practitioner, consultancy and industry forces.

This three-step approach intended to achieve one of the objectives of the exploratory study: operationalise the constituent elements of key dimensions of public relations activity and develop measurement scales of those elements. The assumption was that major advances in public relations would only be made possible by means of a more integrated approach to identify, conceptualise, measure and relate variables involved in the PR activity phenomenon. The dependent variable can be said to be 'existence' of public relations. A dependent variable such as effectiveness was not used because this study is not interested in issues of causality. The aim of the study is exploratory, and at this early stage intends to identify existing variables and to develop its measurement scales.

This chapter will follow the three step approach to multivariate analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA), reliability analysis and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and will conclude with the presentation of correlations among the final purified constructs aimed at a preliminary understanding of how the latent constructs co-exist.

Churchill's (1979) traditional approach to scale development was used. With the aim of producing a set of items which reflect an underlying construct (or factor), Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and coefficient alpha were deployed. Churchill's (1979) and Peter's (1979, 1981) approaches to scale development have been expanded by Gerbing and Anderson (1988), with the use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). CFA was used to assess the measurement properties of the proposed scales. *First*, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the component structure of the data for the construction of scales. *Second*, the reliability of the emerging components was evaluated to further refine the scales. *Third*, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed in order to give a robust estimation of reliability and formally test the unidimensionality (a group of measures representing a unique construct) of the scales.

Data for multivariate analysis were checked for outliers and missing data and were scrutinised to meet the assumptions of normality and linearity (Stevens, 1992; Cleveland, 1993; Hair *et al.*, 1998). Hair *et al.* (1998: 70) stated, "the most fundamental assumption in multivariate analysis is normality, referring to the shape of the data distribution for an individual metric variable and its correspondence to the normal distribution, the benchmark for statistical methods". For this reason, the authors added that, "the researcher should assess the normality of all variables included in the analysis" (1998: 71). Likewise, linearity is another "implicit assumption of all multivariate techniques based on the correlational measures of association, including (...) factor analysis (...)" (1998: 75). Because correlations represent only the linear association between variables, nonlinear effects will not be represented in the correlation value". Normality was checked through visual checks of histograms and normal probability plots. Linearity was checked with scatterplotes of the variables. When the data violate the assumptions of normality and linearity, some researchers such as Cleveland (1993), Stevens (1992) and Hair *et al.* (1998) suggest data transformation. When the normality or linearity assumptions were violated, variables were transformed by being inverted, or their square root or logarithms were taken when appropriate (Hair *et al.*, 1998).

VII.2 First step: Exploratory factor analysis (EFA)

Exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the component structure of the data. A factor loading of greater than or equal to .50 has been used to determine the cut-off point for assigning variables to components (Hair *et al.*, 1998). When an item failed to have a high loading on any existing components, it was removed and the factor analysis was recomputed on the remaining items to improve the overall factor solution (Floyd and Widaman, 1995: 295). The latent root criterion (eigenvalues greater than 1) was then employed due to the exploratory nature of the analysis and to the number of variables being between 20 and 50 (Hair *et al.*, 1998). A fourteen-factor solution was achieved and is presented in Tables VII-1 (1st part) and VII-2 (2nd part). As components 13 and 14 are single factors loading and accounted for just 5% of the total variance, they were excluded from further analysis (VII.2; part 2). Although an inspection of a scree-plot of eigenvalues suggested that 10 of the components should be retained due to the exploratory nature of this research, 12 were retained for subsequent scrutiny by CFA.

Table VII-3 shows the twelve emergent components from the Exploratory Factor Analysis. They accounted for 61% of the variance in the data (40 items), in agreement with Hair *et al.* (1998) who considers satisfactory a solution that accounts for 60% of the total variance in the Social Sciences. For each item, Table VII-3 provides the sample size, mean and standard deviation; and for each component, it provides its eigenvalue, percent of variance explained and its reliability as a scale.

The final 12 emergent components from Exploratory Factor Analysis (cf: Table VII-3) were named as follows:

Component 1 was named "managerial public relations". It is made up of six items concerning activities typically carried out at the managerial level: setting quantifiable objectives, setting strategic goals, deciding on communications policy, assessing progress periodically, making presentations and co-ordinating resources. Respondents are involved in these activities when practising public relations. Managerial public relations explained most of the total variance, 11% (Table VII-3).

Component 2 was called "permanence in job". All four of its items relate to the length of time spent in PR practice: years working in present agency, years in current role, number of years agency has existed, and number of years in public relations.

Table VII-1 *(part 1)*: Exploratory Factor Analysis
[Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation (Kaiser Normalization)][a]

	Variables:	Component 1 Managerial public relations	Component 2 Permanence in job	Component 3 Competition	Component 4 Quality of PR graduates	Component 5 Strategic needs from clients	Component 6 Trade body contribution	Component 7 Industry standard
c1c_a3e	Frequency setting quantifiable objectives	**.788**	.002	.026	-.020	.023	.016	.065
c1a_a3b	Frequency setting strategic goals	**.772**	-.015	.061	-.127	.006	.091	.083
c1f_a3i	Frequency deciding on communications policy	**.749**	-.009	-.060	-.152	-.181	.025	.059
c1b_a3d	Frequency assessing progress periodically	**.694**	-.012	.020	.082	.132	.028	-.024
c1e_a3h	Frequency making presentations	**.632**	-.071	-.096	.060	-.096	.013	.008
c1d_a3f	Frequency co-ordinating resources	**.583**	-.056	.069	.090	-.005	-.182	-.084
c2b_k4	years working in present agency	-.024	**.912**	-.017	.074	-.022	.031	-.037
c2c_k5	years in current role	-.082	**.874**	.005	.054	.019	.078	.003
c2a_j4	agency's years of existence	-.012	**.767**	-.023	.060	.055	.033	-.099
c2d_k8	years in public relations	-.076	**.680**	-.107	.168	-.109	-.117	.052
c3b_f2b	Competition from marketing agencies/people	.063	-.024	**.809**	.098	.039	-.014	.058
c3d_f2e	Competition from sales promotion ag./ people	-.022	-.046	**.804**	.078	-.053	-.045	-.087
c3a_f2a	Competition from advertising agencies/people	.019	-.056	**.757**	.078	.040	-.088	.132
c3c_f2d	Competition from management ag./ people	-.052	.040	**.703**	-.116	-.030	.244	-.127
c4e_g4e	Graduates' overall preparation	-.029	.036	.081	**.688**	.102	.191	.070
c4c_g4c	Graduates' strategic thinking	-.052	.013	.070	**.685**	.001	.062	.106
c4d_g4d	Graduates' management skills	-.063	.078	.030	**.675**	.071	-.004	.046
c4a_g4a	Graduates' writing skills	.138	.055	.143	**.667**	-.025	.059	-.003
c4b_g4b	Graduates' speaking skills	-.012	.049	-.130	**.521**	-.028	.029	-.020
c5c_i3c	clients ask for evaluation of programs	.098	-.028	.057	-.026	**.753**	.071	.041
c5d_i3d	clients ask for research-based programs	.009	-.005	.087	.008	**.749**	.057	-.115
c5a_i3a	clients ask agency to get involved in their strategic planning	-.127	-.089	-.087	.120	**.711**	-.091	.047
c5b_i3b	clients ask for communication beyond pr	-.088	.098	-.082	.035	**.696**	-.077	.050
c6a_d2	trade body membership benefits	.011	.073	-.045	.135	-.065	**.798**	.165
c6c_d4	Contribution of IPR to professionalism	-.056	.055	.042	.197	-.007	**.742**	.190
c6b_d3	Contribution of PRCA to professionalism	.035	-.031	.014	.076	.040	**.730**	.070
c7a_c2e	industry has clear standard of performance	.032	-.050	.028	.072	-.003	.084	**.849**
c7c_c2d	industry has clear code of ethics	.038	.026	.036	-.001	-.022	.272	**.826**
c7b_c2c	pr has clear body of knowledge	.017	-.050	-.036	.087	.016	.031	**.647**

a. All missing values replaced with mean

Table VII-2 *(part 2)*: Exploratory Factor Analysis
[Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation (Kaiser Normalization)][a]

	Variables:	Component 8 Practitioners' managerial ability	Component 9 PR firm size	Component 10 Research expenditure	Component 11 Agency's training	Component 12 Importance of qualifications	Component 13 -	Component 14 -
c8a_c1a	pr practitioners' skills in communication strategic thinking	**.924**	-.063	-.003	.018	.004	.014	.038
c8b_c1b	pr practitioners' credibility providing communication advice to the board level	**.904**	.043	.008	-.051	-.004	.060	.026
c9b_j7	number of clients UK	-.003	**.926**	-.042	.019	.033	-.065	-.058
c9c_j10a	UK turnover	-.002	**.546**	.060	.050	.001	.146	.015
c9a_j6	number of directors	-.010	**.531**	.016	.033	.014	.009	.003
c10b_h6b	research expenditure	.047	.082	**.882**	.041	.025	.056	.042
c10a_h6a	evaluation expenditure	-.039	-.015	**.863**	.059	.011	-.024	-.021
c11b_e2b	my co has training program for new entrants	-.023	.052	.052	**.797**	.009	-.013	.023
c11a_e2a	my co has a clear career structure	-.012	.067	.033	**.766**	.076	-.022	.017
c12a_c3	formal qualifications should be compulsory	-.029	-.034	-.111	.003	**.892**	-.026	-.033
c12b_g2	importance of academic training for pr	.027	.081	.134	.089	**.753**	-.045	.040
c13a_i1f	clients are developing intern campaigns	.085	.121	.027	-.045	-.071	**.915***	-.032
c14a_i1b	clients need to be made aware of pr potential	.065	-.031	.018	.039	.011	-.029	**.981***

a. All missing values replaced with mean

* Single item factors excluded from further analysis

Component 3, "competition" grouped four items representing competitors of public relations consultancies: competition from marketing agencies/people, competition from sales promotion agencies/people, from advertising and from management consultancies/people.

Component 4 was named "quality of PR graduates" as its five items relate directly to a range of public relations graduate students' skills. These include public relations graduates' overall preparation for work in the public relations industry, graduates' strategic thinking, graduates' management skills, graduates' writing skills and graduates' speaking skills.

Component 5, "strategic needs from clients" is represented by four items for which clients ask PR consultancies: evaluation of programmes, research-based programmes; client strategic planning; and communications beyond media relations.

Component 6, "trade body contribution" refers to public relations professional associations' contributions to British industry. This regards trade body membership benefits, contribution of the PRCA (Public Relations Consultants Association) and of the IPR (Institute of Public Relations) to 'professionalism'.

Component 7 was named "industry standards", as the three items appear to be criteria for assessing the integrity of PR. The variables are: the public relations industry has a clear standard of performance; the public relations industry has a clear code of ethics; and public relations has a clear body of knowledge.

Component 8, "practitioners' managerial ability" linked two items: public relations practitioners' skills in communications strategic thinking and public relations practitioners' credibility providing communication advice at Board level.

Component 9, "PR firm size" presents three items that measure size: number of clients in England, agency turnover, and number of directors.

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Component 9, "PR firm size" presents three items that measure size: number of clients in England, agency turnover, and number of directors.

Component 10, "research expenditure" has two items: research expenditure and evaluation expenditure.

Component 11, "company training" has two items: the PR consultancy has a clear career structure and the PR consultancy has training programmes for new entrants.

Component 12 was named "importance of qualifications" as it refers to the importance of academic training for public relations and to formal qualifications being compulsory.

Table VII-3: EFA Components: sample size, mean, SD, Eigenvalues, variance and alpha

	Components and respective items:	Sample size (Total N = 297)	Mean	SD	Eigenvalue	% of variance explained (Total = 61.2%)	Alpha (Scale reliability analysis)
	Component 1 = Managerial public relations				**4.24**	**11%**	**.8141**
c1c_a3e	frequency setting quantifiable objectives	289	3.75	.98			
c1a_a3b	frequency setting strategic goals	292	3.96	.86			
c1f_a3i	frequency deciding on communications policy	290	3.76	.96			
c1b_a3d	frequency assessing progress periodically	286	3.97	.85			
c1e_a3h	frequency making presentations	290	3.57	.94			
c1d_a3f	frequency co-ordinating resources	286	3.88	.86			
	Component 2 = Permanence in job				**3.76**	**9.8%**	**.8401**
c2b_k4	years working in present agency	292	2.96	1.21			
c2c_k5	years in current role	294	2.93	1.26			
c2a_j4	agency's years of existence	295	2.91	1.15			
c2d_k8	years in public relations	296	3.06	1.20			
	Component 3 = Competition				**3.33**	**8.7%**	**.7798**
c3b_f2b	competition from marketing agencies/people	293	3.36	.88			
c3d_f2e	competition from sales promotion agencies/people	294	2.58	1.06			
c3a_f2a	competition from advertising agencies/people	293	3.10	.97			
c3c_f2d	competition from management agencies/people	291	2.41	1.09			
	Component 4 = Quality of PR graduates				**2.44**	**6.4%**	**.7723**
c4e_g4e	graduates' overall preparation	207	2.95	.81			
c4c_g4c	graduates' strategic thinking	205	2.99	.88			
c4d_g4d	graduates' management skills	203	2.68	.77			
c4a_g4a	graduates' writing skills	210	2.94	.88			
c4b_g4b	graduates' speaking skills	204	3.24	.73			
	Component 5 = Strategic needs from clients				**2.01**	**5.2%**	**.7358**
c5c_i3c	clients ask for evaluation of programs	293	2.88	.95			
c5d_i3d	clients ask for research-based programs	291	2.44	.92			
c5a_i3a	clients ask agency to get involved in their strategic planning	294	3.48	.89			
c5b_i3b	clients ask for communication beyond pr	296	3.46	.86			
	Component 6 = Trade body contribution				**1.76**	**4.6%**	**.7677**
c6a_d2	trade body membership benefits	292	2.73	1.12			
c6c_d4	contribution of IPR to professionalism	277	3.05	.95			
c6b_d3	contribution of PRCA to professionalism	252	2.67	.99			
	Component 7 = Industry standard				**1.70**	**4.4%**	**.7287**
c7a_c2e	industry has clear standard of performance	291	2.47	.93			
c7c_c2d	Industry has clear code of ethics	293	2.88	1.03			
c7b_c2c	pr has clear body of knowledge	291	3.18	.88			
	Component 8 = Practitioners' managerial ability				**1.56**	**4%**	**.8330**
c8a_c1a	pr practitioners' skills in communication strategic thinking	292	3.08	.98			
c8b_c1b	pr practitioners' credibility providing communication advice to the board level	292	3.10	.95			
	Component 9 = PR firm size				**1.32**	**3.4%**	**.4213**
c9b_j7	number of clients UK *	288	2.85	1.11			**.7533 if deleted**
c9c_j10a	agency turnover	286	.14	.21			
c9a_j6	number of directors	292	.25	.24			
	Component 10 = Research expenditure				**1.24**	**3.2%**	**.8619**
c10b_h6b	research expenditure	270	1.66	1.39			
c10a_h6a	evaluation expenditure	272	1.54	1.28			
	Component 11 = Agency's training				**1.14**	**2.9%**	**.7738**
c11b_e2b	my co has training program. for new entrants	176	3.21	1.08			
c11a_e2a	my co has a clear career structure	188	3.45	1.00			
	Component 12 = Importance of qualifications				**1.0**	**2.7%**	**.6527**
c12a_c3	Formal qualifications should be compulsory	293	2.88	1.27			
c12b_g2	Importance of academic training for pr	293	3.16	1.01			

* The removal of the item 'number of clients in the UK' significantly improved Chonbach's alpha, and thus it was excluded from further analysis (39 items remained).

VII.3 Second step: Reliability analysis (coefficient alpha)

The internal reliability (Cronbach, 1951) of the emerging components (coefficient alpha) was evaluated to further refine the scales. In the last column of Table VII-3, it can be seen that 11 of the 12 components have a coefficient alpha greater than .700, as recommended by Murphy & Davidshofer (1988) and Nunnally (1978). Robinson *et al.* (1991) suggested it could decrease to .600 in exploratory research. Scales means, standard deviations and alpha if item deleted can be found in Appendix 4. The reliability of the component 9, "PR firm size", improved from an alpha value of .4213 to .7533 by deleting the item 'number of clients in the UK', and thus the scale was reduced to thirty nine items (cf: Table VII-3; last column). However, reliability is a necessary statistical measure but not a sufficient condition for the development of a scale (DeVellis, 1991). Hence the use of Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA).

VII.4 Third step: Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA)

Despite the popular use of CFA as a truly confirmatory approach to test pre-specified theoretical models, it can also be used for exploratory purposes (Gerbing and Hamilton, 1997) (Chapter IV – Methodology). The 39 items resultant from EFA (Table VII-3) disallowed a single model to be run through LISREL 8.3 (Joreskog *et al.*, 1999) because such a number of items would require a very large sample. Thus, three CFA models (Table VII-4) had to be run to identify the most reliable items (R^2>0.5) based on the theoretical framework (Figure V-1), which emerged from both the preliminary interviews and the literature and was afterwards translated into the three units of analysis used in the survey questionnaire: practitioner, consultancy and industry. Table VII-4 presents the results of Confirmatory Factor Analysis for measure validation. Components 8 (practitioners' managerial ability), 10 (research expenditure) and 11 (company training) were rejected by CFA: these scales were deemed insufficiently reliable or valid. Furthermore, 13 items also presented unacceptable 'standardised factor loadings' (lower than 0.7) or 'indicator reliability' values (lower than 0.5) (Table VII-4) and were thus eliminated from the scales (see Hair *et al.*, 1998).

Table VII-4: Confirmatory Factor Analysis [Method of Estimation: Maximum Likelihood]

	Indicator reliability (R^2)	Standardised factor loadings	T-Values
Recommended→	≥0.5	≥0.7	≥1.96
GROUP 1: PRACTITIONER			
Component 1 = Managerial PR [1]			
a3b - frequency setting strategic goals	0.66	0.81	16.02
a3e - frequency setting quantifiable objectives	0.61	0.78	15.21
a3i - frequency deciding on communications policy	0.56	0.78	14.17
*a3d - frequency assessing progress periodically	0.46	0.68	12.49
*a3f - frequency co-ordinating resources	0.28	0.53	9.29
*a3h - frequency making presentations	0.35	0.75	10.54
Component 2 = Permanence in job [1]			
K4 - years in present agency	0.93	0.96	21.30
K5 - years in current role	0.73	0.85	17.71
*j4 - agency's years of existence	0.48	0.70	13.34
*k8 - years in public relations	0.40	0.63	11.78
GROUP 2: CONSULTANCY			
Component 5 = Strategic needs from clients [2]			
i3a - clients ask agency to get involved in their strategic planning	0.65	0.81	14.27
i3b - clients ask for communication beyond pr	0.60	0.78	13.64
*i3c - clients ask for evaluation of program	0.28	0.53	8.92
*i3d - clients ask for research-based program	0.29	0.54	9.03
Component 9 = PR firm size [2]			
j6 - number of directors	0.62	0.79	8.41
j10a - agency turnover	0.89	0.94	8.94
GROUP 3: INDUSTRY FORCES			
Component 3 = Competition [3]			
f2a – competition from advertising agency/people	0.62	0.79	15.03
f2b – competition from marketing agency/people	0.81	0.90	17.95
*f2d – competition from management agency/people	0.31	0.55	9.72
*f2e – competition from sales promotion agency/people	0.46	0.68	12.44
Component 4 = Quality of PR graduates [3]			
g4c - graduates' strategic thinking	0.50	0.71	12.65
g4d - graduates' management skills	0.56	0.75	13.47
g4e - graduates' overall preparation	0.57	0.75	13.63
*g4a - graduates' writing skills	0.35	0.59	10.15
*g4b - graduates' speaking skills	0.09	0.29	4.64
Component 6 = Trade body contribution [3]			
d2 - trade body membership benefits	0.66	0.81	14.89
d4 – contribution of IPR to professionalism	0.68	0.82	15.14
*d3 – contribution of PRCA to professionalism	0.34	0.58	10.04
Component 7 = Industry standard [3]			
c2e - industry has clear standard of performance	0.64	0.80	14.40
c2d - industry has clear code of ethics	0.83	0.91	16.64
*c2c - pr has clear body of knowledge	0.25	0.50	8.54
Component 12 = Importance of qualifications [3]			
c3 – formal qualifications should be compulsory	0.69	0.83	10.08
g2 – importance of academic training for pr	0.64	0.64	8.69
ITEMS WHICH DID NOT LOAD			
Component 8 = Practitioners' managerial ability [*]			
c1a - pr practitioners' skills in communication strategic thinking	**	**	**
c1b - pr practitioners' credibility providing communication advice to the board level	**	**	**
Component 10 = Research expenditure [*]			
h6a - evaluation expenditure	**	**	**
h6b - research expenditure	**	**	**
Component 11 = Company training [*]			
e2a - my co has a clear career structure	**	**	**
e2b - my co has training programme for new entrants	**	**	**

[*] R^2 below the recommended level of 0.5

[**] Rejected by CFA because they did not load

[1] **Group 1** = 'managerial PR' (component 1) and 'permanence in job' (component 2)
Chi-square = 101.81; df = 34; p= 0.000; CFI=0.95; IFI=0.95; NFI=0.93, GFI =0.94

[2] **Group 2** = 'strategic needs from clients' (component 5) and 'PR firm size' (component 9).
Chi-square = 440.74; df = 209; p= 0.000; CFI=0.90; IFI=0.90; NFI=0.89, GFI =0.93

[3] **Group 3** = 'competition' (component 3); 'quality of PR graduates' (component 4); 'trade body contribution' (component 5); 'industry standard' (component 6); and 'importance of qualifications' (component 12).
Chi-square = 247.17; df = 109; p= 0.000; CFI=0.91; IFI=0.91; NFI=0.86, GFI =0.91

CFA is used to test three validity dimensions: (1) convergent, (2) discriminant and (3) nomological validity (Chau, 1997; Eriksson and Sharma, 1999).

Convergent validity refers to the homogeneity of the constructs, i.e., the extent to which each measure correlates with other measures of the same construct. When using LISREL, Joreskog and Sorbom (1993) suggest assessing validity at several levels: convergent validity through t-values (larger than 2.58), and through the level of significance ($p < .01$) of the factor loadings. Convergent validity was verified (Table VII-4): most items had significant standardised loadings (i.e., between 0.7 and 1) of each item in its construct ($t > 1.96$) (Hair *et al.*, 1992).

Discriminant validity refers to the extent of separation between constructs, i.e., the extent to which the measure of a construct does not correlate with measures of other constructs. It is achieved when an item correlates more highly with items that measure the same construct than with items that measure different constructs. Discriminant validity is revealed when no confidence interval around the correlation estimates for the pairs of latent variables includes r=1.0 (Anderson and Gerbin, 1988). Discriminant validity was also verified, based on the correlation estimates between any two constructs, with the highest correlation being 0.47 (for "trade body" and "industry standard") (cf: Appendix V).

Nomological validity refers to the validity of the entire model (Chau, 1997; Eriksson and Sharma, 1999). It compares chi-square results with degrees of freedom to measure the distance between the data and the model[1]. Chi-square is badness-of-fit

[1] In practice it is more useful to regard chi-square as a measure of fit rather than as a test statistic. In this view, chi-square is measure of overall fit of the model to the data. It measures the distance between the sample covariance (correlation) matrix and the fitted covariance (correlation) matrix.

measure in the sense that a small chi-square corresponds to a good fit and a large chi-square to a bad fit. Zero chi-square corresponds to a perfect fit (Joreskog and Sorbom 1993: 122).

There is an on-going discussion regarding which measures provided by CFA should be used (see Bollen and Long, 1993). Several goodness-of-fit measures were used to assess nomological validity: Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Incremental Fit Index (IFI), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), Normed Fitted Index (NFI) (cf: note to Table VII-4), which are functions of chi-square but "have been proposed to eliminate or reduce its dependence on sample size" (Joreskog and Sorbom 1993: 122). All these indices are supposed to lie between 0 and 1 (Joreskog and Sorbom 1993: 125), which is verified (cf: note to Table VII-4). CFI was, for the first model = 0.95; second model = 0.90; third model = 0.91. Incremental Fit Index (IFI) presented in first model = 0.95; second model = 0.90; third model = 0.91. Goodness of Fit Index (GFI): first model = 0.94; second model = 0.93; third model = 0.91. Normed Fit Index (NFI): first model =0.93; second model =0.89; third model = 0.86.

Table VII-5 presents the nine proposed final scales. Out of the 39 tested items, CFA revealed that 19 were not reliable (Table VII-4). The 20 items of the final nine scales present desirable levels of Composite Reliability [$0.7 \leq CR \leq 1$] (Bagozzi, 1980) and Variance Extracted [$0.5 \leq VE \leq 1$) (Fornell and Larcker, 1981) (Table VII-5). Some of the low values (critical ratios) are justified because this is an exploratory study in an emergent academic area where solid conceptualisation and operationalisation of variables is under construction.

Table VII-5: Resulting scales (after EFA and CFA)

PR – DIMENSIONS:	Constructs:	Measures:	Composite Reliability Recommended >.7	Variance Extracted Recommended >.5
PRACTITIONER	Managerial public relations	frequency setting strategic goals frequency setting quantifiable objectives frequency deciding on communications policy	0.82	0.60
	Permanence in job	years in present agency years in current role	0.90	0.82
CONSULTANCY	Strategic needs from clients	clients ask agency to get involved in their strategic planning clients ask for communication beyond pr	0.77	0.62
	PR firm size	agency turnover number of directors	0.86	0.75
INDUSTRY FORCES	Trade body contribution	Contribution of IPR to professionalism trade body membership benefits	0.79	0.66
	Industry standard	Industry has clear code of ethics industry has clear standard of performance	0.84	0.73
	Quality of PR graduates	graduates' overall preparation graduates' management skills graduates' strategic thinking	0.78	0.54
	Importance of qualifications	formal qualifications should be compulsory importance of academic training for pr	0.69	0.53
	Competition	competition from marketing agency/people competition from advertising agency/people	0.82	0.70

VII.5 Correlations between any two variables

Taking into account the exploratory nature of this research, all of the final nine constructs were correlated in order to provide further empirical evidence about the strength of the association between two variables. Using SPSS, the remaining 9 purified constructs had their respective items averaged (items with R^2 >0.5) and were then correlated (Styles, 1998). Table VII-6 presents the correlations among the final purified constructs (i.e., summated scores).

Table VII-6 – Correlation Matrix among the final nine purified constructs

	MANAGERIAL PR	PERMANENCE IN JOB	IMPORTANCE OF QUALIFICATIONS	TRADE BODY CONTRIBUTION	INDSTRY STANDARD	QUALITY OF PR GRADUATES	COMPETITION	STRATEGIC NEEDS FROM CLIENTS	SIZE
MANAGERIAL PR	1.000								
PERMANENCE IN JOB	.037	1.000							
IMPORTANCE OF QUALIFICATIONS	.080	-.069	1.000						
TRADE BODY CONTRIBUTION	-.002	-.038	.360***	1.000					
INDUSTRY STANDARD	.055	.072	.142**	.346***	1.000				
QUALITY OF PR GRADUATES	-.023	.053	.065	.240***	.140**	1.000			
COMPETITION	.026	.027	.225***	.047	.063	.060	1.000		
STRATEGIC NEEDS FROM CLIENTS	.366***	-.055	.029	-.036	.040	-.064	-.030	1.000	
SIZE	.209***	-.176***	-.018	-.103*	-.054	-.092	-.052	.171***	1.000

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.1 level (2-tailed).

Two variables are said to be correlated if changes in one variable are associated with changes in the other variable (Hair *et al.*, 1998). If the direction of the relationship is positive, the two variables get stronger or weaker together; and if it is negative or reverse (–) as one variable gets stronger the other gets weaker.

An analysis of the correlation matrix (Table VII-6) identified 11 significant correlations among the final nine constructs. Eight highly significant correlations ($p<0.01$), 2 significant correlations ($p<0.05$) and 1 marginally significant correlation. Significant correlation values are low, which is consistent with the asserted unidimensionality of the constructs.

Highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "strategic needs from clients" and "managerial PR"; "size" and "managerial PR"; "size" and "strategic needs from clients"; "trade body contribution" and "industry standard"; "trade body contribution" and "importance of qualifications"; "competition" and "importance of qualifications"; and between "trade body contribution" and "quality of PR graduates".
Significant positive correlation ($p<0.05$) between "importance of qualifications" and "industry standard"; and "industry standard" and "quality of PR graduates".
Highly significant negative correlation ($p<0.01$) between "size" and "permanence in job".
Marginal significant negative correlation ($p<0.1$) between "size" and "trade body contribution".
These are hoped to provide fruitful streams for further research.

The final resulting scales (Table VII-5) and the correlations (VII-6) were translated into a visual presentation (respectively, Figure VIII-1 and Figure VIII-2) and taken to the follow-up interviews in order to test external validity of the resulting dimensions and respective scales and in order to gather insights about the perceived significance of each construct and of how they co-exist. These discussions during the follow-up interviews assisted the Discussion, which is presented in the next chapter (VIII).

VII.6 Conclusion

In a preliminary attempt to identify, conceptualise, measure and relate variables involved in the PR activity phenomenon the study developed a multivariate analysis of the survey findings. *First*, exploratory factor analysis was conducted to examine the component structure of the data for the construction of scales. *Second*, the reliability of the emerging components was evaluated to further refine the scales. *Third*, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was performed in order to give a robust estimation of reliability and formally test the unidimensionality (a group of measures representing a unique construct) of the scales.

All the components are inescapably grounded in the public relations phenomena. The emergent components were based on an exploratory questionnaire totally constituted of public relations items. These items were based on the review of the PR literature as well as on the preliminary interviews with PR practitioners, which reported what issues were relevant to them. The sample was exclusively comprised by public relations practitioners.

One of the key research implications of these scales is that public relations' activity complex reality can be studied through multiple constituent elements. No one measure is sufficient to provide a reliable assessment of public relations activity. The advantage of using a combination of readily available items to capture each public relations activity subdimensions helps overcome possible random fluctuations of any given item. The exploratory holistic approach led to the use of the entire data set in the multivariate analysis.

Firstly, an EFA revealed the component structure of the data by identifying a overall factor solution of 12 components (40 items), which accounted for 61% of the variance in the data, considered adequate for an exploratory study (Hair *et al.*, 1998; Streiner, 1994). The 12 components were analysed according to their items and named accordingly.

Secondly, a reliability analysis was conducted in order to access the internal reliability of each of the 12 components. All coefficient alphas are above .600, which is sufficient for an exploratory study (Robinson *et al.*, 1991).

Thirdly, CFA was used for exploratory purposes (Gerbing and Hamilton, 1997) in order to test the unidimensionality, the existence of a single construct underlining a set of measures (Hattie, 1985; McDonald, 1981), of a scale initially developed by EFA (Steenkamp and Van Trijp, 1991). Three CFA models were run with LISREL 8.3 to identify the most reliable items based on the theoretical framework (Figure V-1). After CFA eliminated scales and items as insufficiently reliable or valid, 9 final scales and respective 20 items were successfully tested for three types of validity, convergent, discriminant and nomological. Further, composite reliability and variance extracted were successfully tested.

With the objective of developing measurement scales for further research of the public relations activity, one of the research questions guiding this study was how do PR practitioners perceive which elements are part of contemporary public relations activity? It is concluded that three dimensions of the public relations activity phenomenon were identified: practitioner, consultancy and industry forces. It is also concluded that some of their key constituent elements were identified: at the practitioner level, managerial PR and permanence in job; at the consultancy level, strategic needs from clients and size; at the industry forces level, industry standard, trade body contribution, importance of qualifications, quality of PR graduates and competition. These lay the foundations for further refinement and extensions so as to increase our understanding of PR. The proposed scales are valid and reliable and remain under construction.

Finally, in order to answer to how do the identified elements of the PR activity co-exist, all of the final nine constructs were summated and correlated in order to provide further empirical evidence about the association among them. The correlation matrix identified 11 significant correlations among the final nine constructs (Table VII-6). Significant correlation values are low, which is consistent with the asserted unidimensionality of the constructs. Together with the measurement contribution, these constructs allowed a preliminary understanding of the co-existence among the

constituent elements of PR activity, and intend to stimulate theory about the phenomena, open avenues for further research, and support further studies at the measurement and causality levels.

The main findings, the final measurement scales and the significant correlations among the constructs were discussed with public relations practitioners, non-practitioner PR experts and members of professional associations in order to test external validity and obtain insights about why these constructs are key to the PR activity phenomenon. These insights informed the Discussion, presented in the next chapter (V).

VIII. *DISCUSSION*

VIII.1 Introduction

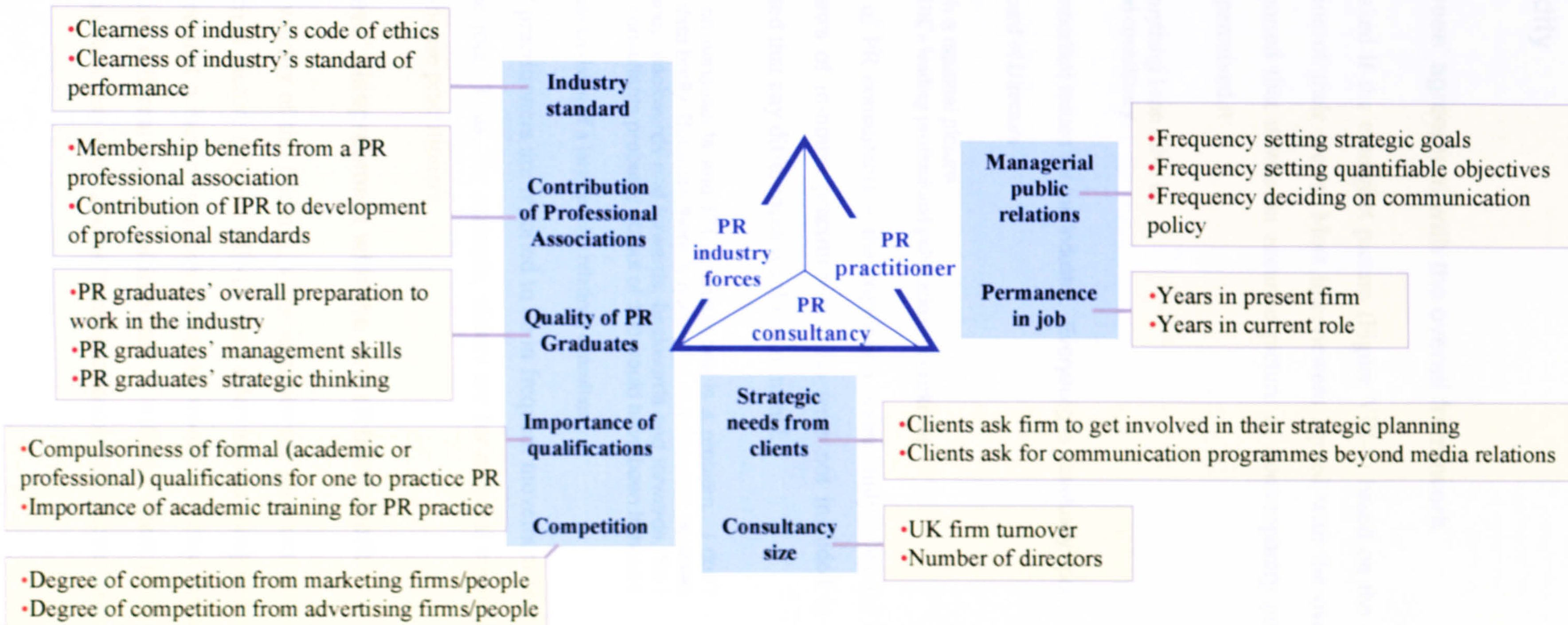
The core findings of this research comprise the identification of the key dimensions of PR activity, the operationalisation of the PR activity constituent elements, and the preliminary understanding of their co-existence. The study was able to identify nine valid and reliable constructs that relate to three dimensions of public relations practice: practitioner, consultancy and industry (Figures V-1 and VIII-1). In all, 11 significant correlations among the nine latent constructs were found. The present chapter will explore the constructs and discuss their implications.

This chapter was developed through the contribution of 16 follow-up interviews (Table IV-4). These interviews were conducted to test practitioners' agreement with the final constructs in order to gain insights about how those constructs relate to their particular context, and to help interpret the correlations among the constructs. Therefore, visual representations of the core findings, the nine valid and reliable constructs positioned at the three dimensions of public relations (Figure VIII-1), and their correlations (Figure VIII-2) were used as guides during the follow-up interviews. After being given an explanation of the research project, interviewees were told that a 'picture' of practitioners' views was created and that the objective of the follow-up interviews was twofold: to ascertain the extent to which the obtained picture was a true reflection of reality, and to obtain insights as to why the picture came to be as it was. Two questions were asked directly of the interviewees: (1) Did the picture represent the PR activity? (2) How could they relate *their* particular reality to the issues represented by each construct? Interviewees were also asked to rank the issues in terms of their importance and justify

their choice. They were also invited to delete unimportant constructs or add important factors and give a justification for doing so.

This chapter is organised as follows. First, evidence of the external validity of the final framework (Figure VIII-1) is presented based on the interviewees' level of agreement with it. Secondly, all the constructs and their items are discussed on the basis of the follow-up interviews. Finally, the meaning and implications of the significant correlations among the constructs are analysed.

Figure VIII-1: Follow-up interviews schedule (part 1): Dimensions of public relations activity



VIII.2 External Validity

VIII.2.1 Interviewees' agreement with the overall framework

The interviewees were asked if the emergent picture (Figure VIII-1) based on the data was a correct interpretation of their views. Most interviewees agreed with the overall framework, i.e. most reported that it was an accurate picture of contemporary public relations activity, as they perceived it:

> You have covered everything I can think of.
> Manager of a small-sized consultancy

> This represents the important issues for the industry. Everything is absolutely spot on.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors

> I think that's very much a national picture.
> PR editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in marketing

When asked if the views of PR consultants -- the population under study -- would vary considerably from the views of in-house practitioners, who were not included in this study, all interviewees stated that any differences would be minimal:

> I don't think focusing on consultants and PR consultancies is a problem. I don't think it will affect your data badly. Because there is quite a lot of movement between in-house and consultancy: backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. So I think if you talk to 100 consultants probably 70 out of 100 would have been in-house as well.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy

A very high percentage of practitioners are reported to be in frequent movement between consultancies and in-house jobs. Thus, for example, clients are for external consultants what employees are for in-house practitioners.

VIII.2.2 Interviewees' disagreement with the overall framework

Without undermining the validity of the findings, some interviewees proposed different ways of approaching the final picture (Figure VIII-1). Two interviewees disagreed with that picture. They suggested that a hierarchical representation would be better, because the identified constructs have different degrees of importance, with the client being the most important player. Thus, for these interviewees "strategic needs from clients" was the most important construct:

At one level, you could say yes to all of these, I mean, they are several of the factors that do or have led to the shape of the industry at the moment. But, I suppose I would see it in a more hierarchical structure. I'm not trying to impose my model on your model but I think that showing it in this sort of isosceles structure gives an impression that they are of equal influence or importance and I think that there is much more of a hierarchy of influences. Basically the client would be first.
Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

I am not sure I would not draw the structural image as a wheel rather than a diamond or whatever, because a wheel is never finished. If I draw PR as a wheel the client is the beginning and the end.
Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

The study provides evidence that some constructs are perceived as more important than others by respondents, e.g. "managerial PR" and "strategic needs from clients" in relation to "competition" or "permanence in job". These responses are in agreement with the exploratory nature of the study, which seeks to identify, conceptualise and operationalise the constructs. The study's holistic approach to public relations activity is intended to explore the relevance of all identified parts in relation to the whole. Future studies could further explore the relative importance of each construct at the causal level, and could add a 'client' dimension to the study of PR activity.

One of the interviewees proposed that instead of being *dimensions*, PR practitioner, PR consultancy and PR industry forces are *drivers* of PR activity. Viewing the three units of analysis as dimensions and respective elements is consistent with this study's holistic definition of PR activity as all the people, institutions and activities that determine, constitute or result from PR.

I think these are 'drivers' more than 'dimensions'.
Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

With one exception, interviewees proposed that a construct could be moved into a different dimension, which reinforces the unidimensionality of the constructs as demonstrated by the quantitative data analysis. One interviewee considered that "quality of PR graduates" could be positioned both at the practitioner and industry forces dimensions:

> I wonder whether graduate skills could appear on both sides [practitioner and industry forces dimensions], I suppose, because continuous professional development has got to be part of this [practitioner] as well as that [industry forces]. I am not sure.
> Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

However, it must be stressed that the constituent items -- "PR graduates' overall preparation to work in the industry", "PR graduates' management skills" and "PR graduates' strategic thinking" -- stand for the quality of human resources available for recruiting and do not relate directly to the practitioner dimension.

The scrutiny of all direct statements by interviewees, both in agreement and disagreement with the final picture, led to the conclusion that the core findings are externally validated by the follow-up interviews.

VIII.2.3 The rewording of constructs as proposed by interviewees

The replacement of "managerial PR" by "strategic role of PR" or "strategic PR" was proposed by two interviewees. The original designation was maintained for the following reasons. The designation "managerial" is intended to embrace strategic thinking and action and other PR-specific thinking and action, as revealed by the items "frequency of setting strategic goals", "quantifiable objectives" and "deciding on communication policy". The designation "managerial" is therefore more generic and implies all the actions which are part of PR practice at the managerial level. A more specific designation could artificially limit the addition of new items to it in future studies.

- **Managerial PR => Strategic role of PR**

> Managerial PR is a funny expression – you might call it strategic. It's just, I think that that expression is not one most people would recognise; they wouldn't quite understand what you meant by that. The strategic role of PR or the strategic priority of PR is, I think, what you're getting at.
> Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR => Strategic Corporate Communications or Strategic PR**

> No, it is not the right terminology. I would say you would either be talking about – probably strategic public relations is better or – people don't use the term "managerial". You would be looking -- what people talk about is strategic corporate communications or strategic public relations.
> Editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in PR

The designation "employee turnover" was also proposed as a replacement for "permanence in job", which refers to the number of years in the present firm and the number

of years in the current role. Again, "employee turnover" is too specific for the exploratory nature of this study.

- **Permanence in job => employee turnover**

> I would call that employee turnover.
> Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

At various points in the follow-up interviews, interviewees interpreted the item "clients ask PR firm for communication programmes beyond *public relations*" as standing for "clients ask PR firm for communication programmes beyond *media relations*", and therefore the designation was changed. These items relate to the construct "strategic needs from clients", which in turn relates to the consultancy dimension.

- **Item "clients ask PR firm for communication programmes beyond public relations" => "clients ask PR firm for communication programmes beyond *media relations*"**

> I would suggest a slight amendment to that: beyond *pure media relations.*
> Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

> You know, this doesn't seem right – I think you meant "beyond media relations". But here I think clients wouldn't ask things beyond *public relations*, whatever that is for them, but they do ask things beyond *media relations*, and that is because media relations is for many a synonym for PR anyway.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized marketing and public relations consultancy

> If a client asks us for communication policy, it tends to ask for programmes beyond press relations – so I'm not sure if you shouldn't reconsider that one. You see, media PR is the simplest way of doing PR, and if in relation to that clients ask more or accept our proposal for more than just press releases, then we will all be going to get involved in a completely different discussion – a more strategic discussion.
> Head of Public Relations of a medium-sized public relations consultancy

> I am not sure – what do they call "beyond PR"? I think it only makes sense if they mean *beyond press relations.*
> Editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in PR

Many interviewees proposed new designations for the constructs. Nevertheless, the proposed rewordings did not seem to undermine the original conceptualisation of each construct. In reality, the new proposed designations and the consequent discussions with interviewees helped to clarify the constructs' conceptualisation.

VIII.2.4 Framework constructs voted the most important by interviewees

During the follow-up interviews, interviewees were asked which of the constructs in the framework (Figure VIII-1) they perceived to be the most important and why. The direct answers are reproduced in this section. Further insights are provided in the succeeding sections of the present chapter. The follow-up interviews revealed both quantitatively and qualitatively that interviewees considered the most important construct to be "managerial PR", which was equated with best practice and best reputation.

- **Managerial PR**

  Managerial PR is the most important. These people here with the clients should be doing this all the time.
  Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR**

  Because it is about the reputation of the industry, the reputation of the practitioner; and it is all about the way forward – the way that the whole practice develops.
  Director of a medium-sized public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR**

  Oh, managerial understanding of strategic PR is the most important. Because that determines how you're going to operate. You know, that's what comes first in terms of having a strategic understanding of what PR can do -- that's like laying your foundations. Then you decide all the rest, you know, what sort of staff you've got and what qualifications they've got ...
  Managing Director of a medium-sized public relations consultancy, Birmingham

- **Managerial PR**

  I think the first one, managerial strategic PR. Because I think that any PR campaign should start with a strategic assessment and review -- it's, I think, best practice.
  Head of Public Relations of a medium-sized public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR**

  Once that [managerial PR] becomes recognised, that we can deliver that at that level, everything else goes up with it. But that is the one that actually impacts on everything.
  Managing Director of a small/medium-sized consultancy

- **Managerial PR**

  I think [the most important is] managerial PR. It is important that you can offer that service to clients, that you are able to handle strategies.

Manager of a small-sized consultancy

After "managerial PR", "strategic needs of clients" was considered most important. Both were frequently related and sometimes considered together as the most important constructs.

- **Managerial PR and Strategic needs of clients**

  It all comes from what the client's needs are. And it does come from that [managerial PR]. The clients want people who understand their issues, their agendas, their objectives, their processes. And if the agencies don't supply that quality, the clients will supply it for themselves.
  Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR and Strategic needs of clients**

  The consultancy's ability to respond on a strategic level and the client's willingness to discuss with the consultancy issues on a strategic level [strategic needs from clients]. And the effective operation of any PR programme, in my humble opinion, is totally dependent on creating the right kind of strategic framework for it.
  Managing Director of a medium-sized marketing and public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR and Strategic needs of clients**

  These two [managerial PR and strategic needs from clients] actually are the two most important. They are very similar in terms of -- if you want to continuously improve, if you like, the quality of what we do -- I would look at the professionalising and the moving up from what we do.
  Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy

- **Managerial PR and Strategic needs of clients**

  That [clients needs] is the driver, because that is where the money comes from; but he won't use us if we don't get that [managerial PR] right.
  Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

- **Managerial PR and Quality of PR graduates (or quality of PR people)**

  The single biggest issue that this whole industry faces right now is the ability to actually recruit sufficient talent from both universities and from other areas of the industry -- to actually build a workforce that can actually [managerial PR] frequently set strategic goals, set quantifiable objectives, decide on communications policy. It all boils down to one thing: they need to go and find the people.
  Editor of one of the leading professional publications in the UK's public relations industry

- **Strategic needs of clients**

  The client -- the shape of the industry is client-led. It is not supply-led, it is client- led.
  Chairman of a large public relations consultancy

- **Strategic needs of clients and Competition**

The most important are needs of clients, be they strategic or tactical. And how to handle competition in achieving those needs. Client needs and delivering a result within the competitive environment is what it's about.
Independent media and marketing consultant

- **Industry standard**

Oh, I think the whole thing about standards is the thing, the most important thing -- reinforcing standards and promoting standards.
Managing Director of a medium-sized public relations consultancy, Birmingham

- **Industry standard and Trade body contribution**

These [trade body contribution and industry standard] are important, but the least discussed or relevant currently in our industry. This will need major leadership in the industry. That people concerned with these things make these [industry standard] happen better.
Chief Executive of large public relations consultancy

- **Industry standard and Trade body contribution**

Raising the standard of performance -- that's the most important one. It involves the role of the trade bodies.
Head of Public Relations of a medium-sized public relations consultancy

- **Industry standard and Strategic needs of clients**

It is chicken and egg [industry standard and strategic needs of clients]. If you don't have proper standards the clients are not going to come to you, but the clients have got to understand the true value and worth of PR.
Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

- **Industry standard and Quality of PR graduates**

Because one is reliant on the other. The quality of the people determines the standard, I think.
PR Editor in one of the UK's leading professional publications in marketing

- **Quality of PR graduates, Industry standards and Trade body contribution**

I think the quality of PR graduates is critical because if you invest in high-quality graduates or you churn out high quality graduates, the industry standards will improve and the trade body contributions will necessarily improve. If the three [trade body contribution, industry standard and quality of PR graduates] are correct, the competition will go away. It's as simple as that.
Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

After "managerial PR" and "strategic needs of clients", constructs relating to professionalism were considered to be the most important: "industry standard", "contribution of professional associations" and "quality of PR graduates". All constructs will be further developed in the next sections.

During the follow-up interviews further insights were gathered through discussions about the meaning of the final framework as a whole, the meaning of the three dimensions, and the meaning of their respective constructs. These allowed a more informed and substantiated discussion of the core findings.

VIII.3 The Practitioner Dimension

The practitioner dimension had two validated constructs: "managerial public relations" and "permanence in job".

VIII.3.1 Managerial public relations

The three items which comprise "managerial public relations", on the basis of CFA, originated from a six-item factor (EFA) which had the highest level of explanation of variance of data (11%) (Table VII-3). The composite reliability of the construct (Table VII-5) and the reliability of each indicator (Table VII-4) were demonstrated. Convergent validity (Table VII-4) and discriminant validity (cf: Appendix V) were also established. The construct "managerial PR" is measured by three items: "the frequency of setting strategic goals", "the frequency of setting quantifiable objectives" and "the frequency of deciding on communications policy". All these activities relate to the managerial level, and thus the construct is named "managerial public relations" and originates from the following question in the survey instrument:

How often are you involved in the following activities when practising Public Relations?
(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your situation)

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Setting *strategic* goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Setting *quantifiable* objectives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Deciding on communication *policy*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

During the succeeding follow-up interviews, "managerial public relations" was the construct most frequently selected by a majority of respondents (11 out of the 16 interviews) as the most important of all constructs present in the framework. "Managerial public relations" was seen as an aspiration by respondents, implying that it is not yet recognised as a widespread practice. It was also seen as a driver for improvement with an impact on the other factors portrayed in the overall picture (Figure VIII-1):

> Once that [managerial PR] becomes recognised -- that we can deliver that at the management level -- everything else goes up with it. But that is the one that actually impacts on everything. Because as soon as that gets the recognition that it deserves, better people will work in the industry, the industry standard will rise, the competitive nature of the business will rise, your management at a mid-level range will improve -- the route to be recognised as a formal profession.
> Managing Director of a small/medium-sized public relations consultancy, Warwickshire.

The frequent practice of managerial PR – setting strategic goals, setting quantifiable objectives and deciding on communication policy – was seen to determine how the public relations practitioner will operate. It will promote the understanding of PR as a strategic tool, the understanding of the client's problem from a strategic standpoint, the inclusion of research and evaluation in the PR process. and incursion in long-term policies. This approach will also probably influence what type of staff and qualifications are going to be valued. Ultimately, the practice of managerial PR was perceived by interviewees as allowing the legitimisation of PR.

During the follow-up interviews, most respondents talked about managerial public relations in terms of its perceived opposite: being *strategic* as opposed to being *tactical*, or, in their own words, *thinking* as opposed to *doing*. Two respondents described the co-existence of these opposites as a continuum from tactical to strategic PR. This continuum would accommodate PR practice from a technical tool, e.g. writing press releases, to a strategic tool, e.g. designing corporate PR:

> My final caption would be the distinction between tactical PR and strategic PR. You could draw a matrix, a cross-axis from consumer tactics, consumer PR at one end to, probably, public affairs or corporate PR at the other end. Tactical to strategic. And you could plot the different positions on that diagram.
> Chairman of a large public relations consultancy, London.

> If you look at PR activity as a continuum from delivery to strategy [a line was drawn on a piece of paper]... So at this end you have PR as about *doing* -- I do news releases; I do events; I arrange photography; I arrange stunts -- through to this end, which is about *thinking* -- I advise my clients; I analyse; I interpret; I produce strategy. The industry – I am talking in general not specifically – is probably about half way along that continuum.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

Interviewees consistently described the PR industry as a whole as a highly tactical industry, with a majority of consultancies lacking strategic sense. This provided evidence of where in the imaginary continuum the PR industry as a whole is perceived to be today:

towards the tactical end. Nevertheless, interviewees acknowledged the importance of PR becoming a strategic tool:

> Almost exclusively PR is used tactically. But we have to become a strategic tool. To properly help companies, we are basically charged with communicating what commerce is doing. (Commerce is not good at explaining itself). We are explaining commerce to different audiences, whether it is community, or consumer, or government, or whatever. And if we just lurch from tactic to tactic to tactic... - you could argue that a series of well executed tactics might add up to a strategy, but a lot of it is tactics done well, tactics done badly, no tactics -- and that is what the industry is doing using PR.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

The question did not seem to be whether PR is purely strategic or pure tactical, because PR practice involves an integration of both activities, probably contingent to the circumstances. Rather, the issue seemed to be that the widespread practice of tactical implementation *only* is inadequate unless it also involves strategic thinking, which is represented by the items that constitute managerial PR: setting strategic goals, setting quantifiable objectives, and deciding on communication policy. Thus, the increasing practice of managerial PR does not mean that it will replace generalised tactical PR, but that it will add to it and improve the practice of PR:

> I think all these [three items] in managerial PR should be almost like basic good practice even if you do something very simple. You should be clear about your objectives and be able to measure them, and you should see how that affects the whole business.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

The tactical end was often equated with media relations, or most probably with the non-strategic way in which most PR practitioners are perceived to practice media relations. It is implied that tactical PR does not include the understanding of the overall business situation of the client. The implementation of tactical PR without a strategic reason does not seem to equate with best practice:

> My job is *just* media relations. It is mainly people just wanting to get press coverage of their company or product. So we are not the sort of company that sits down with a client and says "where do you want to be for the next five years?" and "how are we going to get you there?" My job really is putting out press releases. Exclusively that is what I do. And media relations is probably about 90 per cent of PR in this country.
> Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Nevertheless, practitioners who engage in tactical PR only acknowledge the importance of strategic PR. It is implied that tactical PR does not include the understanding of the overall business situation of the client. The implementation of tactical PR without a strategic reason does not seem to equate with best practice.

To this imaginary continuum from tactical to strategic the idea of evolution was added, i.e. the idea is that the PR industry is in the process of evolution from tactical PR to strategic PR. When some of the respondents first entered the consulting business, 25 to 30 years ago, the PR industry was positioned at the tactical end of this imaginary continuum. The profile of the practitioners was described by one interviewee as the most visible difference between now and then:

> And it's changing more rapidly for PR than it is for the other marketing services, because it used to be a very tactical business which consisted basically of three kinds of people: girls, and it was girls who weren't clever enough to get into advertising who would end up in PR; or girls who were very good secretaries, I mean, good at *doing* things rather than *thinking* about things. The other group was journalists who had finally got so old that they were being thrown out of the newspapers but they had a good address book -- journalists who knew how the media worked. And thirdly, there was a social sort of people who had a lot of contacts but weren't very good at any one thing, but they did know a lot of people. So, good connectors of people. That was what the industry used to be. And it was therefore very tactical and very opportunistic. But that's changing very rapidly.
> Chairman of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Taking its constituent items into consideration, the day-to-day implementation of managerial PR requires business understanding and business skills. However, interviewees did not perceive PR practitioners as generally strong business people. If their perception is correct, this could be an obstacle to the more frequent practice of managerial PR. According to interviewees, the reason for this is that most PR practitioners have a profile which does not include a business background. This in turn is perceived by interviewees as damaging the reputation of PR firms as business partners.

The respondents reported that most clients tend to ask PR consultancies to respond in a tactical way to a strategy that is already developed, suggesting that tactical implementation is seen by clients as a primary function of the PR industry – unlike, for example, the situation in management consultancies. However, none of the respondents seemed to believe that PR will ever be solely strategic (as it is in management consultancies) with the exception of some specific PR specialities:

> Pure thinking, pure strategy, not many consultancies are able to survive only doing that. Clients buy it, yeah, from McKinsey and the likes. I think if you really look at it, except for very specialist situations, it almost always involves *doing*.
> Chairman of a large public relations consultancy, London.

In sum, according to interviewees of the follow-up interviews, public relations should be *both* tactical *and* strategic. However, they perceive that, on the whole, contemporary PR

firms tend towards the tactical end. Nevertheless, the PR industry is seen as being at a stage of evolution from tactical to strategic on an imaginary continuum. If indeed managerial PR represents the strategic end, and this continuum is a valid representation, then the PR industry is perceived by interviewees as being changing or evolving towards managerial PR.

Respondents acknowledged the difficulties involved in promoting the widespread practice of the three activities described by managerial PR: frequently engaging in setting strategic goals, setting quantifiable objectives, and deciding on communication policy:

- Setting strategic goals implies the ability to understand clients' businesses in order to determine how PR can best contribute. Even if the practitioner does set strategic goals, this does not mean that the goals will be implemented strategically, and that is what some interviewees perceived to happen to many practitioners who do set strategic goals:

  > Of the three elements of your managerial PR – this [setting strategic goals] is the one that is most practised. We do set strategic goals. Now, the thing is PR is *used* tactically rather than strategically. Too often we articulate a strategy, and we articulate ideas, tactics, to bring that strategy to fruition. But often we lose sight of the strategic goals, or the client changes the strategic goals.
  > Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

- Setting quantifiable objectives was considered to be particularly desirable but was by far the most problematic of all activities represented by managerial public relations. All respondents agreed that the industry's most widespread practices of evaluation are deficient. These are reported to be counting press clippings or TV mentions, and observing the impact on sales. Output, as opposed to outcome, tends to be accessed traditionally by counting mentions or press clips, particularly when developing media relations.

  > And again, at my level of PR work [media relations] we are never asked to evaluate. It is just a feeling that you either have that it is working or it isn't. But again, if you have got a time to work out the objectives and quantify them and then evaluate them, fine. I don't have that sort of time and my clients don't want to spend that kind of money on me analysing when I could be actually getting more stuff out into the media. So it is almost a thumb-suck thing -- if they see lots of press clippings they think "well, it must be working because obviously we keep appearing in the paper or on TV". So I think it is difficult to evaluate press coverage other than visible output. If you have got three pages in *The Independent*, has it actually affected the client's business? You just assume it is going to.
  > Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

The impact on sales technique is particularly used when PR is working at the product level as a tool of marketing, integrated with other disciplines of the communications mix, with no certainty that this is a result of the PR activities. The respondents recognise that more sophisticated evaluation processes are needed to demonstrate that PR does add value to a business. The ability to establish quantifiable objectives implies the ability to understand and practice PR beyond the tactical level. It is also the ability to speak the same language as the clients.

Part of the evaluation problem starts before the problem of using an adequate method arises; it starts with the difficulty of setting quantifiable objectives for PR activities. If obtaining and sustaining a favourable reputation is the ultimate goal of PR, then it will be necessary to prove, directly or indirectly, that reputation is measurable. The issue of setting quantifiable objectives for posterior evaluation is at the core of conceptualisation of PR as a strategic or even management discipline and at the core of the PR industry's ability to prove the worth of PR. Interviewees repeatedly stressed the need for an evaluation process for PR outputs to be elaborated and agreed upon by the industry. However, the PR industry as a whole does not seem to understand PR as a tactical tool. Interviewees seemed to be unaware that the development of that knowledge could also arise from academic research.

> The industry is a lot of hot air about measuring. We talk endlessly about it and we don't really put our money where our mouth is. Probably, over here the biggest criticism of our industry from people who use us is that "I can't tell whether I am getting value". And that is where it still comes down to gut feeling in practice. We don't really ... we know it is a big thing to swallow, a big thing to make happen.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

From the respondents' perspective, one of the major barriers to investment in evaluation is its high cost. Clients are criticised for not wanting to pay for it and for providing the PR firms with far too small a budget to take that investment on themselves:

> The reason evaluation does not really work is because clients don't want to spend the money. I can tell you that in the last 15 or so years that I have been in PR, we have put evaluation budgets into every budget and 90 per cent of the time clients remove them. Now, you have to then ask the agencies "should you be funding the research that would prove that?" Well, unfortunately the fees are not big enough to enable that to happen. So we have an essential dichotomy there that is not going to get answered currently. If you are spending £10 million on advertising, the ability to spend £100,000 on checking research is a small percentage, so it's fine. Now £100,000 still remains a reasonable PR budget – do you then say "would we like to spend 20 or 30 thousand pounds on research?" No, we can't afford it.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

If PR is to be practised as a strategic tool, the issue of setting and evaluating quantifiable objectives will have to be addressed and if necessary funded by the industry. The industry could also become aware of the possibility of academic research to develop and test mechanisms for setting and evaluating quantifiable objectives. The advantages can be significant, namely more accountability, more effectiveness and more credibility. The ability to become accountable will allow PR consultancies to seek improvement, demonstrate value and be better paid by clients.

- "Deciding on communication policy" requires both ability and credibility in advising clients on how PR can contribute to their overall business. The ability to decide on communication policy requires an understanding and knowledge to practice PR beyond tactical implementation. It also requires that clients recognise PR practitioners as credible providers of advice at the policy level. These remain obstacles.

From one extreme of the continuum to the other – tactical to strategic PR -- there is an effectiveness differential, a respect differential and an income differential. In other words, managerial PR was seen by respondents as the vehicle that would allow PR practitioners for best practice and a vehicle to get to the board level and obtain higher margins:

> Your managerial PR is a growth area; the primary fact is that it has a very high margin. You see, certain consultants are setting up now and actually focusing far more on the strategic end of the market and actually sort of leaving the implementation side to lesser mortals, let us say. And it is because it gives great access to the board and is such a high margin area.
> Editor of one of the leading professional publications in the UK's public relations industry.

Interviewees pointed out that the PR activity lacks well-established processes of practice. Practice is determined by the ability and experience of each practitioner, which rely more on intuition and creativity rather than on other sources of knowledge:

> If we compare what we do with management consultancy, what they seem to do is they have models, ways of doing things. And they apply that to a company situation. We are completely the opposite of that, if you like. We start with the company and look at that company, and then just create something for that situation. Now of course there are things we do in a repeated way but each client wants something different. So in a way that is a weakness, I think, of the industry. I guess eventually we will have a model, but it is a long way away.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Respondents stated that it was desirable and probable that the industry as a whole would move increasingly towards the strategic end of the continuum in the future through the

increased practice of managerial PR. This would bind clients into a whole planning process.

> Clients respond very well to processes – it's the management language. PR is typically an industry that does not have a lot of processes. It tends to be just made up as you go along.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

In sum, managerial public relations proposes three activities which are the starting-point in building a process adapted to PR reality: setting strategic goals, setting quantifiable objectives, and deciding on communication policy.

VIII.3.2 Permanence in job

Alongside "managerial PR", "permanence in job" emerged as part of the practitioner dimension. It is represented by two items: "number of years of employment in the present firm", and "number of years of employment in the current role". Permanence in job was interpreted by *all* respondents to mean staff turnover:

> In public relations consultancy, staff turnover is an issue. I think that the majority, if not all, of consultancies experience that the people they employ are transient.
> Head of public relations of a medium-sized marketing communications consultancy.

When questioned about this construct during the follow-up interviews, respondents reported that low permanence of employment is a characteristic of today's PR industry, particularly in larger consultancies established in competitive marketplaces. A study by the PRCA was mentioned during an interview with one of its management board members. This revealed that there is a very high turnover of PR staff, particularly young staff in London:

> The PRCA's benchmarking study shows that if you look, principally at London, there is an incredible turnover of junior level staff and account execs and account managers. I think the figure we came up with in the last year's benchmarking study was something like a 51 per cent turnover in account execs. And those people are moving around at a younger age.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

According to the respondents, permanence of employment in the UK is affected by several contextual issues. The fact that the industry has low barriers to entry allows a high level of business emergence. This brings about a fact with far-reaching consequences: the PR business is oversupplied and has grown at a higher pace than the availability of

quality people. Thus, generally, PR staff are in a good position to bargain for positions elsewhere, thus reducing their permanence in their role or their firm.

Low barriers to entry mean that individuals can easily set up their own PR firms, either as a first step into the industry or by taking some clients with them. From the perspective of consultancy management, the negative consequences of low permanence of employment were stressed. First, the transfer of knowledge is very difficult because PR lacks processes. New members of staff need time to learn on the job and to build relationships with clients:

> And it is a problem because we don't have many processes and standards. If we had very well established processes, then the knowledge that people have would be easily transferable. But it is not. So it means that you'll be unable to deliver the same results as quickly with new people, irrespective of talent.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Secondly, staff turnover was mentioned by some of the leading consultancies as being a problem simply because clients dislike it when an account handler is changed:

> Clients absolutely hate staff leaving -- it is probably the number one complaint of our clients -- staff turnover.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Nevertheless, low permanence of employment is seen as a positive factor when it occurs at the junior level, because it stimulates new ideas and creativity. At the senior level, however, it is seen as very damaging.

Low permanence in job also reflects the frequent movement between consultancy and in-house jobs. Having experience of both settings represents a competitive advantage for a PR practitioner who might be recruited because he/she can see a situation from both sides of the equation:

> They are moving in and out of between consultancy and corporate jobs, backwards and forwards. I can think of lots of examples of where there is more movement than there has ever been. In fact in some ways people are recruited because they see it from both sides of the equation.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management

The consultancy culture was also seen to be related to low permanence in job. People who work in consultancy tend to like variety and to value mobility as a sign of betterment and success. Finally, there is the impact of tough working conditions: to work in a PR

firm was described as highly demanding and highly stressful. Staff were reported frequently to work under stress for at least ten hours a day. People expect to be rewarded; otherwise they will look for better working conditions. The discussion with respondents about permanence of employment during the follow-up interviews suggested that the contemporary PR industry is highly competitive.

VIII.4 The Consultancy Dimension

A consultancy is a company that gives expert advice on a particular subject in exchange for a payment. The PR consultancy dimension has three constructs: strategic needs of clients, competition and firm size.

VIII.4.1 Strategic needs of Clients

The construct "strategic needs of clients" has two validated items: "clients ask the firm to get involved in their strategic planning" and "clients ask for communication programmes beyond PR". The original questions were:

How often, if ever, do the majority of your clients:	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
ask your agency to get involved in their strategy planning?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
ask for communications programmes that go beyond public relations?	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

"Strategic needs of clients" was the second most frequently cited construct in terms of importance after "managerial PR". The frequency with which interviewees have been asked to get involved in clients' strategic planning and communication programmes that go beyond media relations has been increasing. The survey findings suggest that approximately half of the respondents stated that they had frequently been asked by clients to get involved in their strategic planning and in projects beyond media relations (Table VI-21). The item "clients ask PR firm for communications programmes that go beyond public relations" was consistently interpreted and understood to mean "beyond *media* relations". Five interviewees proposed this specific change in wording.

During the follow-up interviews, respondents pointed out that consultancies are client-driven and not supply-led, and thus to a large extent clients' needs and requests determine PR practice. One respondent illustrated how clients' requests can determine the way in which PR might be practised. On the one hand, the PR firm was asked to get involved in creating a strategy for corporate communications from the beginning, and on the other hand the firm was asked for tactical media relations only to match an existing strategy:

> PR is almost what the client wants it to be, I find. Some people come to us and say: "Look, we have got a problem: How do you solve it? Give us the strategy". One of our clients wants to build a big warehouse shop and they come to us for the strategy: how are we going to communicate that to local shopkeepers and local residents, the councillors, the media, whatever? So we will strategise it with them. And then we will go and deliver it. But last week we saw a company which is making power-generation equipment and their imperative is: "look, really what we want now is lots of media coverage. We just want to get our name out there, we want you to support our marketing effort". They have a corporate strategy which is already set. What we have to do is try and interpret the best way of helping them achieve that strategy.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

Although to a large extent clients determine the type of public relations that is going to be practised, strategic approaches also require a proactive attitude from PR firms. Considering that the majority of clients are unaware of the potential of PR beyond tactical implementation, PR practitioners should be in a position to make them aware of it. When faced with a client who requests media exposure 'only', the PR firm should always ask why. The PR firm benefits from identifying the different strategic needs of each client before implementing undifferentiated tactics.

- Thus, regarding the first item, "clients ask the firm to get involved in their strategic planning", most clients still ask for delivery more often than for strategy. The idea of clients involving PR firms in their strategic planning was perceived by interviewees as an aspiration rather than a reality, because clients still do not necessarily see the PR consultancies as strategic partners. The respondent member of the PRCA's Board of Management agreed that small and medium enterprises, which constitute the bulk of clients, are less likely to require a PR firm to get involved in their strategic planning, and emphasised the opportunity for consultancies:

> No, they [the clients] don't [ask PR firms to get involved in their strategic planning]. The City does, but the SME doesn't. We worked it out the other day -- there is something like 10% of SMEs that use PR strategically. Well, that is wonderful, because there is 90% of the SME market base out there which is waiting to be explored.
> Member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

The interviewees reported that many of the clients who ask for tactical media relations seem to be unaware of PR's potential at the strategic end. When added to the fact that many small and medium-sized clients are very dependent on short-term visible results. This means that they tend to expect the delivery aspect of it -- typically a direct increase in sales:

> While one puts to them the fact that PR is there to raise awareness, increase the profile, help people get a better understanding of what the company is about, what its products will do and achieve perceptions about its image, whilst all those things are the normal parlance of PR, the vast amount of small to medium-size enterprises say, "We want business, we want orders, we want to sell". So, there's a very poor understanding of PR in terms of its strategic and managerial potential.
> Independent media relations consultant, Warwickshire.

Nevertheless, clients *increasingly* ask the leading PR firms to get involved in their strategic planning, from internal communications to corporate citizenship:

> Yes, more and more clients ask us to get involved in their strategic planning and ask for things beyond media relations. Things like cultural change, internal communications, things like corporate citizenship, ethical business. They ask advice with things that have more to do with how they run their own departments -- how they structure their communications across Europe or across the world or that sort of thing. More and more.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

This increased demand seems to be well received by many consultants. The respondents equated good clients with clients who ask for their involvement in strategic planning. Good clients also involve the PR firm with other disciplines that are exposed to the PR perspective on the problem. Bad clients are considered to be the ones who do not understand their own strategic planning or strategic communications planning.

All interviewees stated that clients might be reluctant to involve PR firms in their strategic planning due to the negative image they hold of the industry. The common idea is that PR is about writing press releases and that anybody can do it. In sum, despite evidence that clients tend to request tactical rather than managerial PR, there is also evidence that they are increasingly acknowledging their strategic needs and asking PR firms to help them meet these needs. It was also found that PR firms offering media relations only are less likely to be asked by clients to get involved in their strategic planning.

- During the follow-up interviews, the second item – "clients ask for communications programmes that go beyond *public relations*" -- was consistently interpreted by *all* respondents to mean "clients ask for communications programmes that go beyond *media relations*". Therefore, the future use of the scale should accommodate this refinement.

Media relations still represent the bulk of services offered by PR firms. Media relations represent a specialised area of PR practice which can be conducted either tactically or strategically. It is assumed that the second approach leads to more effective PR. The practice of strategic media relations is a valuable tool of public relations, but nevertheless it is important that practitioners and clients are aware of the existence of other areas of specialisation so that appropriate solutions can be provided for clients' problems. Clients might ask the PR firm to change the way people think about them; there is no deterministic effect to involve media relations. Like the initiative of approaching a client from a strategic angle, tactical media relations implementation at the tactical or strategic level will depend not only on clients requirements' but also on the consultancy.

Interviewees explained that there is a lack awareness and understanding of PR beyond media relations:

> The problem is that clients tend to see PR narrowly. Quite often the client's idea of PR is getting their name in the papers. And we have to tell clients: "look, there is a great world of technique and method outside media relations. And it is part of the sort of good performance factor we talked about here [managerial PR] -- about setting strategic goals, quantifying objectives and deciding on communication policy.
> Managing Director of a medium-size PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

Some PR firms are never asked by clients for communication programmes beyond tactical media relations. Their clients will look for the number of press clippings obtained. PR work will be mainly publicity, although it also often involves the editing of newsletters.

Client companies clearly have a need for the strategic management of communications; and there is evidence that clients are increasingly requesting the involvement of PR firms in their strategic planning. This represents a good opportunity for the industry. The extent to which this opportunity will actually be taken will depend on the ability of the industry to became more strategic, to became more professional and to demonstrate to clients that it is capable of providing strategic advice. Otherwise, there is a risk that the strategic end of communications management will be given to other competing industries.

VIII.4.2 Competition

The construct "competition" has two items: "the degree of competition presented by advertising firms/people" and "the degree of competition presented by marketing firms/people". The original questions were:

How much would you say the following agencies/people compete with public relations? *(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)*

	Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
Advertising agencies/people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Marketing agencies/people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The survey results confirm that the strongest competition for business is perceived to arise from marketing, advertising and management. All these consultancies are battling for the client's ear. If PR firms are not perceived to perform by clients, external competition from other more established disciplines can be seen as a threat.

- Interviewees perceive a high degree of competition from marketing firms/people. They suggest that PR is generally seen by many clients and some PR practitioners as part of marketing, and as such it is competing for budget and attention with all marketing communications disciplines, rather than with marketing per se.

> Budgets tend to be written for marketing. And PR is definitely seen by large as a subset of marketing. We compete with marketing communications areas for budget. And we also compete for space in ideas -- with good clients.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Marketing firms can become direct competitors when offering global packages that include PR. But marketing firms can also advise the client that for a specific problem a specialist PR firm should be consulted. One interviewee suggested that marketing does not compete any longer with PR because "it does not want to". However, this suggestion specified that marketing firms might not be interested in media relations. Because media relations are very time consuming, with a large amount of time spent on the phone with journalists or writing press releases, it is hard work and not highly paid. It is not likely that the same applies to the more strategic end of PR, where competition between marketing and PR resides.

- The degree of competition presented by advertising firms/people is also perceived by interviewees to be high, because many are perceived to offer public relations as a secondary extra. Clients are reported generally to see PR in relation to advertising. Advertising is substantially better understood than PR. In its favour, PR is perceived as a very cost-effective communication tool, because it is seen as a more credible message-generator that is considerably cheaper than advertising.

The interviewees suggested that PR is still seen as the "poor relation" among the marketing communications disciplines, most particularly when compared with the more expensive and popular advertising, with which it competes for budget:

> Clients see PR as the poor relation of the overall publicity industry. So clients are getting £200,000 per year for their advertising, and the client says "we need a bit of PR." A lot of advertising agencies claim to do PR – "we can do that" – £10,000, a side issue – and they will have some young copywriter start writing press releases.
> Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Also, PR is perceived as having a much poorer reputation than advertising. Advertising is seen to be the destination of smart young people, and is seen to offer a feelgood sense that is based on long-term solid credibility.

Nevertheless, a perceived change was reported. According to the interviewees, the increased understanding of the differences between advertising and PR is diminishing the competition between them. Clients are increasingly aware that advertising and PR are different and are more interested to work with PR specialists suggesting thata It was also suggested that advertising competes most with particular PR areas such as consumer PR, and compete less with areas such as corporate PR.

- A minority of respondents suggested that they would add to the construct "competition" a third item: "competition from management". This item did exist but was not validated by CFA. Management was repeatedly described by interviewees as a future competitor. The assumption seemed to be that PR development across the continuum from tactical PR to managerial PR will increase the competition with management consultancies.

There was no agreement among interviewees about the extent to which management consultancies compete or will compete with PR. Some respondents suggested that management consultancies are not as serious a threat as is often suggested, because clients are not yet fully aware of PR's potential as a management tool; and also, like marketing, management consultants "have chosen not to" compete with PR because its market is not profitable enough. There was also the view that the fear of management competition is overstated in an attempt to upgrade the importance of PR.

Other interviewees stated that management poses the greatest threat to PR because it might eventually win the strategic end of the business, leaving PR firms with the implementation end only. One interviewee pointed to recent developments which highlight a growing competition for the strategic end of corporate communications. As new regulations attach a certain tangible nature to corporate reputation, the activities associated with social responsibility provide a new profitable opportunity for British consultancies.

> For example, the recent company law reform proposals are going to enshrine in the law the fact that companies, in addition to their annual reports, are also going to have to produce annual reports detailing their corporate and social responsibility activities and also their environmental mismanagement. Now, of course, firms such as Price Waterhouse Coopers, KPMG, etc., who handle auditing, would dearly like to take on board this area of activity as well, whereas, of course, corporate issues and environmental management are PR areas. So there is a kind of battle taking place now for who is going to handle this. I think where the real competition is coming from is management consultancies.
> Editor of one of the leading professional publications in the UK's public relations industry.

The extent to which interviewees perceive competition from management firms seems to differ according to their conceptualisation of PR. If perceived as a tactical tool, it is not seen to compete with management consultancies; if perceived as a strategic tool, management firms are seen as the industry's biggest threat.

Generally, competition from either marketing, advertising or management is perceived to depend on the specific area of activity in which the PR consultancy is involved as well as on the PR firm's size. While media relations tend to be easily offered by marketing and advertising consultancies, other specialised areas such as corporate PR or issues management overlap with the work of management consultancies. While smaller PR firms tend to compete with advertising and marketing, larger firms tend to compete with management.

> There are plenty of ad agencies and marketing firms which throw in media relations like a bit of an extra; or they will have one or two people and staff who can do media relations; or they will bring in free-lancers to look at specific PR aspects. But if you are into anything to do with corporate PR or issues management; and telecommunications and things like that – then we are talking about far faster growth of business where the competition comes from a range of management consultancies.
> Public relations editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in marketing.

Both the survey results and the follow-up interviews confirm that PR practitioners recognise that there is competition from advertising and marketing, especially in certain areas such as consumer PR and marketing PR. The respondents are less sure about the extent of competition from management consultants, which seems to confirm that an absolute majority of PR firms are not yet engaged in offering the strategic management of communications. Nevertheless, as there is evidence that the industry is moving from the tactical to the strategic end of an imaginary continuum, managerial PR represents both an opportunity and a difficult challenge for the industry. Competition from advertising, marketing and management depends on the specific PR area in which the PR firm is engaged. At the same time, there is evidence that competition from management consultancies will increase in the future to the levels of competition from advertising and marketing.

VIII.4.3 Firm size

The construct "firm size" comprises two items: "UK firm turnover" and the "number of directors". Many other items could be added to this well-known construct in future research. The original questions were as follows:

Please fill in the boxes below as appropriate.
Number of directors/ senior partners (or equivalent): ☐☐☐

What is your company's turnover in a) the UK and b) World-wide?
(Please tick ☑ one box for each column)

a) UK Turnover:		b) Overall World-wide Turnover:	
Up to £500, 000	☐	Does not apply	☐
From £500, 001 to £1, 000, 000	☐	Up to £5, 000, 000	☐
From £1, 000, 001 to £2, 000, 000	☐	From £5, 000, 001 to £10, 000, 000	☐
Over £2, 000, 000	☐	From £10, 000, 001 to 20, 000, 000	☐
		More than £20, 000, 000	☐

Approximately 60 per cent of the survey sample firms are small or micro. Sixty seven per cent of surveyed PR firms reported a turnover of below £500,000. The fact that there are so many small players and there are low barriers to entry in the industry is a clear sign of the industry's immaturity:

> PR is a very immature industry -- that is a fact. It is so fragmented. If you take management consultancy, there are six or something big companies, but if you take PR there are hundreds. Literally hundreds. If you look at the UK PR league table, number 100 is still maybe a 12-person business only. If you took at the whole market there may be thousands. Even the fact that we have a top 100 is ridiculous - - you could not have a top 100 car companies or food companies.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Further, many of these firms practise in isolation, which shows that the industry has not been able so far to build a unified community of practitioners.

> The big problem in PR is that almost all of us are PR people, not business people. Nobody really knows what they ought to be charging. What we tend to do is ring each other up every year -- people I used to work with years ago and are now with other consultancies – "what are you charging nowadays?" [laughs] This year it has suddenly become apparent that I have been charging nowhere near enough. I think the point is that I am equivalent to an account director in a busy company anyway, but I am not handing my work down to a £200 a day junior. I am going to sort that one out! But a lot of people come into PR thinking it is very profitable. I don't think it is. For a lot of big consultancies it is very profitable.
> Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Most micro and small players are able to practise technical media relations with a reduced number of staff. Technical PR takes individuals time, and many layers of staff would not survive with the current fee structure. Firms with two or three staff and two or three clients is seen to work. These firms are able to maintain a business without investing in areas such as research. The large number of players brings about heterogeneity in the quality of services offered.

VIII.5 The Industry Forces Dimension

A particular industry consists of all the people and activities involved in providing a particular service. The characteristics of those people and activities – i.e. the industry's structural elements -- are embraced by the term "industry forces". Four key elements are identified: the industry's standard, the trade body contribution, the importance of qualifications, and the quality of PR graduates.

VIII.5.1 Industry standard

The construct "industry standard" has two dimensions: the clarity of the industry's code of ethics, and the clarity of the industry's standard of performance. These relate to the following questions:

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements to characterise PR?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The PR industry as a whole has a *clear code of ethics*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The PR industry as a whole has a *clear standard of performance.*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The first item refers to the widespread existence of clear principles governing honourable conduct in PR practice. The second item refers to the existence of widespread and clear processes for applying PR knowledge successfully. In both cases the terms "as a whole" and "clear" are of importance, representing not only existence but also clarity and universal existence. These conceptualisations were clearly understood by practitioners during the follow-up interviews. Previous analysis of the survey data revealed that most questionnaire respondents tended to disagree that the PR industry has a clear code of ethics or has a clear standard of performance (Table VI-9).

- The first item, "the PR industry as a whole has a clear code of ethics" is important because there is widespread public debate about the moral legitimacy of the PR activity and the ethical behaviour of individual practitioners. Failure to address these

issues as a community of PR practitioners makes it difficult for those practitioners to feel confident that theirs is a legitimised occupation.

Most of the follow-up interviewees acknowledged the *existence* of the professional associations' code of ethics and of PR practitioners' own personal ethical principles. However, beyond this, not a lot of evidence was found to support the idea that a clear code of ethics for PR practice is well known and internalised by the PR industry as a whole, i.e. by a majority of PR consultants. If the majority of PR consultants are not exposed to the professional associations' code of ethics or to any debate on ethical issues in relation to their activities, then implementation depends exclusively on subjective individual principles. The absence of penalties for unethical behaviour reveals the lack of mechanisms in the PR industry for debating and reinforcing ethical behaviour.

Interviewees felt that PR practitioners are generally seen by other people to be involved in an unethical activity. They disagreed with this overall judgement. However, when it came to two specialised and highly visible areas, political PR and financial PR, concern was expressed about the ethics of behaviour:

> Outside the orbit of PRCA and IPR, we have two areas which I think have problems with ethics. One is political PR -- the spin doctor type of thing -- which I think breaches ethics hourly, not daily or weekly, it is every hour. I don't mean professional people in government information. I mean people who are standing up as spokesmen for politicians -- and I think it has now got to a ridiculous stage. The other area is city and financial PR. Under the Financial Services Act there are supposed to be quite stringent controls but these are breached frequently.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

Both PR and non-PR interviewees perceived that most individual PR practitioners do behave ethically when practising their occupation, but are not as visible. Indeed, the world is often exposed to high-profile figures who are perceived to behave unethically, and this perception is often associated with PR practitioners in general. Interviewees were firm in pointing out that this is a general misconception. Max Clifford, a highly visible and controversial publicist, who often represents famous people in dealing with the British media, was frequently mentioned during the follow-up interviews. All interviewees denied -- contrary to public opinion – that he is a PR person:

> Max Clifford. I think good luck to him, but what he does -- although he's always billed as a PR guru -- what he does isn't really public relations. He's a publicist. He makes publicity for all people who've, you know, had 20 babies at one sitting or bred a cat crossed with a dog [laughs].
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR consultancy, Birmingham.

During the follow-up interviews, then, most respondents stated that there is no clear code of ethics in the sense of well-known norms of professional behaviour accepted by a whole community of practitioners. There are indeed many ethical questions which are raised by PR activity, in particular the persuasive use of communication and the advocacy of questionable positions, which do not seem to be debated by the industry as a whole. Similarly, there is a general view that ethical *behaviour* is not widespread throughout the PR industry as a whole.

- The second item, "the public relations industry as a whole has a clear standard of performance" is important because it seems that individual practitioners have their own views about what PR is and what constitutes effective practice. The industry as a whole does not seem to have a shared view. Interviewees pointed out the diversity and immaturity of the PR industry in this respect: there is no widely recognised standard of excellence against which PR outcomes can be estimated as good or bad.

According to the respondents, in addition to the PR industry's immaturity, one of the obstacles to creating a standard of performance stems largely from the nature of PR activity itself:

> We talk about it getting more sophisticated but there are some essential dilemmas in public relations: absence of processes and meaningful measurement of output and outcome. How do you create a process for something subtle, and how do you measure something intangible?
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

There appears to be no consensus on what constitutes a good process of PR activity, and practitioners find it very hard to establish one. Practitioners obviously practise on the basis of some principles and processes. Principles can be debated and processes can be tried and improved. Intuition and trial-and-error in isolation seem to make practitioners believe that a clear standard of performance is impossible. Practitioners do not seem to share their individual knowledge and experience across the industry in order to allow the

creation of platforms against which to distinguish a good standard of performance from a bad standard of performance.

VIII.5.2 Trade body contribution

The construct "trade body contribution" refers to the initiatives taken by professional associations to represent the interests, and address the common needs, of PR practitioners as a community. The designation "trade body" incorporates both existing professional associations: the IPR and the PRCA. The construct contains two items: membership benefits from professional associations (IPR and PRCA), and the contribution of the IPR to the development of professional standards. The original questionnaire queries were as follows:

The following questions are for both members and non-members of any professional association.

In your view, how beneficial is membership of a public relations professional association?

Entirely Beneficial	A Lot Beneficial	Moderately Beneficial	A Little Beneficial	Not At All Beneficial
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How much, if at all, would you say that the IPR- Institute of Public Relations contributed to the development of professional standards?

Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Generally speaking PR professional associations, which in the UK are the IPR and the PRCA, were seen by respondents during follow-up interviews to have limited membership benefits and to make a limited contribution to the development of professional standards development. These views reinforce the survey findings (Table VI-10).

A member of the IPR pointed to a major obstacle to a better trade body contribution, namely the lack of representative power due to insufficient membership:

> But a membership of, what -- 6,500 to 6,700 of the potential estimated size of the industry being 40,000 practitioners -- that's quite small, really. So obviously we have a difficult job to get our message across.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors.

Too many players do not belong to either of the two existing associations. The manager of a small PR firm, which is representative of a large portion of the industry, explained why he was not a member:

> We are not a member of the PRCA because we are too small to join the PRCA, which demands a minimum turnover of £250,000 in fees. So I think the PRCA would be of great benefit -- but you have to be a big player to join. And the IPR contribution to developing professional standards, I don't know enough about what they do really, I am afraid. I am not in the IPR either. Not really sure how we could benefit. So I don't know what they get up to.
> Manager of small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Most respondents are aware that professionalism is not the exclusive responsibility of the trade body associations, and believe that individual practitioners should get more involved and take improvement initiatives. Professional associations allow a forum for personal standards of individual practitioners to be verified by their peers. This, however, requires individual practitioners to be aware of their individual benefits and responsibilities in order to join in. Similarly, an IPR Board of Directors member stated that the voluntary membership provisions cause difficulties because PR is a non-regulatory occupation. Individual practitioners need to be motivated to buy in by being made aware of the benefits of membership. As soon as that battle is won and they become members, the professional associations have to invest a lot of time and resources to sustain membership. The absence of mandatory power, and limited financial and human resources are perceived as obstacles to a better trade body contribution. Interviewees acknowledged that both PR professional associations have to work within their limited funds and have to work with people who engage on a voluntary basis for restricted periods of time.

A common criticism of both professional associations is that they do not do enough to disseminate their own existence, mission and objectives. Beyond the fact that the IPR represents individual practitioners and the PRCA represents consultancies, interviewees did not have a clear idea of the remit of either organisation:

> From a communications point of view, public relations professional associations are amongst the worst examples of PR in this country. What I think they have lost sight of -- both these organisations – is that they don't have a vision for the industry or have just failed to tell us about it.
> Managing Director of a small/medium-sized public relations consultancy, Warwickshire.)

Interviewees reported that most clients are unaware of the existence of professional associations for the public relations industry, and therefore do not require membership by individual practitioners or consultancies.

- The first item, concerning the membership benefits provided by a PR professional association, received moderate support from respondents who were members of either/or both the IPR and the PRCA, but little support from non-members. The membership benefits mentioned by interviewees included: training, distinguishing member consultancies, providing practitioners with legal support when needed, and providing information about what is happening in the industry.

Trade body membership did not seem to be regarded as imperative. It was frequently argued that many people doing good PR were not members, and thus being a member did not make any difference. Perceptions of the membership benefits for the IPR were significantly more positive than for the PRCA. This could be due to lack of knowledge of the PRCA's activities when compared with those of the IPR, and also to the perception that the PRCA is less representative of the industry as a whole.

- The second item -- the contribution of IPR to the development of professional standards – was recognised by respondents but was nevertheless considered to be insufficient. The IPR has traditionally been stronger as an educator through its various courses.

> IPR's emphasis has always been on education and training, and in some respects the PRCA has enabled us to continue to specialise in being the educator for the industry. Although they do offer their own courses, I think training and education is our primary role. The PRCA, I think, see themselves as very much business-orientated in terms of creating business opportunities for their members. Our job is to provide services to our members but to back that up with education and training to support them so that they professionalise.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors.

Most respondents considered the IPR's educational efforts to be positive but to have a circumscribed impact. One example of an IPR training initiative is the CPD (Continuous Professional Development), which was explained by a member of the IPR's Board of Directors as a gradual professionalising exercise. However, the CDP's non-obligatory status might limit its overall impact amongst members.

> We also have a CPD programme – Continuous Professional Development -- whereby practitioners, once they sign up for membership of the institute, sign up to a three-year CPD programme where they undertake to earn points towards higher standards of their own professional practice and conduct.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors

Although the efforts of the IPR's leadership and educational initiatives have been widely recognised by interviewees, the IPR has the reputation among interviewees of being antiquated:

> The IPR is trying to do the right thing -- I just think that they're the old school. However, I think that Colin Farrington has dragged the IPR through to the 20th century, not the 21st yet. And I think that people like Alison Clark, last year's President, had a good go at getting it right.
> Managing Director of a small/medium-sized public relations consultancy, Warwickshire.

The IPR has been considering the possibility of becoming a Chartered Institute. When asked about what this would mean, one member of the IPR's Board of Directors suggested that PR activities would be regulated like any other profession:

> Chartered Status would mean that public relations would be recognised as a profession and that in order to become PR practitioners, they would have to jump through a series of hoops which we would set in order to get Chartered Institute Status as an individual practitioner.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors.

The same interviewee observed that the absence of mandatory membership by trade bodies meant that PR had not yet reached a professional status. At present, the IPR is in the process of deciding if it will become a Chartered Institute. Despite the acknowledgement of the advantages, some reservations still exist as to whether making membership compulsory would be of benefit to the industry. This view considered that the role of professional associations should be unifying but not regulatory. The trade body would provide identity, information and networking but not compulsory courses, and would not sanction malpractice.

The construct "trade body contribution" had the tentative item "contribution of the PRCA to the development of professional standards" rejected by CFA. Nevertheless, there were many comments from respondents concerning the PRCA during the follow-up interviews, which suggested that a new item relating to the PRCA could be created and included in the future to strength the construct.

The PRCA initiative CMS -- Consultancy Management Standard -- was praised as a breakthrough by all interviewees who were PRCA members:

> For the PRCA, there's an industry standard which has now become compulsory. Tom Watson invented the Consultancy Management Standard -- what all the PRCA members have to achieve. That will contribute enormously to industry standards. They've now got to market that standard. There's no point having it if nobody knows about it, so that's what they need to do.
> Managing Director of a medium-size PR consultancy, Birmingham.

Respondents perceive that the lack of disclosure and need for improvement applies to both professional associations, but more to the PRCA. A member of the PRCA's Board of Management acknowledged these criticisms:

> We have had another survey in the last year which gave very similar results to yours. We ran it through our PR department with ECHO research. Very similar -- and they asked people in PR: "have you heard of the PRCA?" I think 30% said no. And they worked in PR. So, if somebody has not even heard of the PRCA, why are they going to say we have done a good job on standards? We have got a big job to do.
> Member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

The PRCA's traditional target audience are Managing Directors, Human Resource Directors, Financial Directors, and equivalents, and this could explain why the association is not so well known. The PRCA has not traditionally targeted the non-directorate practitioners.

Referring to both the IPR and PRCA, interviewees considered training – of practitioners and clients – to be a priority of professional associations. Training was perceived as one of the most important vehicles for enhancing the quality of practitioners' performance, particularly in the case of the smaller PR firms that do not possess their own training resources. Where interviewees felt that professional associations should do more was in terms of the education of clients in the definition of the nature and scope of PR and how PR practitioners can contribute to their business. The education of clients is especially important, considering the interchange of consultants and clients influencing and their mutual influence:

> Now the trade body can also help the client to learn as well. They [the IPR and PRCA] have not got their head around looking at "let us educate management about what it takes to be a PR practitioner". They are too tactical, saying "let us educate account execs about how we do media relations."
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Interviewed Board members of both professional associations testified to the importance of educating clients:

> Talking to clients is not something that we have done in the past. Really, we need to be getting the message out to clients about what good public relations is, what you should expect from your public relations practitioner when you employ them. These are the sorts of subjects that we're actually beginning to work on in the last year to year and a half.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors

> We spend a lot of our time educating clients. Very much so.
> Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

The public relations industry seems to lack a strong identity, a strong sense of community. Two forums are available for vital issues beyond practitioners' individual interests to be debated for collective advancement. A representative membership is vital if the trade body is to create consensus on which collective steps should be taken towards professionalism.

VIII.5.3 The importance of qualifications

For the construct "importance of qualifications", two items were confirmed as valid and reliable: the compulsory requirement for formal – academic or professional – qualifications in order to practice public relations, and the importance of academic training for public relations practice. The original questions on the survey instrument from which the two items emerged were:

Please specify the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements:

"Formal qualifications (from academic or professional bodies) should be made compulsory for one to practice public relations."

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

How important do you think academic training is for public relations practice?

Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Unimportant	Not At All Important
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

The follow-up interviews revealed resistance to both making formal professional or academic qualifications compulsory, and regarding academic training as important for public relations practice, thereby reinforcing the survey findings (Table VI-9). The interviews suggested that this resistance is mainly rooted in two things: long-held beliefs about the nature of PR activity, and the fact that most practitioners do not have specific qualifications in PR. On the first of these issues, many respondents seemed to perceive PR as too simple and sometimes too unimportant to justify formal (and compulsory) professional or academic qualifications:

> I think making qualifications compulsory is unnecessary. Why? Well, if you have an architect, you don't want your house to fall down. If you go to a doctor you want to know that he is qualified because your life is at risk. I think with PR it is more "normal", if you like. It is more of an everyday job. And people are good at it or they are not good at it.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

The underlying assumption that PR activity is unsophisticated and does not require qualifications but simply the right personality, seems to be directly related to the view that it involves media relations only:

> I think PR is very logical. You don't need qualifications, but it helps to be media-aware and media-savvy.
> Marketing Manager of a small-sized consultancy -- part of a larger group -- providing publicity for artists, London.

During the follow-up interviews, respondents who understood PR to be more than media relations suggested that academic training was important, and they were more supportive of making formal qualifications compulsory for the practice of PR.

- With reference to the first item, "formal qualifications (professional or academic) should be made compulsory for one to practice public relations", formal qualifications here refers to training that is in accord with some sort of established forms and requirements and is recognised to fit a person for practice. Making it compulsory means that unless a person has formal qualifications, he or she will not be able to use the designation "public relations" to describe his/her occupation or profession, and will have to face legal charges if this rule is broken. The follow-up interviews revealed that respondents saw PR as not yet ready, i.e. not mature enough, for compulsory implementation of qualifications, although the advantages of

qualifications in terms of professionalisation were acknowledged, since unqualified practitioners – as in other more regulated sectors – would not be able to practice PR.

Three advantages of making formal qualifications compulsory were mentioned by practitioners during the follow-up interviews: the creation of barriers to unselective new entrants, the development of professional practice, and the improvement of the industry's reputation:

> I'd like to see barriers to new entrants -- it's absolutely imperative for people to take PR as seriously, you know, because anybody ... you could go and decide "well, I'm going to be a PR person now", and you could just go and get a phone, get a computer and promise whatever you want -- there is no regulation. And there is no way that the client can actually find out whether this is a legitimate authorised operation. And once they have burnt themselves, maybe even twice, then they will go against PR -- they'll see all of us as just a rip off.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR consultancy, Birmingham.

The fact that a majority of practitioners, including highly successful ones, do not have formal professional or academic qualifications in public relations was pointed out as a major obstacle to the implementation of compulsory qualifications in the PR industry. Respondents' principal argument against making qualifications compulsory, the alienation of too many good practitioners, might represent a bias in the sense that it implies that it would exclude the respondent himself or herself. Interviewees who supported making qualifications compulsory acknowledged the difficulty involved and suggested that if mandatory requirements for PR practice were eventually applied, practitioners without formal qualification in PR could be included through special arrangements, e.g. through the recognition of professional achievements and excellence built on experience:

> Compulsory qualifications? I suppose my answer to that is no. For a start, a lot of the very good PR people are ex journalists. They won't have gone through taking diplomas in PR and that sort of thing; they will come straight in from newspapers. So if you put too much emphasis, I think, on qualifications you are going to exclude a lot of very good people. Now I am going to shoot myself in the foot now -- Yes, you need some sort of basic qualification to root out the rubbish -- because anybody can set up in PR without qualifications, without any experience. But it is a difficult one. [Pause] But perhaps the answer would be that you need a diploma in PR to go into PR *unless* you have journalistic experience, in which case you don't need it -- that could be exempt.
> Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Resistance to having formal qualifications contrasts sharply with the reported serious dearth of talent in the industry. The insufficient availability of well-prepared people was consistently stressed by respondents. Surprisingly, qualifications in public relations were not seen as the answer to this problem. One respondent, a regular observer of the industry,

suggested that the answer to the dearth of talent in public relations was to abstain from making qualifications in PR compulsory, so that other professionals could practice PR without restrictions. However, the opinion that rather than enforcing public relations qualifications, the way to obtain quality people is to have other professionals transfer to the industry seems to imply a serious lack of confidence in the ability of the industry and its practitioners to provide a high standard of practice:

> No, I don't think formal qualifications should be made compulsory at all. The industry has got a dearth of talent and the only way it is going to overcome that dearth of talent is to start drawing in from outside professions. If this industry is to compete with its main threats -- which are management consultants and lawyers -- the last thing they need to do is prevent people crossing over from other professions into the industry. What is needed is for this industry to draw in budding young management consultants, budding young lawyers. If we start demanding that they have to get a PR degree as well, you might as well hand over most of the most profitable strategic work now to Price Waterhouse Coopers and KPMG because it will create too many barriers.
> Editor of one of the leading professional publications in the UK's public relations industry

The second obstacle to the implementation of compulsory qualifications is presented by most practitioners' negative beliefs about formal qualifications. Both professional and academic qualifications are perceived to be of modest quality and little benefit. This belief is stronger among interviewees who take the view that public relations is an art, not a profession. Thus, practitioners perceive no necessity or benefit in making the effort to obtain qualifications. The few interviewees who were in favour of making qualifications compulsory felt that the industry was not yet mature enough for such a change. They stated that it is too early in the life of the PR industry because a professionalising structure is still in the process of being built:

> We simply could not remotely enforce compulsory qualifications in PR in 20 years. It is too early. This is a new industry. It really did not come out properly in a formal stage in the U.K. until about 1950.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

- Regarding the second item, "The importance of academic training for public relations practice", academic training here refers to study undertaken at a college or university. None of the respondents included in the follow-up interviews had had academic training specifically in PR, though all except one had had academic training in other subjects.

Three advantages of having academic training were mentioned during the follow-up interviews: the ability to understand the client's broader business issues; the capacity for strategic thinking beyond media relations; and the improvement of the reputation of the industry:

> Having a good academic background, I think, is very useful because you have to understand what the client is doing. I mean you do need a bit of an agile brain to get your mind round what that client is doing, because there is nothing a client gets more upset about, I find, than when you are sitting there blankly in front of him getting it wrong. And then you go away and produce a press release that is wrong because you have not really understood the client's business.
> Manager of a small-size consultancy, Warwickshire.

When commenting on the importance of academic training for PR practice, interviewees questioned whether PR had enough autonomous principles and processes that were generally established as valid and fundamental to the extent that they ought to be taught at the academic level. Academic training was seen as being useful only to the extent that it trains the mind to think; but it was not seen by many respondents as an essential requirement for good PR practice. Two things were perceived to be better vehicles for knowledge transfer and development than formal qualifications: on-the-job training (experience) and personality:

> Academic training is important but it's not as important as practical training.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors

> Qualifications are not relevant. Some adequate practical training is essential to be effective but it certainly doesn't have to be formal, nor does it have to be academic. They may be useful and helpful but they are not the determinant of ability.
> Independent media relations consultant, Warwickshire

In terms of recruitment, interviewees stated that they tend to select a good graduate from a good degree, and then teach him/her PR skills on the job:

> But really I think the feeling is that if you take a bright graduate who studied History or English or Economics or whatever, you can teach them PR quite quickly. I do agree with that because PR is really about common sense. Of course you should have a good relationship with the journalists that write about your industry. Of course you should communicate with the analysts that analyse your industry. It is absolutely basic common sense.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Although training in-house has obvious advantages, there is the risk that relying on it exclusively might perpetuate a tactical approach to exercising public relations. A more strategic approach requires a deeper knowledge beyond tactics, and a reluctance to take on more formal qualifications on board might prevent the development of strategy.

Public relations is a "people business" and involves "the ability to get on with people", and therefore academic training is seen as of limited importance. Most interviewees stated that personality is more important than qualifications, particularly in a consultancy context, where relationships with clients are critical:

> Personal characteristics are more important than qualifications. I wish that were not the case but it is still true. It is true, you know, unfortunately, because it is still very much about the people and about the chemistry of the people. Clients still hire agencies with chemistry being a vital element. And clients still fire agencies when the chemistry is wrong, even when the results may be very good.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

The fact that most practitioners do not have qualifications in PR, and that PR is widely perceived as too simple for those qualifications to be necessary, suggests that a large part of the industry's knowledge comes from individual subjective understanding about what public relations is, and from trial-and-error. The fact that a severe shortage of talent is one of the industry's most pressing problems calls for adequately qualified people in PR. Qualification by professional or academic bodies seems to be a more solid route to the improvement of understanding and the exercise of public relations than the search for professionals from other fields. Resistance to professional or academic training in PR suggests a lack of recognition of the value of PR and a lack of confidence in practitioners' capacity to improve. The alternative preferred vehicle for knowledge transfer – on-the-job-training -- further perpetuates existing ways of thinking and doing. It perpetuates tactical PR and prevents the development of managerial PR. Academic and professional training might need improvement, and this might not be the time to make it compulsory, but it should be acknowledged that the usefulness of such training goes beyond the training of "agile brains" to the stimulation of best practice.

VIII.5.4 The quality of public relations graduates

The construct "quality of public relations graduates" incorporates three items: "PR graduates' overall preparation for work in the industry"; "PR graduates' management skills"; and "PR graduates' strategic thinking". These items originated from the following survey questions:

The following statements concern public relations degree students. Would you say that:

In general, Public Relations graduates'...	Very Good	Good	Neither Good Nor Bad	Bad	Very Bad	Don't Know
Strategic thinking is:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Management skills are:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Overall preparation to work in the PR industry is:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Eleven of the 16 respondents during the follow-up interviews stated that they were not in a position to comment on PR graduates' skills because they did not know any PR graduates:

> I don't know because I've never had a PR graduate.
> Marketing Manager of a small-sized consultancy -- part of a larger group -- providing publicity for artists, London.

> I don't know, I have never had a PR graduate. I don't even know what the PR degree actually entails.
> Manager of a small-sized consultancy, Warwickshire.

Nevertheless, PR graduates have an unfavourable reputation among interviewees. Although respondents consider the quality of the people working in the industry as one of the most important issues, due to the lack of available talent they do not seem to think that an increase in PR graduates entering the industry would fulfil that need. Most respondents do not perceive a reciprocal relationship between having specific knowledge in PR and practising PR effectively:

> The most important issue is recruitment, and not just of PR graduates. The single biggest issue that this whole industry faces right now is the ability to actually recruit sufficient talent from both universities and from other areas of the industry -- to actually build a workforce that can frequently set strategic goals, set quantifiable objectives, decide on communications policy [managerial PR]. It all boils down to one thing: they need to go and find the people.
> Editor of one of the leading professional publications in the UK's public relations industry.

- The first item, "public relations graduates' overall preparation to work in the industry" was disagreed with by most interviewees. Actually, for most interviewees, having a degree in PR seemed to be a disadvantage.

> And I am really anti-PR degrees. I mean, I'm sure there are exceptions, but an awful lot of CVs that we see from people who did PR degrees are people who aren't very bright, their A-levels tend not to be so hot, and so we very rarely take people on who've got a PR degree. I mean, there are exceptions, of course.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR consultancy, Birmingham.

> The real difficult people in this industry are the Fionas, the Justins, are the Amandas, are the Bretts who work for the agencies, who haven't got a clue about what they're doing -- and they are mostly the graduates. Not only are they incompetent, they're normally arrogant. They're known by me as the gin and vodka set and they are a real bloody nuisance. I've got to be fair. I speak about the ones who cause problems. The ones who are very, very good, I probably don't hear about.
> Independent media relations consultant, Warwickshire.

The interviewees tended to see universities that teach PR and graduate students who learn PR as being of dubious quality, and stated that PR courses are not found in top universities. More fundamentally, interviewees seemed to doubt the ability of academic degrees in PR to prepare a graduate for PR practice, as interviewees were unaware of what their contribution could be. Therefore, the preferred areas of recruitment to PR consultancies do not include PR degrees:

> I think it is important to have some sort of academic training because you need to be reasonably bright in PR. But not necessarily a PR degree. Ultimately, any kind of academic qualification will give you the ability to think.
> Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Some respondents believe that PR degrees need improvement, especially through the enhancement of numeracy and business skills. Interviewees perceive that PR graduates are not trained to think like a business person, and disregard the importance of graduates being trained to understand communication "in theory" without being trained to apply it in the business context. Therefore, most interviewees are convinced that academic courses are not necessarily meeting all the requirements for the strategic end of the market.

Nevertheless, one respondent argued that there is more of a perception problem than an actual problem in relation to PR graduates:

> I think, in general, there is a perception problem in that with the earlier PR degree courses people got in at low grades. Now the entry levels are much higher in UK terms; it is 24 points, which is 3 B's, which is a good pass. You are not a genius but you are obviously able and quite able to cope with concepts and applications in research. And I think as that level goes up it will apply. So I think for some time the PR degree courses will suffer an image problem but will get there in the end.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm, member of the PRCA's Board of Management.

A member of the IPR's Board of Directors criticised the industry's resistance to recruiting PR graduates, pointing out that there is an opportunity for practitioners to influence what

will be learned by using the professional associations as a bridge between industry and academia.

- When questioned specifically about the two other items, "public relations graduates' management skills" and "public relations graduates' strategic thinking", most respondents replied that they were unable to answer because they did not know any PR graduates.

The ones who did know PR graduates considered that the items "management skills" and "strategic thinking skills" were very important. However, they perceived that PR graduates are less likely than other graduate applicants to have strategic skills. Recruiting consultants seem to look for two profiles of candidates: the ability to work at the tactical level, and the ability to work at the strategic level. The tactical level is the typical starting point in the PR career, and tends to move towards the strategic level as the career progresses. At the start of a job in a consultancy, graduates are expected to work at the tactical level, and only later do they enter the career ladder; and after proving themselves, they might work at the strategic level:

> Yes, management skills and strategic thinking are important, but that is not where you start. When you join an agency you have got to put in two or three years doing very basic things: report writing, attending meetings, filling clients' pictures, writing status reports, writing press releases. So even if you are a very bright graduate you have to demonstrate here ["doing"] that you can think and go ahead quite quickly towards understanding clients' politics, understanding clients' business objectives, advising. It is not just advising, it is advising and being heard. But I have some very bright graduates who are very good doers. Some people are very good at doing and some people are better at thinking. We need both.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

During the follow-up interviews, comments about PR graduates' overall preparation for working in the industry revealed a generally unfavourable perception, which is consistent with practitioners' views on the relative importance of qualifications. Respondents did not seem to be aware of what PR degree entail and seemed to be prejudiced against academic training. PR universities and degree graduates are perceived as having a low ranking. Most respondents would prefer to recruit graduates from other degrees rather than PR. In essence, respondents do not think that PR is fit to be taught as a degree. Nevertheless, both technical skills and strategic skills are thought to be of importance for PR practice.

VIII.6 Discussion of Correlations

The nine final constructs (based on CFA) were correlated (Table VII-6) in order to analyse the strength of the association between two variables so that we have a preliminary understanding of how they relate. A visual presentation of the correlations among the final constructs was taken to the interviews for discussion (Figure VIII-2). Each interviewee was asked why he or she thought the constructs correlated. In some cases, interviewees answered that they did not know, and only the possible answers are exposed in this chapter. Again, explanatory power rather than representativeness was sought during the follow-up interviews.

The objective of presenting the interviewees with the significant correlations was to gain further insights into how the constructs relate to each other. Most of the correlations had similar readings from interviewees, although some would reflect a very personal point of view, and together they provided important perceptions of the authors' situation and hence about the dynamics among the empirically identified constructs.

Figure VIII-2: Follow-up interviews schedule (part 2):

Findings suggest the following correlations

Managerial PR	+	Strategic needs from clients
Managerial PR	+	Size
Permanence in job	-	Size
Importance of qualifications	+	Trade body contribution
Importance of qualifications	+	Industry standard
Importance of qualifications	+	Competition
Strategic needs from clients	+	Size
PR graduates' skills for recruiting	+	Trade body contribution
PR graduates' skills for recruiting	+	Industry standard
Industry standard	+	Trade body contribution
Trade body contribution	-	Size

- **Managerial PR ← (+) → Strategic needs of clients**

The more clients ask the PR firm to get involved in their strategic planning and ask for communication beyond media relations, the more frequently practitioners set strategic goals, quantifiable objectives and decide on communication policy. Or, the less PR firms practice managerial PR, the less likely it is that their clients will ask for their involvement in strategic planning or for communications beyond media relations.

Discussion of this significant positive correlation during the follow-up interviews reinforced the perception that the presence of the constructs "managerial public relations" and "clients' strategic needs" is necessary for best practice. The increase of both was perceived as the route for more effective practice:

> The effective operation of any PR programme is totally dependent on creating the right kind of strategic framework for it in the first place. The most important of these [points to the visual presentation of the constructs] for the quality of the output -- it is a combination of two things. It is what you have put up here [managerial PR] in terms of the consultancy's ability to respond on a strategic level and this, the client's willingness to discuss with the consultancy issues on a strategic level [clients' strategic needs].
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm; sells marketing, advertising and PR to clients.

This best practice is dependent on the clients' willingness to involve PR firms in a discussion about their strategic needs. Interviewees report that if clients see the PR firms as suitable for a strategic discussion about their business, there is a higher probability that the quality of the work will be better. If the PR firm has a strategic profile that boosts client's confidence, the client is more likely to involve it in their strategic planning. This would allow the PR firm to understand the issues effectively and propose an adequate response to the problem. Corporations, according to interviewees, are increasingly aware that communication is a strategic issue, and increasingly search for PR firms that they trust to work on strategic communications.

Interviewees reported that clients allocate significantly smaller budgets to PR, usually assigning public relations to junior people who will implement PR without involvement in strategy. Companies will have to be aware of PR's importance as a management tool and trust PR firms to deliver it. This requires PR firms to be more proactive in approaching the client's problem from a strategic perspective:

> It does not only depend on the client but on the firm too -- mainly because often we are being briefed by junior PR people who are in tactical roles, or inexperienced PR people who might be at PR manager level, who maybe don't think about their businesses' overall strategy. If a client just asks for a series of tactics, a good PR agency will say "hang on a minute, why do want to do this? You need to be thinking strategically" and they will go "oh, what do you mean?" Where there is not a strategy we will come up with a strategy, and where there is a strategy we might disagree with it and challenge it.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

Consistently, respondents who scored low in managerial public relations (with low frequencies of setting strategic goals, setting quantifiable objectives and deciding on communications policy) scored low on clients' strategic needs (clients asking the PR firm to get involved in their strategic planning, and asking for communication programmes beyond media relations):

> So we don't tend to involve ourselves with strategic goals and that sort of thing. It is all about press relations rather than the overall PR. Clients are not interested. It is mainly people just wanting to get press coverage of their company or product.
> Manager of a small consultancy, Warwickshire.

Managerial PR and clients' strategic needs are perceived to be increasing due to two main reasons: managerial public relations allows PR practitioners a higher status, and clients are increasingly aware of their strategic communication needs. There is a danger, however, that if clients are not aware of PR's potential as a management tool, and if they do not trust PR firms as strategic advisers, they will fulfil that need in some other way, i.e. in-house or by searching for other industries.

Managerial public relations is perceived as good practice. Clients are perceived as having increasing strategic needs at the communications level. For the first to be increasingly practised by PR firms, they have to be knowledgeable about it and proactive in explaining it to clients. For the second to be fulfilled by PR firms, clients have to understand public relations as a management tool and have to see firms as reliable and professional strategic advisors. Both seem to imply a need for an effort by the whole industry, including its trade body, to educate clients and practitioners alike about PR's potential beyond the sphere of media relations. There needs to be an effort by clients and practitioners alike to increase professionalism and hence trust in PR firms. Managerial PR and clients' strategic needs represent an opportunity for the PR industry and also a challenge that can be won if individual practitioners are willing to unite as a community of professionals.

- **Managerial PR ← (+) → Size of PR firm**

A significant positive correlation was found between managerial PR and size of PR firm. The higher the frequency of engaging in managerial PR, the bigger the PR firm tends to be. Or, the smaller the PR firm, the less likely it is to get involved in managerial PR:

> I have been on my own doing media relations; it all comes down to sending press releases and dealing with the media. I am not interested in that [managerial PR] and our clients are not interested in that either.
> Manager of a small-size consultancy, Warwickshire.

Interviewees proposed that the frequent practice of managerial PR is more likely to be found in larger consultancies because they are more likely to have a profile of human resources and a financial situation that are conducive to the development of a strategic approach to PR. Managerial PR requires an understanding of public relations beyond a tactical tool, the knowledge and finances to develop evaluation, and the credibility to work at the board level with clients.

- **Permanence in job ← (-) → Size of PR firms**

There was a significant negative correlation between the constructs "permanence in job" and size. The larger the PR firm, the more likely it is to have lower permanence of employment.

> Last year we had a 60 per cent staff turnover, which is horrendous.
> Chairman of the Corporate Division of a large public relations consultancy, London.

The higher the permanence of employment, the smaller the PR firm tends to be. It was generally agreed that as the consultancy gets bigger, permanence of employment tends to decrease.

- **Importance of Qualifications ← (+) → Trade Body Contribution**

Practitioners who believe that qualifications are important, and that formal academic or professional qualifications should be made a compulsory requirement for the practice of public relations, tend to believe in the trade body contribution, i.e. in the membership benefits derived from a PR professional association, and the IPR's contribution to professional standards. Conversely, practitioners who believe that the trade body does not contribute tend to think that qualifications are less important.

This link was highlighted during the follow-up interviews in two ways. First, respondents perceived that (professional) qualifications and their enforcement are one of the key roles of professional associations. Secondly, it was suggested that practitioners involved with professional associations tend to be more interested in qualifications and are more likely to be exposed to debates about that issue.

- **Importance of Qualifications ← (+) → Industry Standard**

Practitioners who believe that formal qualifications are important, i.e. that they should be made compulsory and that academic training is important for PR practice, tend to believe that the industry has a clear standard, i.e. a clear code of ethics and a clear standard of performance. Practitioners who believe that the industry standard is less clear tend to believe that qualifications are less important.

- **Importance of Qualifications ← (+) → Competition**

Practitioners who consider that qualifications are important, i.e. that formal qualifications should be made compulsory and that academic training is important for PR practice, tend to perceive more competition from advertising and marketing.

Interviewees suggested that an awareness of competition from advertising and marketing leads practitioners to value qualifications as a means of opposing those competitors. Similarly, practitioners who identify less competition from advertising and marketing tend to regard formal qualifications as less important:

> People who think qualifications are important are the people who want to be seen as a more grown-up industry, to face advertising and marketing. If they're just a non-strategic PR company, which does not see the competition, they're not going to worry about qualifications.
>
> Public relations editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in marketing

- **Trade Body Contribution ← (+) → Industry Standard**

Practitioners who believe in the trade body contribution, i.e. in membership benefits and the contribution of the IPR to the development of professional standards, tend to believe more in the industry standard, i.e. that the industry has a clear code of ethics and a clear standard of performance.

A strong link between the industry standard and the trade body contribution is generally perceived by interviewees, who consider that the industry standard is partly the responsibility of the trade body:

> These [the trade body contribution and the industry standard] are important but are the least discussed or relevant currently in our industry. This will need major leadership in the industry so that the people concerned with these things make these [industry standards] happen better.
> Chief Executive of a large public relations consultancy, London.

- **Trade Body Contribution ← (+) → Quality of PR Graduates**

Practitioners who believe in the trade body contribution, i.e. in membership benefits and in the contribution of the IPR to the development of professional standards, tend to believe in the quality of PR graduates, i.e. in terms of PR graduates' management skills, strategic thinking and overall preparation for working in the industry. Practitioners who perceive that the quality of PR graduates is lower also tend to perceive that the trade body contribution is lower.

- **Trade Body Contribution ← (-) → Size of PR firm**

There is a significant negative correlation between the variable "trade body contribution" and the variable "size". The bigger the PR firm (turnover, number of directors), the less likely it is to consider that trade bodies contribute in terms of membership benefits and that the IPR contributes to the development of professional standards.

The follow-up interviews confirmed that the larger firms are less likely than smaller firms to look for trade body membership and to believe in their contribution to professional standards. According to interviewees, larger firms tend to not get involved with professional associations because they have the resources to develop their own training and their own standards:

> If you go to Hill & Knowlton, they have got a building with 500 people in it. They don't have to say "we are a member of the IPR". Why would they bother? They have got 500 people! And they have methods of operating their systems and standards, and they sell the client the concept that those systems and standards are not only standard in the industry but are better than the industry. And their substance, and their history, and their track record is what provides you with the confidence that they are able to do a good job.
> Managing Director of a medium-sized PR firm; sells marketing, advertising and PR to clients.

The interviewed members of the IPR's Board of Directors and the PRCA's Board of Management agreed that larger firms have less need for professional associations and that smaller PR firms are perceived to value professional associations to a much greater extent because they have a greater need of them:

> Because big firms probably provide their own training in-house, they can provide their own publications in-house, they can do more or less everything in-house. They're just big, and they are bigger than us.
> Member of the IPR's Board of Directors

> We are a life-support system for the small people, because the small people don't have a Financial Director and Human Resources director, they don't have an IT person, they don't have a lawyer -- we do it all from here. So the small people really need us. And the biggest -- they don't think they need us because - in fact it is true - the big ones don't need us. They are so good, so successful at what they do that, you know ...
> Member of the PRCA's Board of Management

- **Industry Standard ← (+) → Quality of PR Graduates**

Practitioners who believe in the PR industry standard, and believe that the industry has a clear code of ethics and a clear standard of performance, tend to believe in the quality of PR graduates in terms of PR graduates' management skills, strategic thinking and overall preparation for working in the industry.

Consistently, interviewees linked the standard of the industry with the quality of people:

> I'd say these two -- the industry standard and the quality of PR graduates -- are the most important because one is reliant on the other. The quality of the people determines the standard.
> Public relations editor of one of the UK's leading professional publications in marketing

- **Clients' Strategic Needs ← (+) → Size**

The bigger the PR firm, the more likely it is to be approached by its clients with their strategic needs, i.e. clients ask the firm to get involved in their strategic planning and ask for communication programmes beyond media relations. Conversely, the smaller the PR firm, the less likely to it is to have clients asking it to get involved with their strategic needs.

VIII.7 Implications for the existing body of knowledge

The study supports previous attempts by PR (e.g. Broom and Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1982; Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992; Cutlip *et al.*, 1994; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998), to conceptualise PR as a management discipline, namely through the construct 'managerial PR' as evidence that practitioners do engage in managerial PR: (frequency setting strategic goals, quantifiable objectives and deciding on communication policy), although to a lesser extent than they practice technical PR (eg: writing and contacting the media). Evidence was gathered through multivariate data analysis (EFA and CFA) and the descriptive analysis of survey findings.

The study also supports previous attempts by marketing academics (e.g. Goldman, 1984; Kotler, 1991; Henry Jr., 1995; Kitchen, 1996;) to conceptualise public relations as a tool of marketing. This study's interviews revealed that practitioners frequently use marketing as a framework to develop PR in the absence of a PR-specific framework, and that they use marketing PR integrated with other activities in order to aid the marketing effort.

This study does not subscribe to the traditional stance from PR academics which conceptualise PR as *solely* as a management discipline, and consider marketing PR as a *threat* to its development. It is proposed that PR can be developed as technical communication, as communication for marketing support and as communication for management support. Therefore, the study supports several definitions of PR as "the management of communication" but argues against PR being exclusively a tool of management. The study argues, however, that, independently of its form, PR should always be strategic, even when implementing a specific technical activity. For example, it is not assumed that the most widespread activity among the sample, media relations, is inferior, but it is assumed that media relations should be strategic and not solely a tactical form of implementation; i.e., even if producing a press release for a particular situation, it should be guided by a strategic concern. Further empirical evidence about the concepts of marketing PR and corporate PR could be gathered in order to explore how they relate to a core concept of PR.

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This study supports Grunig and Grunig's (1992) continuum from craft PR to professional PR. As a field, PR appears to be in a transition from a tactical to a strategic, and probably, managerial field. PR also appears to be in a transition from an occupation to a profession.

The study supports the contingency approach of Leichty and Springston (1993) which argues that the type of PR practice depends on the circumstances, which should be determined in future research, namely in which circumstances marketing PR, corporate PR or other forms of PR should be deployed.

VIII.8 Conclusion

The dependent variable in this study can be said to be "existence of public relations". A dependent variable such as effectiveness was not used because this study is not interested in issues of causality. The aim of the study is exploratory, i.e. at this early stage it seeks to identify existing variables and to develop its measurement scales. All the components are inescapably grounded in the public relations phenomenon: the emergent components were based, **first**, on an exploratory questionnaire totally constituted of public relations items -- these items were based on the preliminary interviews with PR practitioners (who told us what issues were relevant to them) and on the review of the PR literature; and, **secondly**, on a sample exclusively comprising PR practitioners (managers of PR firms). The preliminary study offered a framework (practitioner, firm, industry) which was used as a basis of the survey study. Three units of analysis were developed so that we could have a comprehensive research instrument.

The core concept of public relations activity, embracing all the people, institutions and activities that determine, constitute or result from PR, was factor analysed simultaneously with all the constructs related to it (e.g. competition, clients' needs, trade body contribution) and was derived from three units of analysis which represent three dimensions of the core concept. Therefore, the final scales measure crucial attributes of the public relations dimensions at three levels: practitioner, consultancy and industry, as perceived by PR practitioners. Thus, for example, *trade body contribution* relates to public relations professional associations to the

professionalism of the public relations industry, and *competition* relates to competitors of PR consultancies. The emergent components are related to no other than the PR reality.

The PR practitioner can be defined as a person practising activities that constitute the PR occupation. Two constructs were identified at the practitioner dimension: managerial PR and permanence in job. Managerial PR was the construct that explained the most variance in the data, and it was selected by practitioners as the most important construct. The more frequently a practitioner "sets strategic goals", "sets quantifiable objectives" and "decides on communication's policy", the more he or she is practising managerial PR. Nowadays the British PR industry is predominantly tactical. Both the literature and the follow-up interviews suggested that developing PR without a strategic approach is not good practice. Managerial PR is perceived by practitioners as a desirable evolution towards more effectiveness, more respectability and more income. It is seen as synonymous with good practice and as a catalyst of improvement for all the other constructs. Interviewees believe that the industry as a whole is increasingly changing towards the strategic end of the continuum through the increased practise of managerial PR.

The more widespread practice of managerial PR faces several obstacles. Most PR practitioners do not see themselves as strong business people, which is an obstacle to "setting strategic goals". Most PR practitioners do not have enough knowledge or budget to develop research-led PR nor effective evaluation, and most PR practitioners believe that experience and intuition are more fundamental than research, which is an obstacle to "setting quantifiable objectives". Most PR practitioners are perceived not to have enough ability or credibility to be heard at the board level, which is an obstacle to "deciding on communication policy".

A practitioner's permanence in job – "number of years of employment in the present firm" and "number of years of employment in the current role" - is generally perceived not to be long-lasting. The PR industry is generally perceived to be a dynamic working place. The PR industry overall is seen as being oversupplied with PR firms and short of quality people, which leads to a frequent movement of practitioners between consultancy and in-house positions.

A PR consultancy is a firm that sells expert advice about public relations. Two constructs were identified at the consultancy dimension: "strategic needs of clients" and "firm size". "Strategic needs of clients" was considered to be the second most important construct during the follow-up interviews, after managerial PR. When clients "ask the PR firm to get involved in their strategic planning", and "ask the PR firm for communication programmes that go beyond media relations", the PR firm is being exposed to the strategic needs of clients. Clients are central to the activity of consultancies, and respondents see the PR industry as client-driven. As such, clients' needs and requests determine the PR practice to a large extent. Nowadays, most clients still ask for tactical delivery rather than strategy. However, it was significant that practitioners report that they are increasingly being asked by their clients to satisfy their strategic needs. Approximately half of the sampled PR firms have been frequently asked by clients to get involved in clients' strategic planning and to develop projects beyond media relations.

Most clients are unaware of PR's potential at the strategic end. Clients are mostly aware of PR as tactical implementation because it is predominantly practised as such through media relations. This delivery role focuses on the media and consumers, the most frequent target audiences of all PR firms' clients. It is not assumed that media relations are exclusively tactical, but it is concluded that most PR firms offer tactical media relations *only*. Media relations is a specialised area of PR that can be practised at the tactical and/or strategic level. Both the literature review and the interviews provided evidence that media relations are less effective when they are solely tactical. The findings suggest that PR firms that offer tactical media relations only are less likely to be asked by clients to get involved in their strategic planning. PR firms that do not only offer tactical media relations welcome greater involvement in clients' strategic planning because it is seen as better practice. Practitioners from these firms call clients that ask or allow them to get involved in their strategic planning "good" and "best" clients. Interviewees reported that the implementation of strategic approaches also requires a proactive attitude from PR firms in approaching the problem of the client from a strategic standpoint, although clients determine PR practice to a large extent.

The construct "PR firm size" was operationalised with "UK firm turnover" and "number of directors". A substantial majority of the sample is constituted by small or micro PR firms (approximately 65% have up to six employees and approximately 67% have a turnover below £500,000) (Figures VI-2 and VI-4). Interestingly, some of the world's leading large multinational consultancies are British. They comprise less than 3% of the sample (Figure VI-2). A possible explanation why the PR industry is mainly comprised by small and micro sized firms is the low barrier to entry in the PR industry. According to the interviewees, only the bigger PR firms, less than 16% of the sample (Figures VI-2, VI-3 and VI-4), are ready to exploit new business opportunities. These are perceived to be: internationalisation, which requires heavy investment abroad; and specialisation, which requires human resources with expertise.

The PR "industry forces" consist of all the structural elements that affect the people and activities involved in providing the PR service. Five industry forces were identified by this study: "industry standard", "trade body contribution", "importance of qualifications", "quality of PR graduates" and "competition".

The construct "industry standard" is measured by determining if the PR industry as a whole has a "clear standard of performance" and a "clear code of ethics". The first item stands for the widespread existence of proven processes for successfully applying PR knowledge. The second item stands for the widespread existence of unambiguous principles governing honourable conduct in PR practice. In general, the standard of the PR industry is unfavourably perceived by its own practitioners. Most respondents (59.1%; Table VI-9) consider that their industry does not have a "clear standard of performance". In fact, the PR body of knowledge was reported by very few PR practitioners (36.1%; Table VI-9) to be clear. Many consider that their industry does not have a "clear code of ethics" (42.6%; Table VI-9). Future research could provide evidence as to whether this perception is a reflection of reality or a reflection of PR practitioners' low self-perception. When considering a standard of performance, the majority of PR practitioners do not share a common view of what PR actually is and what constitutes its effective execution. There is no widespread knowledge and use of a PR process, such as a research-led PR process. PR is mostly shaped by principles and processes that are individually developed. Individual knowledge and experience are not systematically shared across the industry in

order to expose and debate what is a good standard of performance and what is a bad standard of performance. Such an agreement among PR practitioners provides evidence that the PR occupation is still at an early stage of its professionalisation.

When considering ethics, beyond the professional associations' written code of ethics and PR practitioners' own personal ethical principles, there is no evidence of an existing code of ethics addressing PR-specific moral issues that is internalised or implemented by the PR industry as a whole. The industry lacks mechanisms that engage the majority of practitioners in debating and reinforcing ethical conduct. The industry should take the initiative in this respect, as PR raises many ethical questions, particularly regarding its use for persuasive communication, the moral stance of the message it advocates, and the social impact of its influence on the mass media agenda. PR practitioners perceive that they are, erroneously, seen by others as being involved in an activity that is unethical by nature. Interviewees pointed to the honourable benefits of their intermediate role in promoting dialogue and understanding in relation to opposing but equally legitimate interests. Admitting that some high-profile unregulated specialist areas of PR were particularly prone to ethical ambiguity, such as political PR and financial PR, respondents argued that most PR practitioners are ethical but are not necessarily as visible.

The designation "trade body" refers to the existing PR professional associations in the UK (the IPR and the PRCA), and "contribution" means their efforts in representing the interests and addressing the common needs of PR practitioners as a community. These needs are perceived by practitioners to include education and training, distinguishing member consultancies, providing practitioners with legal support, and providing information about the industry. The trade body is seen by practitioners to have both limited "membership benefits" and to make an insufficient (although acknowledged) "contribution to the development of professional standards". Approximately 62% of the surveyed sample firms are not affiliated to the IPR or the PRCA. At present, the UK's trade body does not have mandatory membership. Overall, personal affiliation of individual practitioners (IPR) is substantially greater than firm affiliation (PRCA). Practitioners generally acknowledge trade body efforts and difficulties. Efforts praised include the CMS -- Consultancy Management Standard -- initiative by the PRCA, and the

specialised courses provided by the IPR. Difficulties recognised include the absence of mandatory power due to low affiliation and limited financial and human resources.

PR practitioners call for the unity of the industry under a stronger body. In all fairness to both professional associations, a stronger body depends on representative membership, which is also the responsibility of individual practitioners. Greater involvement and effective contributions must start with more members. An increase in membership numbers is not being helped by the perception that the professional associations are not disseminating sufficiently their existence, mission and objectives. A stronger body would penalise incompetent and unethical practice by enforcing tighter regulations, and would praise the best practice of practitioners, client organisations and public opinion. The IPR is at present considering becoming a Chartered Institute, but this is seen as a controversial proposal. Most practitioners would prefer that the trade body is unified but not regulatory. The main reasons for opposing the proposed change are that making trade body membership compulsory would exclude many good practitioners, that it would be difficult to transfer other professionals to the PR industry, and that too much control would constrain creative solutions to complex PR problems.

Practitioners revealed resistance to both regarding "academic training" as important for PR practice, and to "making formal qualifications compulsory". These items measure the construct importance of "qualifications". "Academic training" refers to the study of PR undertaken at a college or university. "Formal qualifications" -- professional or academic -- refers to training that is in accord with some established requirements and is recognised by peers to fit a person for practice. Making it compulsory means that unless a person has formal qualifications, that person will not be able to use the designation "public relations" to describe her/his occupation, and will have to face legal charges if he/she does try to do this.

This opposition to academic education and to the compulsory implementation of qualifications is mainly rooted in long-held beliefs about the unsophisticated nature of PR, the unworthiness of formal professional and (particularly) academic qualifications, and the fact that most practitioners do not have formal qualifications specifically in PR (but mostly in other various areas). Many respondents see PR as too simple and

sometimes too unimportant to justify formal (or compulsory) professional or academic qualifications. The underlying assumption that the PR occupation is unsophisticated and unprofessional is expressed in the statement by practitioners that PR involves media relations only. Opinions about academic worthiness and understanding the importance of PR seem to explain the different responses. Practitioners who understand PR to be more than media relations are systematically more supportive of the importance of academic training and of making formal qualifications compulsory for the practice of PR. Practitioners seem to be either unknowing, indifferent or negative in relation to PR academics, suggesting that a better dialogue between industry and academia is needed.

Most practitioners suggest that a PR-specific education is unnecessary for the practice of PR. An academic qualification is seen as useful, but not as a guarantee of good PR practice: it is seen to train one's mind "to think". This is taken to mean the ability to understand broader business issues and the capacity for strategic thinking beyond media relations. In turn this implies that PR is not seen by these practitioners as a strategic tool. Another recognised benefit of having a formal qualification is the improvement of the reputation of the PR industry. Rather than formal qualifications, PR practitioners perceive that on-the-job training and personality are better vehicles for knowledge transfer and development.

A major disadvantage of compulsory formal qualifications is perceived to be the alienation of too many good practitioners or potential PR practitioners without PR qualifications (implying perhaps the respondent himself or herself). Nevertheless, compulsory formal qualifications are also seen by respondents to have advantages, particularly for professionalism: the creation of barriers to unselective new entrants, the development of professional practice, and the improvement of the industry's reputation. But even the practitioners who support academic qualifications and compulsory formal qualifications believe that the PR industry is not ready or mature enough for such changes.

In-house training in consultancies could be another route to improve standards, but few PR firms offer it to their staff. Most PR agencies involved in the survey do not have their own staff-training programmes, and those that do, develop it mainly in writing and

presentation skills. Many rely on existing training courses, particularly those provided by the IPR.

Approximately 30 per cent of survey respondents did not know any PR graduates and thus did not know if they were good or bad. Nevertheless, in accordance with the widespread belief that academic training is inadequate to prepare someone for PR practice, perceptions about PR graduates' overall preparation to work in the industry are somewhat unfavourable, and this is reflected in the construct "quality of PR graduates". Interviewees perceive that the quality of PR graduates and of the universities where they are taught are not of the highest standard.

Most respondents do not perceive a reciprocal relationship between having a specific knowledge of PR and practising PR effectively. The preferred areas of recruitment by PR consultancies do not include PR degrees. When recruiting, PR firms consider personal qualities to be the most important factor, followed by practical experience, and academic qualifications are some way behind. Consultants look for two profiles of candidates: the ability to work at the tactical level, and the ability to work at the strategic level (usually representing two steps of career progression). PR graduates' management skills and strategic thinking are perceived as important; and most practitioners admit that they are not in a position to express an opinion about the quality of those skills.

External competition from other more established areas is also identified as an industry force. It is seen by interviewees as a threat that the PR industry must overcome. The strongest competition for PR firms is seen to come mainly from advertising and marketing agencies/people. Advertising is better known and understood but is more expensive and seen as a less credible message-generator than PR. Some advertising agencies compete directly with PR firms by offering PR services to clients. Advertising is perceived to compete more with PR specialist areas such as consumer PR and corporate PR. Practitioners state that direct and indirect competition between both will decrease as the differences became increasingly clearer.

Most interviewees perceive PR to be a part of marketing, and as such it is competing for budget and attention with all other marketing communications disciplines, rather than

with marketing itself. In their view, PR is still seen by clients as the "poor relation" among the marketing communication disciplines. Management consultancies are seen as increasingly important competitors. The assumption seems to be that the evolution of PR along the continuum from tactical to strategic PR, particularly if managerial PR is increasingly practised, will increase the competition between PR firms and management. On the one hand, some interviewees suggest that management consultancies are the biggest threat to the PR industry because they might be in a competitive position to win the attractive strategic end of the business. On the other hand, some believe that the fear of competition from management consultancies is overstated because today's PR is not sufficiently understood as a strategic or managerial tool by clients.

Within the PR industry, the number of competitors is also perceived by interviewees as continually increasing due to low barriers to new entrants. A majority of survey respondents (84.4%; Table VI-13) see the PR industry as more competitive than it was ten years ago.

IX. CONCLUSION

The objectives of this research are exploratory: to provide a preliminary understanding of public relations activity and to develop measurement scales for further research into that activity. The first objective was pursued through a holistic approach in order to identify empirically the constituent elements of PR activity, and the second through the operationalisation of those elements. The assumption underlying the research is that major advances in public relations will only be made possible by means of a more integrated approach to identify, conceptualise, measure and relate the variables involved in the PR activity phenomenon.

The main contributions of this research are: the identification of key dimensions of PR activity, the operationalisation of its constituent elements, and the preliminary understanding of their co-existence. The study was able to identify nine valid and reliable constructs that relate to three dimensions of public relations practice: practitioner, consultancy and industry. 11 significant correlations among the nine latent constructs were found and discussed. The holistic approach used in this investigation led to a new research instrument with new measurement scales that seek to stimulate theory-building, open avenues for further research, and support further studies at the measurement and causality levels.

Two general research questions guided this investigation. The first is threefold: (1) how do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England (a) perceive the nature and scope of PR, (b) practice PR, and (c) perceive which elements are part of contemporary public relations activity? The second question is: (2) how do the identified elements of PR activity co-exist? These questions will be addressed in turn.

IX.1 Research Questions

IX.1.1 How do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England perceive what is PR?

There are many interpretations of the nature and scope of PR. To start with, PR was variously reported as dealing with 'attention', 'perception' and 'relationships', each of which respectively represents an increasing degree of complexity. PR was also seen by interviewees (both during the exploratory study and follow-up interviews) as a component of communication, marketing and/or management. Communication was seen as being intrinsic to PR, while marketing and management were seen as two different (although not mutually exclusive) ways of applying that specific form of communication. Corporate PR involves the practice of PR at the organisational level, and marketing PR involves the practice of PR at the service/product level. They seem to be differentiated by target audiences or publics. While corporate PR typically deals with all the internal and external publics, such as the community, suppliers and legislators, marketing PR focuses mainly on consumers and potential customers. Some respondents perceive that the practice of PR is experiencing an expansion – more than a substitution – from the practice of technical communication to the management of communication.

The issue that obtained the largest consensus was the ultimate goal of PR. Most respondents perceive the ultimate goal of PR as being to build a favourable reputation (75.4%, Figure VI-5). The difficulty here is the ambiguity of the term "reputation". Half as many survey respondents considered that the ultimate goal of PR is to obtain mutual understanding (36%, Figure VI-5). Further research is needed to explore this important issue in more depth.

Further research is also needed to shed light on whether corporate PR and marketing PR in fact represent different concepts and practices, and on the extent to which they are tactical or strategic in focus. In sum, a unifying description of PR activity is problematic due to the wide heterogeneity of views about what it stands for, the variety of distinct sub-areas, and the ongoing construction of PR activity.

IX.1.2 How do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England practice PR?

The most frequent activities PR practitioners in England carry out are: writing (95.6%), contacting the media (88.3%) and defining a target audience (82.2% - Table VI-5). These responses, along with the interviewees' reports, provide evidence that media relations, or the frequency of writing for the media in order to reach specific audiences, is the most widespread activity of the studied PR firms. Traditionally, PR intermediates between entities and their publics by communicating through the mass media, and thus it is confirmed that media relations is the most widespread activity of PR in the sample. Although interviewees reported that PR practitioners and client organisations perceive media relations as synonymous with PR, most of them acknowledged that PR is more than media relations.

The practice of PR as a management tool emerged as particularly important for PR consultants because it is perceived as a well-rewarded and increasing business opportunity. There was agreement among interviewees that some PR specialisations require communication to be managed, but there was no agreement as to whether that means PR is part of management. There was also agreement among interviewees that the practice of PR as a marketing tool is particularly widespread in the UK, which is also reported in a previous study (Moss *et al.*, 1997). According to interviewees, this may be because marketing (the communications mix) provides PR practitioners with a helpful framework for the use of PR in the absence of a universal PR-specific framework. Further research should seek to operationalise the concepts of PR as a management tool and as a marketing tool, and to discover the extent to which, and in which circumstances, PR is practised as one or the other.

PR practitioners frequently work together with practitioners from other established communication disciplines and see the overlap of PR with those disciplines as inevitable in practice. Thus, most practitioners do not agree with the academic stance that the best PR practice is independent from other communications disciplines, including marketing (Grunig, 1992a). Both in theory and in practice, the affirmation

of PR's independent body of knowledge and the clarification of its boundaries remain incomplete projects.

IX.1.3 How do PR practitioners working for PR consultancies in the PR industry in England perceive which elements are part of contemporary public relations activity?

Three dimensions of public relations activity were identified: PR practitioner, PR consultancy and PR industry forces. The PR practitioner is a person practising activities that constitute the PR occupation. The PR consultancy is a firm that sells expert advice about PR activity. PR industry forces consist of all the structural elements that affect the people and activities involved in providing the PR service.

Among the existing constructs which are part of each of these three dimensions, nine have been identified and operationalised in this study (see Table VII-5 and Figure VIII-1). At the PR practitioner dimension the constructs are: "managerial PR" and "permanence in job"; at the PR consultancy dimension they are "strategic needs from clients" and "firm size"; at the PR industry forces dimension they are: "industry standard", "contribution of professional associations", "quality of PR graduates", "importance of qualifications" and "competition".

IX.1.4 How do the identified elements (latent constructs) of the PR activity co-exist?

In order to understand how the nine latent constructs co-exist, they were correlated, and follow-up interviews provided further valuable insights about the perceived significance of each one and how they co-exist. An analysis of the correlation matrix among the final nine constructs revealed eight highly significant correlations ($p<0.01$), two significant correlations ($p<0.05$) and one marginally significant correlation (Table VII-6). These 11 significant correlations point to fruitful streams for further research.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "strategic needs from clients" and "managerial PR".** The more clients ask the PR firm to get involved in their strategic planning and ask for communications beyond media

relations, the more frequently PR practitioners tend to set strategic goals, quantifiable objectives and decide on communication policy.

PR firms should be aware that the need for managerial PR exists. Client organisations are perceived to be increasingly aware of their strategic needs in communicating effectively with publics other than consumers. If client organisations are not aware of the potential of PR as a strategic managerial tool, and if organisations do not trust PR firms as strategic advisers, they will fulfil that need by searching for other industries or by creating strategic advice in-house. The industry as a whole should be proactive through its trade body, effectively educating clients and practitioners alike about the strategic potential of PR beyond the sphere of tactical media relations, and promoting trust in PR firms' ability to deliver strategy. Managerial PR and the satisfaction of strategic needs from clients represent an opportunity to be won if individual practitioners are willing to unite as a community of professionalising practitioners.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "firm size" and "managerial PR".** The bigger the PR firm's UK turnover and number of directors (or equivalent), the more frequently practitioners set strategic goals, quantifiable objectives and decide on communication policy.

Most of our sample's small and micro PR firms practise PR mainly as tactical media relations. However, the practice of managerial PR, or the frequency of setting strategic goals, quantifiable objectives and deciding on communication policy, is not assumed to be limited by the size of the PR firm. Further research is needed to clarify the factors that maximise the potential of the practice of managerial PR. Qualitative data suggest that the understanding of PR beyond a tactical tool and business training might be more important than the firm's resources as determinants of managerial PR.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "size" and "strategic needs from clients".** The bigger the PR firm's UK turnover and number of directors, the more clients ask the PR firm to get involved in their strategic planning and ask for communications beyond media relations.

Smaller firms -- which are the majority of the PR industry – are more likely to have clients who do not ask them to get involved in their strategic planning or to work beyond media relations; and are less likely to be proactive in approaching PR problems strategically rather than tactically.

- **A significant positive correlation ($p<0.05$) between "importance of qualifications" and "industry standard".** Practitioners who believe that academic training is important for PR practice, and that formal academic or professional qualifications should be made compulsory, are more likely to believe that the PR industry as a whole has a clear code of ethics and a clear standard of performance. By contrast, practitioners who do not believe in the industry standard tend not to see the importance of qualifications. Practitioners' perceptions seem to be determined by their level of optimism/pessimism towards the PR industry and the PR occupation. An optimistic view allows improvement, as valuing the importance of qualifications will impact on the PR industry's ethics and standard of performance and vice versa. A pessimistic view is linked with low self esteem. Education and training are again a possible collective route that might lead to beneficial change.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "trade body contribution" and "industry standard".** Practitioners who believe that there are membership benefits from a PR professional association and that the IPR contributes to the development of professional standards are more likely to believe that the PR industry has a clear code of ethics and a clear standard of performance. The trade body is seen as largely responsible for the industry standard. It has a hard job to do in changing attitudes towards membership benefits, and to bring more visibility to its contribution to the PR industry's standard of performance and ethics.

- **A significant positive correlation ($p<0.05$) between "industry standard" and "quality of PR graduates".** Practitioners who tend to believe that the PR industry has a clear code of ethics and a clear standard of performance are more likely to perceive that PR graduates have good management skills, strategic thinking and overall preparation for work in the industry.

The PR industry standard is perceived to be associated with the quality of PR people. PR graduates are being made available and added to the PR people working in the industry and will contribute to its standard of performance and ethics. Practitioners consistently report that the PR industry *is* its people, and that the PR industry faces a serious dearth of talent. Resistance to the recruitment of PR graduates should be overcome through an informed debate about their academic training and the recruiting needs of the industry. Industries which are perceived to have a good standard attract good people. The PR industry should therefore work to improve its standard of performance and ethics and actively promote itself among attractive candidates.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "trade body contribution" and "importance of qualifications".** Practitioners who believe that there are membership benefits from a PR professional association, and that the IPR contributes to the development of professional standards, are more likely to believe that academic training is important for PR practice and that formal academic or professional qualifications should be made compulsory. During follow-up interviews practitioners stated that the enforcement of qualifications is the responsibility of professional associations. Practitioners who value the role of professional associations will tend to value qualifications more.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "competition" and "importance of qualifications".** Practitioners who perceive that they have competition from advertising and marketing firms/people are more likely to believe that academic training is important for PR practice and that formal academic or professional qualifications should be made compulsory. An awareness of competition leads to the valuing of qualifications as a means of meeting the challenge of competition. Advertising and marketing are more established areas; qualifications upgrade PR to strengthen its capacity to face competition.

- **A highly significant positive correlation ($p<0.01$) between "trade body contribution" and "quality of PR graduates".** Practitioners who believe that there are membership benefits from a PR professional association, and that the IPR contributes to the development of professional standards, tend to perceive that PR

graduates have good management skills, strategic thinking and overall preparation for work in the industry. The quality of PR graduates was frequently referred to as quality of PR people to work in the industry. The quality of PR people is the responsibility of the professional associations in terms of their contribution to their education and training and their intervention to restrict incompetent and unethical practitioners. This correlation might also reflect a pessimistic versus optimistic view of the PR industry.

- **A marginally significant negative correlation ($p<0.1$) between "firm size" and "trade body contribution".** The bigger the PR firm's UK turnover and number of directors, the less likely it is to consider that there are membership benefits from a PR professional association, and that the IPR contributes to the development of professional standards. Larger firms are seen to have the resources to develop their own training and standards, and are less likely to endorse the PR trade body. Smaller firms are perceived to need and value the trade body contribution more due to their lack of resources such as training and legal advice.

- **A highly significant negative correlation ($p<0.01$) between "firm size" and "permanence in job".** The bigger the PR firm's UK turnover and number of directors, the shorter the time (in years) that the practitioner tends to stay in the present firm and in the current role. Staff turnover is bigger in larger consultancies that are set in more competitive marketplaces.

IX.2 Summary

One of the objectives of this exploratory study is to acquire a preliminary understanding of the public relations phenomenon. The study suggests that PR is goring through a transition period in two respects: from a technical to a strategic-based practice and from an occupation to a profession (or, probably and more realistically, towards a semi-professionalised occupation).

The study identifies the existence of a wide variety of understandings about what PR actually is. This varies from PR being understood as a simple tactical tool to it being understood as a sophisticated strategic tool; from simply getting attention to managing

complex relationships; from being a tool of marketing to being a tool of management. Nevertheless, there is consensus that public relations is rooted in communication, and that the ultimate goal of PR is to build a favourable reputation for the client.

In terms of how PR is practised, generally the most widespread way among English PR consultancies is media relations. Traditionally, media relations have been practised more as a tactical implementation than as a strategic process. The practice of PR as a marketing tool -- mainly targeting consumers at the product/service level in order to impact sales -- is also more widespread than the practice of PR as a corporate tool in order to manage the client's reputation with consumer and non-consumer publics. The practice of PR in the UK is now experiencing an expansion – rather than a substitution -- from a tactical to a strategic approach.

Another objective of this exploratory study is to identify the key dimensions of PR activity (by dimension is meant the scope of a facet of the whole) to operationalise the constitutent elements of each identified dimension, and to understand the co-existence of those elements.

The construct "managerial PR" emerged as very important. This stands for a desirable evolution towards more effectiveness, more respectability, and more income for a predominantly tactical industry. It comprises the frequency of three actions when practising PR: setting strategic goals, setting quantifiable objectives and deciding on communications policy. Each of these actions implies a move towards, respectively, strategic thinking, evaluation and research, and access to the boardroom. It is suggested that future research should expand this construct and employ it as a dependent variable.

Assuming that managerial PR stands for best practice, it is important to determine how the other identified factors relate to it. "Managerial PR" significantly correlated with "strategic needs from clients" and "firm size". This implies that client organisations must be aware of the potential of PR as a strategic managerial tool, and that clients must trust PR firms as strategic advisors. These client attitudes require the initiative of the industry in educating clients and demonstrating their professional

worth to them. The correlations with firm size imply that human and financial resources make a difference in the practice of managerial PR, and that the bigger the firm the bigger the probability of it having clients with strategic needs.

The construct "industry standard" stands for the clarity of the PR industry's code of ethics and standard of performance. The contemporary British PR industry is still in an immature state and a wide variety of standards can be found. "Industry standard" significantly correlated with "importance of qualifications", "quality of PR graduates" and "trade body contribution". All of these relate to the issue of professionalism. The way practitioners see the interaction between industry standard and the constructs with which it correlates appears to reflect either their belief/disbelief in the possibility of PR being or becoming more professional. It implies a change of attitude for many PR practitioners towards the recognition that PR is worthy of qualifications, that academic training is of value, and that the trade body contribution is a community responsibility.

Although a unifying description of PR remains problematic due to the heterogeneity of views about what it stands for, the variety of distinct sub-areas, and its ongoing construction, the above-mentioned avenues of research are empirically-based platforms for further work in the quest to understand more clearly the PR phenomenon.

IX.3 Theoretical Implications

The study provides evidence that supports Grunig and Grunig's (1992) continuum from craft PR to professional PR. As a field, PR appears to be in a transition from a tactical to a strategic, and probably, managerial field. PR also appears to be in a transition from an occupation to a profession. The study provides some empirical evidence that supports previous attempts by PR academics (e.g. Broom and Smith, 1979; Dozier, 1982; Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992; Cutlip *et al.*, 1994; Ledingham and Bruning, 1998) to conceptualise PR as a management discipline. Practitioners do engage in managerial PR (frequently setting strategic goals,

quantifiable objectives and deciding on communication policy), although to a lesser extent than they practice technical PR (frequently writing and contacting the media). The construct "managerial PR" emerged from the data as representing a minority but increasingly important practice, and future research should seek to identify and operationalise other distinctive forms of PR practice. Marketing academics (e.g. Goldman, 1984; Kotler, 1991; Henry Jr., 1995; Kitchen, 1996), marketers and many PR practitioners see public relations as a tool of marketing. PR academics (e.g. Grunig and Hunt, 1984; Cutlip, Center and Broom, 1994) argue that PR should be a tool of management. This study suggests that PR appears to be a tool of both. It is not assumed that the most widespread activity, media relations, is inferior, but it is assumed that media relations should be strategic and not solely a tactical form of implementation. It is proposed that PR can be developed as technical communication, as communication for marketing support and as the management of communication. Moreover, PR can be a management tool (strategic) or a marketing tool (strategic and/or tactical). It is proposed that PR can have the objective of building a favourable reputation, building mutual understanding and advising accommodative behaviour or action; and that PR can deal with attention, perception or relationships. The identification of these features requires further research, and this might assist the building of a universal PR-specific framework. The study also supports the contingency theory approach (Leichty and Springston, 1993) by arguing that the type of PR practised depends on the circumstances. Further research should be able to determine these circumstances. The study further provides nine valid and reliable constructs that can be refined and used for further operationalisation.

In sum, this research, it is hoped, contributes a step toward advances in the public relations body of knowledge by validating scales for subsequent refinement and use across various research settings, and by exploring the co-existence among different elements associated with PR activity. All the emergent constructs are inescapably grounded in the public relations phenomenon. They are based on a review of the PR literature and on preliminary interviews with PR practitioners, thereby assisting the development of a survey instrument totally constituted of public relations items and tested with a sample of nearly 300 PR practitioners (working in PR consultancies in England).

IX.4 Practical Implications

PR activity is going through a natural evolution towards the consolidation of its body of knowledge and towards professionalism. The study proposes that it is possible to quicken the evolution cycle for the occupation by a collective effort by PR practitioners in tackling some of the factors that this study has identified as being key components of PR activity (although, of course, many other important factors may have been neglected in this study). The study provides evidence that among the identified elements, the following appear to be the most important: at the practitioner level, managerial PR; at the PR consultancy level, the strategic needs from clients; at the industry forces level, the industry standard, the contribution of professional associations, the quality of PR graduates (and PR people), and the importance of qualifications.

IX.4.1 Implications for PR practitioners

The main contemporary challenge for individual PR practitioners is the acquisition of new skills. This is motivated in particular by an ongoing evolution of PR from a tactical function to a strategic function, requiring a more elaborated conception of PR and the acquisition of more complex skills. Nowadays, the most predominant practice is implementation of tactical media relations.

It is assumed that a tactical approach is inferior to a strategic approach. Strategy should be added to media relations. The practice of managerial PR might help to move PR along a continuum from tactical to strategic PR. Further research is needed in order to identify and add further items to this construct, and also to clarify the extent to which managerial PR impacts effectiveness, for example. Nevertheless, it is probable that in relation to technical PR, managerial PR will offer a salary differential (the managerial end is better paid), a respectability differential (probably including access to the board level) and an efficiency differential.

Nowadays, most clients continue to ask for tactical delivery more often than strategy. It is assumed that clients do have strategic needs and are not approaching PR firms for the most part to solve those needs because they are unaware of the potential of PR as a

strategic tool and they do not trust the bulk of PR firms to provide strategic advice. Thus, practitioners perceive both the frequency of practising managerial PR and the involvement of the PR firm in the strategic needs from clients as necessary for best practice. However, traditional views from many clients and PR practitioners are obstacles to the further development of these practices.

Individual PR practitioners could frequently set strategic goals, set quantifiable objectives and decide on communication policy. Implications are as follows. Setting strategic goals implies that strategic thinking could "complement" tactical implementation; setting quantifiable objectives implies that research and evaluation could replace intuition and trial and error; and deciding on communication policy implies understanding business strategy. This understanding implies the importance of professional and academic education and in-house training as vehicles for knowledge transfer rather than intuition, experience and trial-and-error. Knowledge could become one of the major priorities for the industry as a whole.

Implication: PR practitioners could attach more value to qualifications -- professional or academic. Education and training could be granted at least as much, if not more, importance as personality and experience. The industry standard -- ethics and standard of performance -- should depend more on education and training as vehicles for widespread informed debate and practice; rather than on individual subjective moral principles or on trial-and-error, respectively.

Most PR firms will tend to deliver merely what the client requests, which is traditionally tactical media relations. **Implication:** Consultancies, particularly small ones, could be proactive in providing a strategic solution to the client's problem when the clients ask for tactical delivery only.

The improvement of the PR industry standard is perceived by PR practitioners as one of the most pressing issues. However, the three industry forces that correlated with industry standard -- importance of qualifications, quality of PR graduates and trade body contribution -- are generally considered to be of low significance by PR practitioners. These views imply a certain pessimism about the worth of PR as a

discipline and as an occupation, and practitioners' low self-esteem. It is assumed that a change of views could lead to the improvement of the industry standard, which in turn could lead to a change of views.

Implication: PR practitioners could attach value more to PR graduates, because in an industry with a "serious" dearth of talent, ignoring the existence of PR graduates while recruiting, stands for a waste of resources. The unfavourable perceptions of PR graduates and their universities should be scrutinised for misconceptions, particularly considering that the overwhelming majority of PR practitioners do not know any PR graduates and do not themselves hold PR degrees.

Implication: Individual PR practitioners should become members and get involved in their professional associations. Collective efforts -- through the mechanism of professional associations -- are vital for the improvement of the industry standard. Although the industry standard is seen largely as the responsibility of PR professional associations, the power provided to these through representative membership is the responsibility of individual practitioners. Larger leading firms, which are less likely to value trade body contributions, could get more involved by sharing and debating the standard of performance and ethical standards. A commercially successful PR firm is benefited if the standards of the industry to which it belongs are highly regarded.

IX.4.2 Implications for PR professional associations

The PR industry is evolving naturally towards becoming a semi-professionalised occupation. This transition period can be shortened in proportion to the ability of individual practitioners to unite and act through their professional associations. One of the main problems that the PR industry faces is the absence of a strong sense of identity and of a united community of practitioners engaged in beneficial actions in furtherance of their collective interests. The existing professional associations have made an immense contribution to the PR occupation, but the widespread impact of their efforts has been limited by insufficient membership. More than 30% of the sampled practitioners are not members of the IPR nor members of the PRCA. Limited resources and the passivity of PR practitioners are among the obstacles to obtain the necessary mandatory power.

Trade body membership should be regarded as imperative. Most PR practitioners perceive that there are limited membership benefits and insufficient (although acknowledged) contributions by the associations to the development of professional standards. Professional associations could disseminate their existence, mission and objectives more intensively to all PR practitioners, particularly small players, and, just as importantly, to most clients or potential clients, many of whom are reported by PR practitioners not to be aware of the existence of a PR trade body. They could also educate client corporations to require trade body membership from individual practitioners and consultancies.

Most clients are reported to be unaware of PR's importance as a strategic management tool and, when they are, they are reported not to trust PR firms to deliver it. The trade body could further educate clients to appreciate the strategic and managerial potential of PR, and its value beyond tactical implementation.

The trade body could make practitioners aware that although PR will probably never be like medicine or law, public relations, like many other contemporary occupations such as consultancy, can legitimacy be an emerging or semi-professionaled activity. Sociologists (Farrugia, 1988; Lowendahl, 2000) are proposing a less rigid approach to professionalism by arguing that an occupation can be placed on a continuum according to its degree of specific (and rigorous) criteria. Individual practitioners and the trade body could actively unite in an open discussion of these criteria and agree on how to implement them.

There is a need for an attitude change in relation to those factors which can provide the means for PR practitioners to fulfil many aspirations. The trade body could more intensively promote among members and non-members the value of qualifications – professional *and* academic – to the industry standard. It could consider making them compulsory for one to practice PR. This (and other mechanisms) would increase barriers to entry in the PR industry and help avoid the standard of ethics and performance in the industry falling below an acceptable level. Many active PR

practitioners without qualifications (professional or academic) could be accommodated through rigorous mechanisms.

The trade body could promote intensive dialogue with PR academics in order to follow the on-going research advances in PR and additions to PR's body of knowledge. A dialogue between PR academics and practitioners would serve the industry standard by helping PR graduates to be well prepared and better valued.

IX.5 Research Limitations

A few issues must be kept in mind when interpreting the results of this study. Little was known about the public relations phenomenon both at the theoretical and practical levels. There was a need to empirically identify new variables and new measurement constructs in order to enhance our understanding of the phenomenon and motivate further research. The holistic approach used in this study led to the identification of key dimensions of PR activity, to the operationalisation of its constituent elements and to a preliminary understanding of their co-existence. These factors are not by any means exhaustive. Many additional variables might have been overlooked; many other dimensions rather than those specified might exist. The present study provides clues as to some variables that may be accounted for in further research and provides valid and reliable measurement scales for future refinement and replication.

The exploratory nature of the study does not permit us to draw any conclusions about causality or about the direction of the relationships between the variables. Nevertheless, it allows the identification of the variables and provides insights about potential relationships among them. As with any mail survey, the data are based solely on the perceptions of the respondents and thus may be subject to bias as some data might occur on the basis of perceptions, not on the basis of actual problems. The measurement of perceptions requires that the results should be interpreted only in terms of perceptions of the social environment and not in terms of actual environmental characteristics. The less socially desirable questions may have attenuated responses, but these were minimised by the anonymous self-report questionnaire (Appendix 1). There can be a self-selection bias with a mail survey, with some degree of difference between those PR firms that did not respond to the survey from those that did respond. In spite of these limitations, which are inherent in any mail survey, the study has yielded substantial and valuable information concerning public relations activity that has never before been compiled.

The survey sample characteristics limit the generalisability of the findings. The results reflect exclusively the perceptions of PR managers of PR firms in England. The study could hardly be generalised to developing countries, but could probably have some parallel with the PR industry of some developed countries.

The final picture is skewed towards PR practitioners. Other important players could have been surveyed, most particularly clients, who emerged as fundamental actors. Similarly, PR scholars, PR students, and other practitioners who compete with PR firms – e.g. marketing, advertising and management consultants -- are not fully represented.

The PR occupation comprises practitioners working in PR firms, consultants and practitioners working in-house for an organisation. The findings are necessarily determined by the particular characteristics of the consultancy world, and views of in-house practitioners might be under represented. Nevertheless, consistent qualitative reports conclude that the majority of PR practitioners work alternately in PR firms and in-house, and thus the difference in perceptions about their occupation might not be substantial. For example, the central importance of clients for consultants might have a parallel in the central importance of employers in for in-house practitioners.

As the second largest PR industry in the world, after the US, the UK is an interesting case through which to research the PR phenomenom. England was chosen due to resource limitations which did not allow the inclusion of other parts of the UK. A sample based on a single country is bound to be limited as the results cannot easily be generalised to PR practitioners, consultancies or industries of other countries. Nevertheless, the replication of the study on other countries might shed light on the similarities and differences and enhance our understanding of the PR activity.

Despite the use of three units of analysis due to the holistic approach followed, a first limitation is the necessary omission of relevant dimensions, constructs and items. This omission may lead to a degree of bias.

IX.6 Directions for Further Research

We are still at an early stage in the development of reliable and valid scales of public relations. Clearly, further work that addresses both conceptual and measurement issues is required. The constructs presented in this research are empirically based, valid and reliable and can be used to help operationalise future research. All constructs presented require the further addition of items. The construct "managerial PR" could be used as a dependent variable in a future causal study. Future studies could also analyse the impact of managerial PR on performance, or it could be used along with new tentative constructs, namely marketing PR. The replication of this study across various countries is suggested. Researchers could use Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to determine if the factor structure applies to samples from other countries.

Future studies could also focus on causality in order to understand the relationships among some of the forces at play in the industry, at the consultancy and practitioner levels, and explore in particular the relationships between the constructs that are correlated (see Table VII-6 and Figure VIII-2). The acquisition of such knowledge would contribute to PR theory while helping PR consultancy decision-makers, professional associations, client organisations and PR students.

Considering the present study with the benefit of hindsight, the researcher would do certain things differently. Taking into account the dearth of existing empirical evidence about the phenomenon of PR and the immature theoretical stances; in addition to the public relations field and parent disciplines' influences, the literature review would have been done together with a more established academic area. Considering the importance of the strategic approach to the practice of PR, the use of PR as a marketing tool, and the importance of professionalism to the PR activity, the three possible candidate areas for a literature search are: strategic management, marketing and sociology (the study of professions).

If the researcher were undertaking a new study now, it would be concerned with the development of a process for PR. It would start by conceptualising antecedents (such as crisis) and consequents (such as reputation) by focusing on the causal relationship between the construct "managerial PR" and tested measures of efficiency from more established fields. To the construct "managerial PR" tentative items related with tested measures of research and evaluation would be added. New constructs would be tentatively created in a continuum from tactical to strategic PR. The concepts "marketing PR", "corporate PR" and "personal PR" would be conceptualised and tested.

APPENDIX 1: QUESTIONNAIRE

PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY - SURVEY 1999

(Supported by the European Union - FCT-Praxis XXI/BD/11096/97)

This questionnaire aims to collect concrete data on major topics such as *professionalism* and *evaluation* in order to understand the current Public Relations industry.

There are a few things we would like you to keep in mind while answering the questions:

- This questionnaire is structured so that its completion is as easy as possible. It will take approximately **20 minutes** to complete.
- The information you provide will be kept **strictly confidential**. Only agglomerated results of all the respondents' answers will be used.
- There are **no right or wrong answers**. This is an opportunity for you to express your honest opinion on a range of issues concerning your practice and industry.
- To answer the questions, please tick the box ☑ that corresponds to the appropriate answer or fill it in with a number when asked for quantities, e.g., ☐. Please **answer all** questions.

Please use the enclosed envelope to return your completed questionnaire.

Your response is crucial to the success of the Warwick University study on the practices of Public Relations and its evolving remit.

Carmen Lages
Doctoral Researcher

If you require assistance in completing the questionnaire or have any questions regarding the survey, please contact:
Carmen Lages, Warwick Business School, Marketing and Strategic Management Group, Warwick University, Coventry CV4 7AL.
Tel: 01203 572832. Fax: 01203 524650. E-mail: C.H.C.Lages@warwick.ac.uk

A) PUBLIC RELATIONS
This first section is about the Public Relations activity and your views on it.

1- In your opinion, which of the following are the <u>two ultimate goals</u> of Public Relations?
(Please tick ☑ TWO boxes only)

a) To change opinions ☐
b) To sell something ☐
c) To support other communications activities ☐
d) To obtain mutual understanding ☐
e) To build favourable reputation ☐
f) Other:_____ ☐
(Please specify)

2- Considering your day-to-day experience, would you say that <u>Public Relations is about</u>:
(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)

	Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
a) Informing an audience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Persuading an audience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Planning a programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Implementing a programme	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Counselling management	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) Other:_____ (Please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- <u>How often</u> are you involved in the following activities when practicing Public Relations?
(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your situation)

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) Writing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Setting *strategic* goals	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Editing	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Assessing progress *periodically*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Setting *quantifiable* objectives	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) Co-ordinating resources	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g) Defining a *target* audience	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
h) Making presentations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
i) Deciding on communication's *policy*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
j) Contacting the media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
k) Other:_____ (Please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4- In your opinion, Public Relations is <u>more effective</u> when applied:
(Please <u>RANK</u> the following options, beginning with "<u>1 = most important</u>")

a) at the product level ☐
b) at the corporate level ☐
c) at the personal level ☐
d) Other:_____ ☐
(Please specify)

5- In your opinion, which of the following are the two most important business skills for a Public Relations practitioner? ***(Please tick ☑ the TWO most important)***

a) Managing human resources ☐
b) Understanding the client's market place ☐
c) Managing finance ☐
d) Setting business strategy ☐
e) Other: _____ ☐
(Please specify)

6- When introducing yourself, what job title do you use most frequently to identify your professional activity?

_____

7- To what extent do you agree or disagree that:

Public Relations is...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) A vocation	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) A profession	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Other: _____ (Please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

8- In your own words and/or using keywords, how would you define "Public Relations"?

Public Relations is _____

_____

_____

B) LINKS WITH OTHER COMMUNICATION DISCIPLINES

This section concerns the place of Public Relations in the communications world.

1- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Public Relations practice is at its best when practised independently from other communication disciplines	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The overlap of Public Relations with other communications disciplines is inevitable in practice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2- How often does your company work with practitioners that have expertise in other communication areas (e.g., advertising, sales promotions)? ***(Please tick ☑ one box only)***

Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- If communication activities were to be integrated, in the majority of cases, who should lead the process? ***(Please tick ☑ one box only)***

a) The client ☐
b) The Public Relations agency ☐
c) Both ☐
d) Other: _____ ☐
(Please specify)

C) "PROFESSIONALISM"

Professionalism is one of the most debated issues in the Public Relations industry and is the theme of this section.

1- When thinking of most Public Relations practitioners, would you agree or disagree that:
(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)

Most Public Relations practitioners...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a) Are *skilled* in communications' strategic thinking	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Are *credible* in providing the board level with communications advice	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements to characterise PR?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PR has a body of knowledge based on *theory*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PR has a body of knowledge based on *practice*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
PR has a *clear* body of knowledge	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The PR industry as a whole has a *clear code of ethics*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
The PR industry as a whole has a *clear standard of performance.*	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- Please specify the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement:

"Formal qualifications (from academic or professional bodies) should be made compulsory for one to practice Public Relations."

Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

D) PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATIONS

The objective of this section is to collect your views on the role of the Public Relations Professional Associations in the UK.

1- To which trade body, if any, is YOUR COMPANY affiliated?
(Please tick all the boxes ☑ that apply)

a) None ☐
b) The Public Relations Consultants Association (PRCA) ☐
c) The Institute of Public Relations (IPR) ☐
d) The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) ☐
e) International Public Relations Association (IPRA) ☐
f) Other:_____ ☐
(Please specify)

The following questions are for both members and non-members of any professional association.

2- In your view, how beneficial is membership of a Public Relations professional association?

Entirely Beneficial	A Lot Beneficial	Moderately Beneficial	A Little Beneficial	Not At All Beneficial
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- How much, if at all, did the PRCA- Public Relations Consultancies Association contribute to the development of professional standards?

Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4- How much, if at all, would you say that the IPR- Institute of Public Relations contributed to the development of professional standards?

Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5- How much, if at all, would you say that the PRCA represents the interests of the whole of consultancies/agencies?

Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

E) TRAINING
The following questions are about company training in Public Relations.

1- Does your company run its own formal staff training programme (e.g., presentation skills)?

No ☐ *If no, please go to Question 2*

Yes ☐ —— **1a) In which of the following areas has your company developed training for its own staff?** *(Please tick all that apply)*

Writing skills	☐	Technological skills	☐
Presentation skills	☐	None	☐
Management skills	☐	Other:_____ (Please specify)	☐
Business skills	☐		

2- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in describing your company? *(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)*

My company...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Does Not Apply
a) Has a clear career structure	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Has a structured training programme for new entrants	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Is attracting more qualified personnel than five years ago	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3 - When was the last time, if ever, that someone from your agency attended a conference or workshop on Public Relations? *(Please tick one box ☑ in both columns)*

Last Conference or Workshop attended (excluding client-related events):

	a) Senior Partner	b) Account Handler
Never	☐	☐
During the last 12 months	☐	☐
Over the last 1-3 years	☐	☐
More than 3 years ago	☐	☐

F) COMPETITION

This section aims to collect your opinions as a practitioner on competition in the Public Relations industry.

1- Compared to 10 years ago, how competitive is Public Relations today?

(Please tick ☑ ONE box only)

Much more competitive	More competitive	No change	Less competitive	Much less competitive	Don't Know
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2- How much would you say the following agencies/people compete with Public Relations?

(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)

	Entirely	A Lot	Moderately	A Little	Not At All
a) Advertising agencies/people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Marketing agencies/people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Lawyers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Management consultancies	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Sales promotion agencies/people	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) Other:_____ (Please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- Generally speaking, what would you say is the biggest opportunity for the PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY? ***(Please answer on the following lines)***

- _____

_____

4- What would you say is the biggest threat that the PUBLIC RELATIONS INDUSTRY is currently facing?

- _____

_____

5- What do you believe are the key future trends for the Public Relations industry?

- _____
- _____
- _____

G) PUBLIC RELATIONS AND ACADEMIA

The following questions are about Public Relations academics and degree students.

1- How would you rate the relationship between Public Relations academics and the Public Relations industry?

(Please tick ☑ ONE box only)

Very Good	Good	Neither Good Nor Bad	Bad	Very Bad	No relationship exists
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2- How important do you think academic training is for Public Relations practice?

Very Important	Important	Moderately Important	Unimportant	Not At All Important
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- In your opinion, Public Relations academics should spend more time:
(Please tick ☑ ONE box only)

a) Researching Public Relations ☐
b) Developing Public Relations theory ☐
c) Developing more practical issues ☐
d) Other:_____ ☐
(Please specify)

4- The following statements concern Public Relations degree students. Would you say that:

In general, Public Relations graduates'...	Very Good	Good	Neither Good Nor Bad	Bad	Very Bad	Don't Know
a) Writing skills are:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Speaking skills are:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Strategic thinking is:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Management skills are:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Overall preparation to work in the PR industry is:	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

5- What is, in your opinion, the most important factor to consider when recruiting?
(Please tick ☑ one box only)

a) Academic qualifications ☐
b) Personal qualities ☐
c) Practical experience ☐
d) Other:_____ ☐
(Please specify)

H) RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

Research and evaluation are also extensively debated in the industry. The objective of this section is to learn about the views of Public Relations practitioners on the issue.

1- Does your company undertake any type of PR evaluation, such as analysis of press clippings?

No ☐ ***If no, please go to Question 2***

Yes ☐ —— **1a) What type of evaluation procedures has your company developed?**
(Please tick ☑ all that apply)

Post-planning evaluation ☐
Measurement of message impact on the audience ☐
Compilation of press clippings/radio-television 'mentions' ☐
Pre-planning research ☐
Other: _____ ☐
(Please specify)

2- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
a) PR is more experience-based than research-based	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) PR is more intuition-based than research-based	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) It is impossible to evaluate Public Relations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Public Relations can be included in the management process without research	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- What are the most important aspects in developing research/evaluation tools?
(Please tick ☑ the TWO most important)

a) Time ☐
b) Money ☐
c) Trained personnel ☐
d) Familiarity with methodologies ☐
e) A requirement from the client ☐
f) Other: _____ ☐
(Please specify)

4-Does your company sub-contract services (e.g., media analysis) from a media evaluation agency?

No ☐ ***If no, please go to Question 5***

Yes ☐ ____ **4a) Which of the following services does your company sub-contract from a media evaluation agency?**

	Yes	No
Self-assessment	☐	☐
External media analysis	☐	☐
Pre-campaign market research	☐	☐
Post-campaign market research	☐	☐

Other:_____
(Please specify)

5- Who do you think should support the evaluation/research expenses?

The PR consultancy	The client	Both
☐	☐	☐

6- How much, if at all, does your company spend a year on a) evaluation and b) research?

[RESEARCH is defined as "information gathered in order to plan the communication programmes" and EVALUATION as "information gathered in order to measure the success or failure of programmes"]

(Please tick one box ☑ in each column)

	a) Evaluation	b) Research
No expenditure	☐	☐
Less than £ 1, 000	☐	☐
From £ 1, 001 to £ 5, 000	☐	☐
From £ 5, 001 to £ 10, 000	☐	☐
From £ 10, 001 to £ 20 000	☐	☐
More than £ 20 000	☐	☐

I) YOUR CLIENTS
This section is about your clients' expectations and needs.

1- To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in describing the majority of your clients: ***(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)***

The majority of my clients...	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know
include *communications* in their management agenda	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
need to *be made aware* of the potential of PR	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
understand *entirely* what Public Relations are	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
are *realistic* about what Public Relations can achieve	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
understand Public Relations *better* than in the past	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
are developing *international* campaigns	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2- When considering the majority of your clients, which of the following audiences are most frequently the target? ***(Please tick ☑ the box on each row that best describes your opinion)***

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) Local community	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) Media	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) Environmental groups	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) Clients	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) Employees	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) Consumers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g) Other:_____ (Please specify)	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- How often, if ever, do the majority of your clients:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
a) ask your agency to get involved in their strategy planning	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
b) ask for communications programmes that go beyond Public Relations	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
c) ask for evaluation of communication programmes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
d) ask for researched-based programmes	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
e) ask you to liaise with their other communications agencies/ suppliers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
f) pay for ***evaluation*** costs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
g) pay for ***research*** costs	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

4- When working with your clients, which of the following do you deal with most frequently?
(Please tick ☑ the TWO most frequent)

Advertising Manager	☐	Marketing Director	☐	Manufacturing Director	☐
Brand Manager	☐	IT Director	☐	Operations Director	☐
Communications Manager	☐	Logistics Director	☐	Sales Director	☐
Manufacturing Director	☐	Managing Director	☐	Other:_____ (Please specify)	☐

J) YOUR COMPANY
The following section concerns your company.

1- Generally, which of the following best describes the Public Relations activity of your company? ***(Please tick ☑ one box only)***

Business-to-business PR ☐ Consumer PR ☐ Both ☐

2- In what MARKET is your company predominantly active (e.g., Healthcare, motor industry)?

_____

3- Which one of the following best describes your company's Public Relations services:
(Please tick ☑ one box only)

Generalist ☐ Specialised ☐ Please specify in which area: _____

Please fill the boxes below as appropriate .

4- In what *year* was your company founded? 19 ☐☐

5- Number of *employees*: ☐☐☐☐

6- Number of *directors/ senior partners (or equivalent):* ☐☐

7- Number of *clients in the UK*: ☐☐

8- Number of *clients abroad*: ☐☐

9- Number of *countries* in which your company operates (excluding the UK): ☐☐

10- What is your company's turnover in a) the UK and b) World-wide?
(Please tick ☑ one box for each column)

a) UK Turnover:

- Up to £500, 000 ☐
- From £500, 001 to £1, 000, 000 ☐
- From £1, 000, 001 to £2, 000, 000 ☐
- Over £2, 000, 000 ☐

b) Overall World-wide Turnover:

- Does not apply ☐
- Up to £5, 000, 000 ☐
- From £5, 000, 001 to £10, 000, 000 ☐
- From £10, 000, 001 to 20, 000, 000 ☐
- More than £20, 000, 000 ☐

11- What are the main challenges facing YOUR COMPANY in the new millennium?

- _____
- _____
- _____

K) ABOUT YOU
This section is about you and your expectations.

1- What is your job title? **(Please do not abbreviate)** _____

_____

2- Age:

Under 25	25-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	Over 60
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

3- Gender:

Male	Female
☐	☐

Please fill the boxes below with the appropriate quantities.

4- Number of years working in the present company? ☐☐

5- Number of years of service in your current role? ☐☐

6- Number of previous posts in present company? ☐☐

7- What are your educational qualifications? ***(Please tick ☑ all that apply)***

"O" level/ GCSE	"A" Levels (or equivalent)	Degree (or equivalent)	Higher Degree (Msc, MA, PhD)	Professional Qualification	Other: _____
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐ _____ (Please specify)

8- For how many years have you been working in the field of Public Relations? ☐☐

9- How many other PR companies have you worked for? ☐☐

10- If you had any other employment before Public Relations, please state which:

_____

_____

11- Why did you choose to work in Public Relations?

_____

_____

12- How would you like your career to develop in the next five years?

_____

_____

13- What are the principal challenges facing YOU in the new millennium?

_____

_____

Thank you for your participation and for sparing your valuable time in responding to this survey!

Your responses will not be divulged to any third party, nor will your individual responses be published.

If you would like a summary of the findings of this study, please attach your business card to this questionnaire.

APPENDIX 2: PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS' GUIDE

Preliminary Interviews' Guide

- **Overall perception of PR industry**
  - Underlining successes/ problems
  - Competition
  - Specialisation (niching for small/large consultancies)
  - Internationalisation (EU changes, eastern Europe changes, pan-European)
  - Personnel development (investment in recruiting, training, learning and knowledge management)
  - Technology (IT-based communications, internet)/(new)media segmentation
  - Evaluation
  - Strategic and management expertise/practice
  - Corporate and product branding value

- **The evolving relationship with the rest of the Marketing Communications industry**
  - The "grey area"
  - Sponsorship, Direct Mail, Sales Promotion, Personal Selling, Advertising (informercials, advertorials), Internet
  - Integrated communications
- PR practice: marketing tool / management tool
- PR academics/ practitioners relationship
- Grunig's two-way symmetrical model (interviewer explanation, discussion, practitioners perspective)

New issues consistently raised during interviews and added to the guide:

- Professional Associations
- History of Public Relations industry
- High level strategic advice PR
- Future trends in PR
- Media relations

APPENDIX 3: TABLES FOR DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Tables that generated figures about respondents' PR firm profile (chapter VI)

Dimension	Range	All respondents (n= 297)[1]
Agencies' foundation date		(%)
	1936-1959	1.5
	1960-1969	3.8
	1970-1979	11.3
	1980-1989	46.5
	1990-1999	37
Number of employees		
	up to 6	64.5
	7 to 20	23.5
	21-40	8.5
	50+	3
Number of directors		
	1	40.8
	2	33.6
	3	12
	4+	13.6
Number of clients in Great Britain		
	up to 5	27.4
	6-10	30.9
	11-20	25.6
	20+	16.1
Number of clients abroad		
	none	51.4
	1	13.7
	2-5	27
	6+	7.9
Number of overseas countries in which operates		
	none	58.3
	up to 6	30.5
	6+	11.2

[1] All figures are valid percent of frequencies and missing data are excluded.

APPENDIX 4: OUTPUT TABLES FOR RELIABILITY ANALYSIS OF SCALES

Original Scales for Reliability Analysis (Alpha) of Scales

Scale 1 – Managerial public relations

N of Cases = 276.0	N of Items = 6	Alpha = .8141

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
A3B- frequency setting strategic goals	3.9601	.8540	.7674
A3D- frequency assessing progress periodically	3.9710	.8523	.7860
A3E- frequency setting quantifiable objectives	3.7500	.9793	.7637
A3F- frequency co-ordinating resources	3.8804	.8635	.8114
A3H - frequency making presentations	3.5870	.9360	.8003
A3I- frequency deciding on communications policy	3.7717	.9660	.7763

Scale 2– Permanence in job

N of Cases = 289.0	N of Items = 4	Alpha = .8401

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
CJ4 – agency's years of existence	2.9031	1.1476	.8347
K4 – years working in present agency	2.9516	1.2124	.7266
K5 – years in current role	2.9135	1.2484	.7613
K8 – years in public relations	3.0623	1.1973	.8503

Scale 3– Competition

N of Cases = 288.0	N of Items = 4	Alpha = .7798

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
F2A – competition from advertising agencies/people	3.0972	.9650	.7274
F2B – competition from marketing agencies/people	3.3472	.8781	.6852
F2D – competition from management agencies/people	2.3889	1.0795	.7838
F2E – competition from sales promotion agencies/people	2.5521	1.0413	.7087

Scale 4– Quality of PR graduates

N of Cases = 187.0	N of Items = 5	Alpha = .7723

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
G4A - graduates' writing skills	2.9679	.8854	.7458
G4B - graduates' speaking skills	3.2299	.7075	.7696
G4C - graduates' strategic thinking	3.0160	.8889	.7216
G4D - graduates' management skills	2.6952	.7884	.7026
G4E - graduates' overall preparation	2.9412	.8177	.7069

Scale 5 – Strategic needs from clients

N of Cases = 288.0	N of Items = 4	Alpha = .7358

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
I3A - clients ask agency to get involved in their strategic planning	3.4792	.8950	.6614
I3B - clients ask for communication beyond pr	3.4618	.8463	.6664
I3C - clients ask for evaluation of programs	2.8681	.9499	.6910
I3D - clients ask for research-based programs	2.4375	.9199	.6865

Scale 6 – Trade body contribution

N of Cases = 251.0	N of Items = 3	Alpha = .7677

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
D2 - trade body membership benefits	2.7490	1.1157	.6818
D3 - contribution of PRCA to professionalism	2.6693	.9870	.7578
D4 - contribution of IPR to professionalism	3.0398	.9415	.6185

Scale 7 – Industry standard

N of Cases = 288.0	N of Items = 3	Alpha = .7287

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
C2E - industry has clear standard of performance	2.4688	.9365	.5117
C2C - pr has clear body of knowledge	3.1736	.8821	.7803
C2D - industry has clear code of ethics	2.8750	1.0351	.5907

Scale 8 – Practitioners' managerial activity

N of Cases = 290.0	N of Items = 2	Alpha = .8330

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
C1A - pr practitioners' skills in communication strategic thinking	3.0759	.9814	--
C1B - pr practitioners' credibility providing communication advice to the board level	3.0966	.9472	--

Scale 9 - PR firm size

N of Cases = 285.0	N of Items = 2	Alpha = .7590

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
J6 - number of directors	.2472	.2371	_
J10A - agency turnover	.1365	.2058	_

Scale 10 – Research expenditure

N of Cases = 262.0	N of Items = 2	Alpha = .8619

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
H6A - Evaluation expenditure	1.5382	1.2702	--
H6B - Research expenditure	1.6565	1.3939	--

Scale 11 – Agency's training

N of Cases = 169.0	N of Items = 2	Alpha = .7738

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
E2B - my co has training program. for new entrants	3.1953	1.0817	--
E2A - my co has a clear career structure	3.4201	.9915	--

Scale 12 - Importance of qualification

N of Cases = 289.0	N of Items = 2	Alpha = .6527

Variables	Mean	Std Dev	Alpha if Item Deleted
C3 - formal qualification should be compulsory	2.8824	1.2802	_
G2 - Importance of academic training for pr	3.1730	1.0127	_

APPENDIX 5: CORRELATION MATRIX OF EACH CFA GROUP

Correlation Matrix of each CFA Group

Group 1 (Practitioner)

	Managerial PR	Permanence in job
Managerial PR	1.00	
Permanence in job	-0.10	1.00

Group 2 (Consultancy)

	Strategic needs from clients	PR firm size
Strategic needs from clients	1.00	
PR firm size	0.27	1.00

Group 3 (Industry forces)

	Trade body contribution	Industry standard	Quality of PR graduates	Competition	Importance of qualifications
Trade body contribution	1.00				
Industry standard	0.47	1.00			
Quality of PR graduates	0.27	0.16	1.00		
Competition	0.08	0.05	0.12	1.00	
Importance of qualifications	0.44	0.20	0.10	0.27	1.00

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