BENCHMARKING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE NAMIBIAN PUBLIC SERVICE WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT

OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF ARTS (MEDIA STUDIES)

OF

THE UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

BY

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OCTOBER 2019

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ED	-	Executive Director
MWT	-	Ministry of Works and Transport
O/M/As	-	Offices/Ministries/Agencies
PR	-	Public Relations
PROs	-	Public Relations Officers
CEOs	-	Chief Executive Officers
PRSA	-	Public Relations Society of America
HPP	-	Harambee Prosperity Plan
NBC	-	Namibia Broadcasting Corporation
OPM	-	Office of the Prime Minister
PA	-	Personal Assistant
TV	-	Television
SMS	-	Message
MICT	-	Minister of Information and Communication Technology
IT	-	Information Technology
Government	-	The Government of the Republic of Namibia

ABSTRACT

The minister responsible for the management of government information in Namibia, as well as commentators, have expressed concern about public relations practice in government ministries, arguing that citizens are disadvantaged and the full spectrum of the advantages effective communication confers are lost at the national and transnational level (Kapitako, 2013; Mutambo, 2014; Namibia News Digest, n.d.). This study sets out to compare public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the tenets of the Excellence Theory of public relations which is seen as an example of generic benchmarking that involves identifying critical success factors (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006) that should aid public relations practice in the Namibian public service come into its own. This entailed benchmarking public relations practice in the public service with the principles of the Excellence theory as well as key informant Interviews with stakeholders – government officials and public relations practitioners. The findings indicate that Namibian government public relations still needs working on if it is to qualify as excellent practice, hence the recommendation for practitioners to closely align the practice context with the tenets of the Excellence Theory.

DEDICATION

This paper is dedicated to my beautiful children: Winnie, Atushe, Ishmael, Inutu - Shalom and Solomon.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am grateful and always shall be, for unmerited grace and mercy that my Father, God Almighty, bestowed upon me. Without divine wisdom, I could have not accomplished this study. I was confronted with innumerable challenges but my Creator, in His abundance of love, carried me under His shadow of protection and I emerged victorious.

My research supervisor, Prof. Eno Akpabio, your guidance will always be treasured and appreciated. Your kindness, encouragement and patience coerced me to continue with my study.

My children, your endurance astonishes me. You stay awake waiting for me to come back home and meet me with smile regardless the time. I will always be indebted to you. I love and cherish you greatly.

My supervisor Mr. Willem Goeiemann – ED: MWT I am honored to have you as a supervisor, your understanding is amazing. My friends – Liz Siririka and Etu Kayone I recall how you always encouraged me to complete my research, I thank God for your lives.

My family – Beata, Kalinde, Alma, Linda, and Loide, your love mesmerizes and your words of wisdom pieced my heart and gave me hope. My God will reward you all.

DECLARATION

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N.T. (Grace) NAMBUNDUNGA **October 31, 2019**

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the context and rationale for the study, its significance as well as limitation and delimitation.

1.2 Background of the study

The Government of the Republic of Namibia offers several services to the public through various Offices/Ministries/Agencies (O/M/As), but the public, through the media and reporters are often not satisfied with the way the services are rendered. Reporters specifically, complain that officials responsible for communication in Government offices delay in providing responses (Kapitako, 2013), while the readers' expectations of timely stories also put pressure on reporters, (Itule & Anderson, 2008; Kapitako, 2013).

This delay was also confirmed by a journalist (T. Ndjembela, personal communication, September 5, 2019), who said that based on his experience with Public Relations Officers, they are unfazed by journalists' deadlines. This was also flagged by Kapitako, (2013), who postulated that the Namibian government has not yet grasped the full importance of communicating with the media and the public. Nevertheless, "client satisfaction can serve as an outcome indicator of the quality…received" Laferriere (1993, p. 67), while "service failure results in customer dissatisfaction" (Weun et al, 2004, as cited by Kamran and Attiq, 2011, p. 169).

The Minister of Information and Communication Technology has called for the empowerment of government public relations officers (PROs) in line with the literature (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) to assist them in timely dissemination of information to the public (Namibia News Digest, n.d.).

The Minister's call for PROs' empowerment heralded that the Government acknowledged the challenges regarding communication and the value of Government public relations as the "communication function that deals with the interactions" (Bowen, 2011, p. 4) between the government and its citizenry (Guangming, 2018).

On the other hand, the Government lays the blame on PROs, whom it says have failed in their duty to disseminate timeous information to citizens (Namibia News Digest, n.d.). But Mutambo (2014) argues that PROs are not properly positioned as they are not members of the dominant coalition nor empowered to function effectively. This is imperative because "a public relations voice in the dominant coalition can help avert crises and reputational damage by considering the interests of publics" (Bowen, 2015, p. 3).

Additionally, Mutambo (2014) sees a critical role for public relations (PR) through two-way communication with citizens, effective media and employee relations (Grunig, 1993; Grunig, 2009) as well as advisory services that would result in good governance as well as better national and transnational perception. Guangming (2018, par. 3.) referred to a two-way communication as a soft strategy used to "establish and maintain harmonious relationship between the government and the public to ensure smooth implementation of government's administrative policies". Mutambo, (2014) however postulated the absence of central office for public information in government, as a contributing factor to the delay in providing information to the media. This, Mutambo (2014) asserted, has led to uncoordinated communication which he said is fragmented across the public service.

The Excellence Theory, which undergirds this study makes room for a theoretical profile and benchmark, thus making it possible for government public relations departments and units to compare themselves with world-class practices which will, in turn, lead to performance improvement (Grunig, 1993; Grunig, & Dozier, 2006).

Given these dire reports and commentaries about public relations practice in the Namibian public service, this study tackled this issue by benchmarking PR practice with the principles enunciated in the Excellence Theory. The negative media report prompted the present benchmarking study to determine the credibility of such reporting. It is believed that the application of the theory has the potential to enhance the PR effectiveness once the principles enunciated in the theory are adopted and applied accordingly (Wise, 2003).

1.3 Statement of the problem

The Minister responsible for the management of Government information in Namibia as well as commentators have expressed concern about public relations practice in government ministries arguing that citizens are disadvantaged and the full spectrum of the advantages effective communication confers are lost at the national and transnational level (Kapitako, 2013; Mutambo, 2014). The present study set out to compare PR practice in the Namibian public service with the tenets of the Excellence Theory of public relations which is seen as an example of generic benchmarking that involves identifying critical success factors (Grunig, 1993; Grunig, & Dozier, 2006) that should aid PR practice in the Namibian public service to come into its own. This entailed benchmarking PR practice in the public service with the principles of the Excellence theory, in order to determine if PR in Government plays a managerial role or technical expertise role, whether or not all PR functions are integrated into a single department, whether or not government PR departments are research-based, and the type of communication model which is used in government – such as symmetrical communication etc. The foregoing principles have great impact for effective PR in any organization.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How is PR practice in the Namibian public service in comparison to the organization of the function as enunciated in the Excellence Theory?
2. To what extent do heads of PR departments enact managerial and/or technical roles?
3. Which of the four PR models (as outlined by Grunig et al., (2006) – press agentry/publicity, public information, two–way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical - predominates in the public service practice environment?
4. What are the unique practices in the Namibian public service PR environment that will make a contribution to global theorizing on public relations?

1.5 Significance of the study

The Excellence Theory has the ambition of becoming a global theory of PR, hence scholars have replicated the study in various countries (Grunig et al., 2006). The present study could make a Namibian contribution and bring our unique practice (could there be any) to bear on the literature. But the study would also meet the local need as the benchmarking will assist in bringing to the fore what is required if the public service wishes to practice the world-class public relations.

1.6 Limitation of the study

While it would be best to conduct a study that accounts for PR practice in the entire country, the scope of this study was limited to the Namibian public service. Hence findings cannot be generalized to cover the private sector and other entities.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

The study is focused entirely on the Namibian public service giving the dire reports and comments regarding the PR practices.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This review of literature focused on the historical origins of public relations, defined the term 'public relations', and investigated public relations practice. In today's business world, organizations use benchmarking as a point of reference and a way to compare themselves to others in the industry (Menachof & Wassenberg, 2000). Hence, this chapter explored the concept of benchmarking. It further discussed Excellence theory, Communication Models of public relations and the challenges of government public relations. The review encompassed the perspectives of scholars, critics of government public relations and the Grunig and Hunt's model of communication.

The goal of the research was to benchmark PR practice in the Namibian Government Service with the principles of the Excellence Theory which has been described as "the dominant paradigm of public [relations] research" (Wise, 2003, p. 497), in order to see how well the public relations practitioners are performing and identify ways to assist them become more effective.

2.2 Review of Literature

2.2.1 Benchmarking

Benchmarking is becoming a popular tool for companies / organizations to systematically assess their performance against that of other companies so that trouble spots can be targeted (Blankenship et al., 1998). "The verb Benchmarking…links to the notion of comparison with a relevant standard directly to taking of specific action to improve performance", (Francis & Holloway, 2002, p. 284).

Organizations often strive to be more responsive to their customer's needs and changes in business strategies. In order to identify optimal solutions to challenges some resort to benchmarking to keep pace and become more efficient by pursuing best practices identified by the benchmarking - a search for industry best practices that lead to superior performance (Noha,1993).

Benchmarking is therefore defined as "the practice of being humble enough to admit that someone else is better at something and wise enough to try and learn how to match and even surpass them at it", (Menachof & Wassenberg, 2000, p. 41). It simply means, "Measuring your own performance against that of best-in-class companies; determining how the best in class companies achieve those performance levels; using the information as the basis for your own company's targets, strategies, and implementations", (Menachof & Wassenberg, 2000, p. 41).

Hawthorne (2003) defines Benchmarking as the practice of a business comparing key metrics of their operations to companies they aspire to be like by looking at how they are doing, hence they can identify areas where they are underperforming; in order to improve their own operations. As can be seen from the definitions above, Benchmarking supports the organizational learning and innovation through empirical knowledge which underpins it (Askim et al., 2008).

Askim et al., (2008) argued that the outcome of benchmarking might be a decision to either improve; maintain the status quo or reduce the quality, quantity, and efficiency of a given task as such decision to implement the outcome may be coupled with resistance, uncertainty, and politics. However, the core of benchmarking is not necessarily exclusively on the performance but on how the internal process works (the system) and how the different processes achieve the outputs / desired results.

2.2.2 The Origins of Public Relations

In the early 19th century America went through some important social changes, it was this revolution which initiated public relations. Organizations could use publicity to raise funds, promote their goods and boost commercial ventures (Ewen, 1996; Cutlip et al., 2000, p. 103).

The main focus of PR was to take business' side, to influence public opinion and to persuade politicians (Cutlip et al., 2000) and publicize their organizations (Voss and Speere, 2013). Ewen (1996) argued that PR was used as a propaganda by American Government during World War I which according to him evoked public skepticism towards public relations.

Voss and Speere (2013) elucidated how women in America were marginalized and confined only to pages designated to women in the newspapers – pages which were writing about less important news such as wedding news, society events, food and fashion. They wrote about a certain Peggy Daum – University graduate, holder of a Journalism Degree, who started "covering the subject of food as news without conforming to the advertiser's wishes" (p. 45). "Although excluded from professional journalism organizations for decades, female journalists made their own ethical guidelines in the area they could claim as their own: food" (Voss and Speere, 2013, p. 48). They used the Press Agentry model to publicize their organization as articulated by Voss and Speere (2013) that “women used the opportunity at the food conference to legitimize their profession by creating a journalism organization of their own that continues today,” (p.48).

One would say the functions and effectiveness of PR was not properly identified thus it was misused and perceived as a tool used by the managers to advance their interests and “manipulate the public opinion” (Lee et al., 2012, p. 7), a belief which is pervasive even in modern world. In fact, PR profession results in organizational efficiency, effectiveness and accountability (Lee et al., 2012).

A number of surveys conducted in early years of PR inception, according to Grunig and Tunt (1984) revealed that most of top managers of the companies / organizations were surveys / researches were conducted, were dissatisfied with the performance of the PR departments within their organizations. Their dissatisfaction was caused by the fact that PR personnel had no management skills but only possessed the technical skills – writing; editing; and producing publications. The study further revealed that PR personnel could only receive orders and implement “the PR programs without being involved in the formulation and management of those programs” (Grunig & Tunt, 1984, p. Vi).

Today, the organizations are overwhelmed by the public’s needs and the two (organizations and publics) continuously conflict one another (Grunig & Tunt, 1984). They further added that organizations and publics have in fact reciprocal consequences as the Organizations’ decisions affect the public, and similarly, the public’s reactions to the organizations’ decisions affect the organizations. For instance, the Ministry responsible for issuing passports and birth certificates decided not to issue documents due to budgetary constraints, but without proper communication with stakeholders (public). The public resolved to demonstrate or approach a certain high office or perhaps approach the Court of Law because they feel entitled to receiving official documents. The Ministry's decision prompted the public's reaction.

As the organizations and the public grew, the technical skills could no longer be helpful in enabling the PR professionals to deal effectively with the public (Grunig & Tunt, 1984). Although the technical skills remained a pre-requisite to discharge the PR programs, PR professionals require an in-depth understanding and supervision of the program was needed. Further, the PR techniques skills need to be integrated into the management framework. In addition, the overriding organization – public growth also resulted in creation of 'Specialized Communication Management role' called Public Relations, to carry out the PR functions need (Grunig & Tunt, 1984).

2.2.3 Defining Public Relations

It is not so easy to distinguish PR from marketing as both are management function and seek to serve the interest of the practitioner. James L. Tolley as cited by Grunig et al., (1992) believed that public relations boils down to getting people to do what the public relations practitioners or organizations want them to do. Many Scholars defined public relations according to how each understands and perceives it, but their definition are closely similar. Ahrens (1959) defined public relations as "the execution of a program of action to earn public understanding" (p. 1213). While Ahrens defined public relations from the execution of PR activities view point, Gras (1945) defined PR as connections made by business men with other persons outside their own business.

Twedt (1964) defined public relations in terms of execution of work like Ahrens, but he linked activities to ‘communication’. His first part of PR definition is “conducting one’s affairs in a fashion which deserves the approval of the public” (p. 74) while in the second part he defined PR as “making sure that the public understands how one’s affairs are being conducted”.

DeCicco (1988) said PR is simply drawing the public attention to the products and services rendered by an organization through the dissemination of positive information. Although it is often seen as an attempt to cover up the negative image of the organization (DeCicco, 1998), “public relations is the ‘management’ of communication between the organization and its publics” (p. 334). The term ‘**management**’ in PR definition by DeCicco (1988) denotes “planning, control, feedback and performance measurement” (baker, 2002. p. 199). Grunig and Hunt (1984) cited by Huang (2004) equated public relations to a bridge “spanning the boundaries between the organizations with the outside world” (p. 335).

Baker (2002) however disputed that the definition of PR should not include the term ‘management’ of the publics as public relations cannot manage the public because the public is not owned by the organization. He said any attempt to manage the public is “unethical, inappropriate and impossible”, (p. 199). Public relations should rather serve the public’s needs diligently and faithfully to stir faith in the publics in order to gain public trust. Therefore the term ‘public relations’ should be conceptualized as ‘client-oriented‘, but not forgetting the interests of others, and be proactive with focus on the reality while taking into account the importance of the relationship with the stakeholders (Baker, 2002).

According to Grunig (2000, p. 23), as quoted by Wise (2003) PR is "viewed as a mysterious hidden persuader working for the rich and powerful to deceive and take advantage of the less powerful" (p. 501). Wise (2003) however maintained that PR practice has "nothing to do with lying and manipulation." Wise (2003) argued that public relations plays a critical and positive role in a democratic society by encouraging equilibrium / balance among interdependent systems (as cited in Hon, 1997, p. 6). It is however not clear as to whether or not the equilibrium will be attained through public relations which uses the models which are regarded as tools to persuade the publics (Bivins, 1989), such as: Press Agentry and Public Information Model - one way communication (Grunig, 1993) and asymmetrical model which Saxena (2012) also sees as imbalance.

Nevertheless, in the PR definitions above, all authors imply that PR plays a major role in linking their organizations with publics / stakeholders by playing a mediator role, while some authors perceive public relations as a positive publicity (Benn et al., 2010).

2.2.4 Public Relations Practice

Public Relations Practitioners assist the organizations to reconcile the organizations' goals with the expectations of the public (Wise, 2003). Toh (2015) wrote that public relations practitioners / professionals work for various different organizations "ranging from Government Institutions to small businesses and multinationals to non- profit organizations" (p. 8), communicating with diverse audiences.

The effectiveness of PR practices requires a broad knowledge of communication and the media, understanding of strategy, being culturally sensitive as well as a range of writing, communication, visual and listening skills, in order to gain an understanding of reputation management and learn to make ethical judgment in relation to communication (Toh, 2015).

Keeping the public informed of activities of an organization should be a daily concern for PR managers (Williams, 1991), therefore as a PR manager you “must merchandise what you are doing” (Ahrens, 1959, p. 1214). Williams (1991, p. 1351) argued that “Many managers are not fully aware of the interest that the public has” in their organization’s daily operations. It is discreet to note that by telling the stakeholders / public / service users of how the organization works, they are kept abreast and their interest in the organization’s operations will always be active (Williams, 1991). Good public relations inform their clients; stakeholders and service users about the company’s plan for growth and change (Benn et al., 2010). In other words, any significant change or plan should be made known to the public.

Lee (2012) advised that the public relations activities or communication should have a distinct and strict functionality. He emphasized that with the evolution of new communication technologies and new social media, the public relations need to stay on top of communication wave in order to excel, (Lee, 2012). Ahrens (1959) urged PR managers to know that media has deadlines to beat and therefore PR personnel should accordingly strive to provide the reporters with required information.

Customers generally want on-time, reliable and consistent service by a competent personnel in a courteous and friendly manner (Wagenheim & Reurink, 1991). Should then the performance fall below the expectations, it culminates in customer dissatisfaction (Burns & Bowling, 2010). More so as “adequate service is essential to adequate public relations… and adequacy dictates that the public should be kept informed” (Williams, 1991, p. 1352). William argues that “customers who are convinced that they are not receiving the service they [are] entitled to receive will not remain sympathetic (p. 1351). And it is best to note that "one satisfied customer can do more public relations than a dozen ads" (Ahrens, 1959, p. 1214).

2.2.5 Organization Communication

Organizations, like people, must communicate with others (stakeholders including customers) because they do not exist in isolation and also have goals to realize. Thus it is vital that the public should be ethically communicated to as "publics also have a stake in organizations' goals", Grunig, 1993). Effective communication with the public results in organization awareness of the public's expectations which the organizations consider during the organizational goal setting process (Wise, 2003). A well-developed and maintained organization-stakeholders relationship leads to proper understanding, although they (organization and stakeholders) may not agree always or also not necessarily need develop a friendly relationship. Stakeholders will know what to get from the organization and visa-versa as "open communication could bring about the world's understanding" (Grunig, 1993, pg. 151).

Botan & Hazleton (2006) studied the level of programs devised by the excellent public relations departments to effectively communicate with the publics. They emphasized that the excellent PR departments' communication programs should be strategically managed by conducting research and scanning the environment using different techniques. The less excellent PR department do not conduct research therefore they hardly know their new publics and they do not even evaluate if their organizations' objective are achieved (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). "Managers of excellent departments also reported the availability of evidence that their programs have positive outcomes, such as meeting their objectives, changing relationships and avoiding conflict" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 50).

For Lee (2012), society seems to be dominated, even overwhelmed by communication and media whereby technology has permitted easy accessibility to information. He said that the traditional news media have been joined by new transformation of reporting and content communication virtually changing the old fashioned objective news coverage and ideology-based or rumor-based venues, while "upholding the principle of truthfulness, sincerity and honesty when communicating" (Huang, 2004, p. 335).

Lee (2012) noted that:

> *The old-fashioned public administration, the stuffy, ponderous, fair-minded and politically neutral government agency that is dedicated to the public interest and good public policy, is often buffeted by the evolving media-drenched world, reacting cautiously to events, trying to be responsible, trying to do the right thing (p. 1).*

Lee described the modern communication as the most effective way which react swiftly and carefully to events unlike the old fashioned government communication which is tedious, probably because "public relations has been historically either absent or informal, or of a haphazard nature" (McAbeerr, 1953, p. 168). The best and understandable way / response to this communication trend by Government public relations is to step out and jump into the new media world feet (Lee, 2012). For as long as Government communication is controlled by the top managers such as CEOs, (Botan, & Hazleton, 2006) that dream may not be completely fulfilled.

Benn (2010) expounded that PR had evolved from publicity and Press Agentry to Strategic Management function which provides counselling to the organization regarding the PR functions including the organizations-stakeholders relationship. The strategic management implies identifying essential organizational problems and finds ways to address those identified challenges (Wise, 2003). The major role of PR in strategic management is to develop the relationship with its stakeholders so that stakeholders can partake in the organizational decisions that affect them (Wise, 2003; Marland, 2017). That makes Public relations departments the essential management functions which uses strategic management to also identify opportunities and dangers in the environment and develop strategies for exploiting the opportunities and minimizing the dangers (Grunig, 1993). Without strategic management, organizations rather react to events instead of being proactive whereby strategies are developed in advance to address the potential hurdles (Grunig, 1993).

The public relations departments should have competent and professional staff to render quality services, (Blinder, 1950). Governments realized a need to have trained and experienced public relations personnel to prepare information to be released to the public (Fitzpatrick, 1947; Marland, 2017). In large organizations the duty of liaising with the public is assigned to a trained official (s) who represents the organization as the Public Relations Officer / Spokesperson, while in medium and small companies the managers must use their discretion to inform the public / stakeholders of the company's operations (Williams, 1961). Stressing the importance of having a designated official to handle PR related functions in the organization, Marland (2017) recounted how the Government Communication policy in Canada was revised to encourage the heads of communication to nurture good relationship with the media. On the contrary, Lee (2012) said that politicians want to be the link between the citizenry and the organizations which is contrary to

Williams (1961); Marland (2017), who believe in having a designated person who liaise with the public especially in large organizations.

According to Williams (1961), in some organizations the PR managers build good working relationships with media personnel / reporters, brief the media about how they operate and occasionally report the company's activities to the clients / public on their behalf. Ahrens (1959) echoed the same sentiment by saying that PR managers should know the news editor as he may tell the PR managers how news are being handled and may also assign the reporter to be reporting issues from that specific organization.

Although politicians may speak to the media on behalf of their organizations, the emphasis or the PR activities should be discharged by the PR managers / designated personnel (Williams, 1961; Blinder, 1950; Ahrens, 1959).
The PR should prepare information to the public through press releases but should further be ready to respond to queries emanating from issued press releases and provide information material to reporters upon request (Fitzpatrick, 1947).

"If the Community has two or more competing newspapers, radio, and television stations, written release may be required to prevent the news from being distorted." "Annual Reports, letter stuffers, and short messages on postcard bills are tools frequently used to maintain a high standard of public relations", (Williams, 1961, pp. 1351 – 1352).

Grunig (1993) believes that the use of the information material, as prescribed by Williams (1961) in the above passage, is a one-way communication used by Public Relations practitioners to disseminate objective / impartial information through what he termed as ‘control media’. His terminology ‘control media’ refers to the publications produced by the public relations departments to inform their publics about their organizations and services rendered. Williams (1961) on the other hand, views the use of publications as essential tool for public relations to obviate the distortion of information by the reporters.

On the other hand researchers also found that although PR communication may survive on its own without being induced, but, Botan, & Hazleton (2006) indicated that “activism pushes organizations toward excellence as they try to cope with the expectations of their strategic constituencies” (p. 51).

2.2.6 Government Public Relations

Marland (2017) believed that the Government Public Relations’ functions is to “generate favorable coverage, to influence public opinions and to persuade citizens about a course of action, all of which to improve the ability of political elites to pursue a policy agenda and secure re-election” (p. 36). He affirmed that “image management and public persuasion are all found in government”. Adding that the “strategic management of government information is so pervasive that it enters all political decisions” (Marland, 2017, p. 36). He further argued that politicized government communication are a threat to public service, journalism and democracy. Marland (2017) asserted that in government information passes through the internal strategic management process.

Fitzpatrick (1947) is convinced that although the duties of the PR officer in Government are defined, several issues still have to be addressed such as “How much authority should an information officer be given? What is his proper position in the executive hierarchy?” (p. 530)

It is crucial that every organization develops an 'Annual Strategic Communication Plan' – which supports the overall vision or the principal statement (vision; mission, goal and value) of the institution and help identify priorities, (Lee et al, 2012). The development of the Communication Plan does address the concerns as raised by Fitzpatrick (1947), not only does it help the organization to move forward but the Plan also assist the other components of the organization to be known and valued (Lee et al., 2012), as well as indicating how information should be handled and disseminated.

The Government officials are 'public servants' hence they must be accountable to the public. They should be obliged to communicate their institutions' activities, respond to the public and media enquiries (Lee et al., 2012).

"This accountability is operationalized by the obligation of public administrators to work transparently, including the duty to respond to the media questions, inquiries and requests. 'No comment' is not an acceptable answer from a civil servant whose salary is being paid by the tax payers" (p. 14).

Lee (2012) also believes that "defensiveness and silence are not good either" (p. 10), therefore it is the PR's responsibility to explain plainly to the citizenry. Ahrens (1959) insisted that PR divisions should "keep the media informed on what is happening," (p. 1215) in their organizations. Steiner (1978) highlighted some *four factors* considered essential for effective response / communication by the Government PR professionals. **Firstly** – Communication objective: Organizations should develop a Communication objective to ensure timely and appropriate response to inquiries. If it is implemented properly it will assist journalists to submit their stories on time as they complain that responsible officers delay in providing responses, while the readers' expectations of timely stories pressure on reporters, (Itule and Anderson, 2008).

Secondly- Routine Mechanism for handling Enquiries: Sometimes government officials have fear of releasing information (Fitzpatrick, 1947), but if proper mechanism for handling enquiries are in place, fear and uncertainty in releasing information will be obviated.

Thirdly – Government should desist from withholding information –Government information should not be disseminated at the convenience of the Government but it should employ a policy of disclosure (Steiner, 1978).

Fourthly: Information Programs: Instead of Government being reactive to queries there should be well articulated and comprehensive information programs in place.

Steiner's main focus is the effective communication which he believes that it helps the public to identify their needs and understand the government's programs in order to have the ability to measure the government's performance which will also result in the improvement of the government's service delivery to the communities (Steiner, 1978).

Lee (2012) stated that PR function should include the persuasive advocacy to convince clients/ customers that whatever the government is proposing is in the best interest of the public for the public to support the idea. The PR function as persuasive advocacy may be appropriate when the government intends to promote its programs but it may be applied in other areas as it might be viewed differently.

Lee (2012) and Lee et al., (2012) urged PR to be mindful of the external customer /client's response to the services by examining the services they offer through the customer's eyes. *For instance:*

> *"Are signs easy to understand? Forms? Telephone tree? Is there a mechanism for filling and examining grievances? Is there an emergency response venue on evenings weekends*

and holiday: is there a customer-focus to the provision of services? Are the front line staff dealing with clients, as well as the front-line supervisors, well trained for the particular work environment? Are there incentives to prevent high turnover of front line staff and supervisors (which sometimes are the least desirable and go to the most junior employee?" (Lee, 2012, p. 6).

Lee emphasized that public relations function should not merely be to implement the laws but to ensure that the public is promptly sensitized and thoroughly understand the message and its goals. The objectives of government information efforts should be mainly to inform the public, improve the effectiveness of government operations through appropriate public information techniques; and provide feedback to the widest number of citizens, (William Ragan as cited by Wilcox et al., 2005). Mostly, the government uses informational campaigns to educate, instruct or appeal to citizens or to promote its programs through the media or other informational material.

It seems that Governments generally use the 'public information model' to disseminate information to its various audiences, but what is ambiguous in the above passage is whether the Governments properly assess their audiences 'level of understanding and satisfaction of government' programs.

According to Lee et al., (2012) the government is responsive to the public. This responsiveness should be by means of 'gauging public opinions and citizen participation' which is done through "public hearing, advisory committee, focus groups, surveys, facilitations, brainstorming, newsletters visioning, open houses and booths". "The agency that is focused on being responsive to the public at large will gradually improve its satisfaction scores" (2012, p. 18).

Although the concept ‘public assessment’ is also not reflected in the passage, it can be concluded that this government-citizen engagement constitutes assessment of the citizenry’s understanding and satisfaction of the government programs. The exercise may also be equated to a ‘scientific research’ which is used in asymmetrical and symmetrical model – Grunig’s preferred models for public relations.

2.2.7 Elements of Effective Public Relations

Fall (2005) believed that there are two major elements of effective public relations. He said the ‘development and maintenance’ of a positive reputation is one of the two major elements of effective public relations. A positive reputation characterized by trustworthy; clear vision; treat everyone with respect and dignity; reliable; knowledge of key publics; as well as crisis management plan in place. The second Falls’s major element is effective relationship with the organization’s various stakeholders (this matter is discussed in detail in the preceding sections).

Fall (2005) maintained that for the public relations mangers to evaluate the effectiveness of the PR division, the first thing is to know the goals and mission of the organization because “effective public relations occurs when communication activities achieve communication goals (in a cost-effective manner)” (Fall, 2005, p. 231).

The two elements identified by Fall, appear to be very crucial as they are encapsulated in the PR practices adopted by whatever PR departments / firms – either adding to the development and maintenance of reputation or tarnishing the reputation / image; or encouraging relationship with stakeholders or destroying the relationship. “Organizations with an organic structure, participative culture, and a symmetrical system of communication… provide a hospitable environment for excellent public relations” Botan & Hazleton (2006, p. 53).

2.2.8 Models of Public Relations

Botan & Hazleton (2006) said that James Grunig, Scholar and public relations Guru introduced four (4) Models of communication (explained below) "as a way of understanding and explaining the behavior of public relations practitioners" (p. 46). The models of communication further help to better analyze and judge the effectiveness of communication between the public relations departments and their stakeholders. They are as follow:

Press Agentry model – It "describes PR programs aimed solely at attaining favorable publicity for an organization in the mass media – often in a misleading way- the model is commonly used in publicists such as: sports promotions, movie stars; products; politicians or senior managers." (Grunig, 1993, p. 143). Publicity can be described as the "use of press, radio, motion pictures, speakers and the likes" (Binder, 1950, p. 148), whereas the objective of the public relations, as stated by Binder (1950) should not to be loved but rather to promote the organizational services to the public. Therefore Press Agentry is regarded as "a one-sided propaganda specialist" (Bivins, 1989, p. 66), which is still practiced today (Moffitt, 2004), and approximately 65% of PR practitioners use this model (Gregory, 2002).

Public Information model – "Close to the Press Agentry as it is a one-way-model that sees public relations only as the dissemination of information" (Grunig, 1993, p. 144). This model according to Grunig (1993) is commonly used by many organizations through what he termed as "Journalists-in-residence" referring to the Public Relations Officers / Practitioners who represent their organizations as journalists whose role is to disseminate 'objective' information via mass media and the in-house information material or "controlled media such as newsletters; brochures and direct mail" (Grunig, 1993, p. 144). Public Relations should be a 'mutual affair' (making the public and organization mutually aware of each other's needs and desires (Gourley, 1954), rather than a 'one-way street' where organizations tell the public what they want them to know (Vinson, 1947). In concurrence with Grunig, 1993; Vinson, 1947, Bivins (1989) affirmed that Public Information model is used to "carefully disseminate balanced information to the publics" (p. 66), whereby PR practitioners gather information about the publics and accustom their messages in order to influence the publics.

The first models do not use in-depth empirical research like the following two models but rather randomly send out the messages (Moffitt, 2003), with perhaps less or no consideration of the public for as long as it is to the advantage of the organization.

Two-way asymmetrical model –This model, unlike the previous discussed models, "uses social science research to identify attitudes and to develop messages that appeal to those attitudes that persuade publics to behave as the organization wants", (Grunig, 1993, p. 144). The model customizes messages based on the information collected by the public relations through scientific research to influence the public (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). Bivins (1989) said the public relations practitioners who use this model are seen as "Scientific Persuaders" (p. 66).

Grunig regarded the last two models as "more professional, sophisticated and effective" (1993. p. 144), because a two-way-communication is regarded as an ideal as it builds mutual trust between the organization and the practitioner (Hayenhjelm, 2006). Similarly, Huang, (2004) said that organizations which use asymmetrical model of communication intend to change the cognition or behaviors of others. Huang (2004, p. 337) asserted that "communication messages should cause changes in knowledge, attitude and behavior among the publics". The model manipulates the behavior of the publics by disseminating information assumed benefiting the public and the organization (Hayenhjelm, 2006). He said the public relations practitioners conduct empirical research about the public or obtain feedback from the public, then they evaluate the collected information or feedback obtained to plan how to communicate to the public while having the public's needs and interests in mind.

Asymmetrical model is however regarded as imbalance and only suitable, as John McGarry (as cited by Saxena, 2012) puts it, for advertising and marketing for organizations whose interest is to generate more profit. Some Scholars further argued that the model contained seeds of separatism, whereas others such as John McGarry, cited by Saxena (2012), refuted that claim stating that asymmetrical model does not promote any break-up. The argument of asymmetrical model being considered as imbalance was also supported by Tarlton (1965) who argued that in asymmetrical system it "would be difficult to discern interests that could be clearly considered mutual" (p. 868).

Two-way symmetrical model – "It describes public relations that is based on research and that uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding with strategic publics", (Grunig, 1993, p. 145). This model refers to the public relations which uses both research and communication to deal with conflict and improve understanding with the publics (Grunig, 1993). Under this model, the practitioners are perceived as "mediators between the organization and the publics" (Bivins, 1989, p. 66)

The symmetrical guru, Grunig, as cited by Huang (2004, pp. 333-336), "maintained that the public relations will be inherently ethical if it follows the principles of the two-way symmetrical model", in order to "help organizations manage their response" (p. 333), principled by "negotiation and compromise" (Grunig, 1993, p. 146). Huang (2004) quoted (Grunig, 1996) who pointed out that "other models could also be ethical depending on the rules used to ensure ethical practice" (p.336).

Grunig (1993) wrote about Ivy Lee-pioneer public relations practitioner who called himself a 'publicity councilor'. According to Grunig, although Lee used the public Information model, after he moved away from Press Agentry model, he also believed in the effectiveness of the principles of the symmetrical model which Grunig described as sophisticated model. Grunig stated that although he called himself a 'publicity councilor', Ivy Lee believed that publicity cannot change the public mind to accept bad policies, but rather policies have to be changed, to address the concerns of the publics. Grunig (1993) said Lee advised the Germans to change Hitler's policies, probably Lee perceived Hitler's policies as anti-symmetrical as himself believed in symmetrical and was committed to "facts and accuracy, Morris (2017). Instead the Germans attacked Lee as a 'traitor' and labelled him "Poison Ivy" and he later died in disgrace.

By writing Lee's story, Grunig wanted to fortify his view / claim of labelling the symmetrical model as the best public relations model which "uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding" (1993, p. 151), but, Huang (2004) on the contrary, argued that there is very little evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of Grunig's preferred model, symmetrical communication model. Huang (2004) also cited (Leichty & Springston, 1993) who questioned the effectiveness of organizations which apply only one model of communication when communicating with their stakeholders. They, (Leichty & Springston, 1993), according to Huang (2004), have recommended that the effectiveness of public relations should be measured according to 'relational level' rather than the uniformity. Grunig, (1993, p. 146) affirmed that the "quality of relationship depends on the model of public relations practices".

Huang further wrote that the critics of symmetrical model, referred to the model as ‘unrealistic’, that ‘symmetrical communication is difficult to find in the real world’ (p. 334) as it is hardly practiced in organizations. Hayenhjeld (2006) concurred with Huang (2004) saying a two-way-communication is far from being referred to as an ideal of “equal participants exchanging ideas…because the “dialogue, background knowledge, and the influence over the communication process… is asymmetrical (p. 13). But, Grunig and Huang (2000), as cited by Wise (2003); Botan & Hazleton (2006), maintained that symmetrical model balances the interests of the organization and that of the public. Although there is no accepted model of organizational effectiveness, should the public relations practice symmetrical model, it is anticipated that the public’s expectations will be considered during the organizational goal setting process (Wise, 2003).

In terms of Government systems, Symmetrical dictates that “each State would maintain essentially the same relationship to the Central Authority.” “The division of power between Central Government and States government would be nearly the same in every case”, (Tarlton, 1965, p. 868-9). Each of the four models can be functional for different kinds of organizations in different kinds of environments” (p. V), however the two are regarded as superior to the first two as they are based on “negotiation, compromise and understanding” (p. V).

Laskin (2009) contested Grunig’s Models of PR, arguing that they should be re-conceptualized to address the criticism and focus on relevant daily PR practices. He affirmed that Grunig’s four models of public relations, “especially the two-way symmetrical model, have been the most controversial and the most debated component of the Excellence theory” (Laskin, 2012, p. 357) of which the author of the Excellence Theory / Study acknowledged that their models were heavily criticized. The critics of the two-way symmetrical see it as “unattainable and normative” (p. 357).

The model failed to recognize the other crucial aspect of PR such as the role and the relationship. They further argued that the emphasis of the study should not be on the "organization, nor the publics or communication process…. But rather should be the relationship between the organization and the publics" (Laskin, 2012, p. 357).

One wonders how that relationship would be built without communication, but symmetrical model seems unattainable or hardly attained. If the symmetrical model is not about "pure cooperation" (as stated by Grunig, 2002, as cited in Laskin, 2012) that did not come out clearly in the Excellence Study. Because the Excellence Theory which encourages the use of symmetrical models stated that the model is based on 'mutual understanding' which is the same as 'pure cooperation'. Nonetheless, the understanding is that the business / organization is about respect and cooperation with stakeholders, to a certain extent, otherwise without cooperating with stakeholders to a certain degree, the organization stands a risk of ceasing to exist.

Another criticism is that the symmetrical model endeavors to balance the "interests of publics and the organization" (Laskin, 2012, p. 357). While this sounds great, it appears to be unrealistic unless the organization does not have goals / objectives to attain. Despite the fact that organization want to maintain organization-client relationship to 'build mutual trust' (Hayenhjelm, 2006), balancing the interests of both parties may depend on the goals which the organization wishes to achieve.

Leichty and Springston (1993), cited by Laskin (2009), shattered the Excellency theory by stating that models of public relations "fall well below the minimum recommended reliability levels" (p. 358). They lamented the "lack of logical differentiation between the asymmetrical and the symmetrical models".

Actually, the two models are unambiguous and logically differentiable. The asymmetrical model –"uses social science research to identify attitudes and to develop messages to persuade publics to behave as the organization wants", (Grunig, 1993, p. 144). On the other hand, the symmetrical model "uses communication to manage conflict and improve understanding", (Grunig, 1993, p. 151). In other words, it creates a balance between the organization and its publics. Etter (2014) added that Grunig shifted PR communication "from manipulation to the notion of benefit for both organizations and stakeholders through two-way" (p. 322). The two models are both research-based models but the difference is one is manipulative (asymmetrical) while the other creates the balance (symmetrical).

Grunig's models were changed to dimensions and thereafter to 'PR scale' with additional three principles regarded as appropriate to make them seven PR scales'. The three additional are: (1) interpersonal dimension; (2) mediated dimension; and (3) ethical dimension (Grunig et al., 2002). Notwithstanding the fact that the four models were extensively criticized, Etter (2014), as quoted in Grunig et al., 2002) is adamant that Grunig's models of communication are useful tools to describe public relations practices and worldview. Notwithstanding critics, the Grunig's models remain the dominant till other scholars develop other models or amend the existing ones.

2.2.9 Challenges to Government PR

Lee, (2012) identified three challenges which he called as "three strikes" which may hamper the outcome of the activities of the government Public Relations: i**) Bureaucratic** – decisions made by government officials than the people who elected them. Similarly, Fitzpatrick, (1947) explicated that the Government PR managers who are working under other departments rather than under the Executive offices face more challenges as their activities go through bureaucratic process, adding that for public relations to be effective they should have easy access to the executive offices. He said that intermediate offices disadvantage / retard the PR work if the division has lack of personnel facilities to execute the work well. “Organizational context of a public relations function could nurture or impede excellent communication management, although to a lesser extent than could the dominant coalition” (Botan, and Hazleton, 2006, p. 51).

In some cases, government public officers have fear of releasing information to the public unless the authorization to do so is obtained from the high office. Some Public Relations Officers know their work perfectly but “fear that their immediate supervisors may be offended if they give out information…, therefore, before they talk, they insist that the permission of higher authorities be secured”, (Fitzpatrick, 1947, p. 534). This principle does not work well in cases where information is wanted urgently Fitzpatrick (1947). It rather contributes to the delay in responding to queries.

ii) **PR being viewed as manipulative spin rather than truth and fact**;

Despite the stereotype, Ahrens (1951) is obstinate that if public relations personnel commit themselves to ‘making correct and honest statement,” (p. 1214) it can change the mindset and evoke confidence in the audience, the element which he described as a secret tool to good public relations.

Fitzpatrick, (1947) supported the provision of factual information by recommending that the Government Public Relations Officers should be authorized to obtain information from other departments, stressing a need for overriding coordination between Government departments because accurate information in government cannot be obtained without cooperation with other departments.

However, Fitzpatrick (1947) raised a concern that although authorization to get information from other operation departments is granted, "a Government public information man sometimes has difficulty in determining who has the authority to give certain information" (p. 534). It should be noted that a case, where another division refuses to divulge information to the Information man is costly to the PR functions, Fitzpatrick, (1947) as it may lead to bad PR reputation which could be too costly to rebuild.

The issue of releasing press releases framed in legalistic terms results in ambiguous meaning. Rather public relations office should be permitted to translate the message into a language of the media to avoid misunderstandings (Fitzpatrick, 1947).

iii) **Controversial and highly politicized** – occurs when the matter under discussion is linked to the matter which was previously not welcomed by the public. Lee (2012) cautioned that any service or new idea or any PR activity is prone to criticism, and as such PR messages should be precise and specific in order to minimize criticism. He added that it is not a good thing to be criticized but neither is criticism an indication of a program or policy failure.

Fitzpatrick, (1947), talked about the leakage of information (which may possibly create controversy) by officials not designated to disseminate information to the public / media as another hurdle in Government institutions. He said the solution to the information leakage lies in the ability of the Government information man to create awareness and proper understanding among the employees. Fitzpatrick, (1947) cautioned government information personnel to be alert against government critics saying that one bad public relations is generalized to the whole government.

Another problem of government agencies is the "hesitancy on the part of many agencies to admit an error when it has been discovered" Fitzpatrick, 1947, p. 537). "The answer of 'no comment'…certainly does not benefit the Agency in the long run" (p. 537), it is rather tantamount to inefficiency which destroys the media's confidence in the office, Fitzpatrick, (1947). This is however not distinctly explained whether the hesitation to admission of error is an influence by the government leadership or it is an oversight within the government PR departments.

2.3 Theory

2.3.1 The Excellence Theory in Public Relations

The Excellence Theory, that undergirds this study, identifies the issue of empowerment as a critical success factor (Grunig et al., 2006). The authors also pointed out other characteristics / principles of excellent public relations departments such as: performance of a managerial role as well as higher levels of technical expertise, integration of all PR functions into a single department, PR research-based, and communication models, as best practices for excellent PR departments.
The result is excellent relations with various publics, a real need in the Namibian context, as this reduces negative publicity, increases employees' satisfaction levels with their jobs and the organization and makes the entity more competitive (Grunig et al., 2006).

A study in the Australasia region indicated that the Excellence Theory remains the dominant paradigm of PR practice in Australia and many South East Asian countries (MacNamara, 2012). Similar studies have also been carried out in Korea and Slovenia with varied levels of compliance with the principles of the theory as well as surfacing unique contributions from these practice environments (Grunig, Grunig, & Dozier, 2006).

“The Theories can be used to explain the PR problems, plan, coordinate, and evaluate PR programs, used to understand effects of the different PR techniques and determine when to use those techniques” otherwise “there is no all-embracing theory to the field together” (Grunig & Tunt (1984: p. V).

According to Grunig (1992) the Excellence Theory is a general theory of public relations which resulted from a 15-year study of best practices in communication management. Grunig is one of the authors who participated in the 15-year research. He said the study explained the value and the quality of relationship of public relations to organizations and society. Grunig (1992) stated that for any organization to be effective and socially acceptable, it must be a stakeholders oriented, being able to satisfy their goals and solve problems. Furthermore, organizations must be conscious of their environment and to be able recognize and identify their stakeholders who are affected by decisions they make or who want organizations to make decisions to solve problems that are important to them” (Grunig, 1992; Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

The Excellence Theory recommended for the organizations to employ the ‘symmetrical communication’ method with the stakeholders to preclude undesirable cost and social consequences (Grunig, 1992). Organizations must communicate regularly with publics (Grunig, 1992), taking the interests of both the organization and publics into account (Grunig and Huang, 2000) as cited by Wise (2003) to nurture high-quality and long-term relationships with the publics (Grunig, 1992). He revealed that, during the 15-year research, the heads of public relations departments which were interviewed stressed the importance of establishing and maintaining good relations between the PR and the publics. He said the interviewees indicated that good relationship with stakeholders reduces negative publicity; increases awareness of what the stakeholders expect from the organization; helps organizations to make informed decisions that affect their clients as well as reduces the risks of making costly errors.

The public relations practitioner, as a communicator, can play four major roles in organizations such as: “the manager, senior adviser (also known as a communication liaison), technician, and media relations role” Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 41). The manager and technician roles are commonly practiced and both can be carried out by one PR practitioner (the effectiveness will probably depend on the size of the organization).

The public relations department should be headed by the public relations manager who will conceptualize and direct all PR programs, or else other members of the dominant coalition with no or little knowledge of communication management will lead (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). This is contrary to Marland (2017) who stressed the importance of having a designated official to handle PR related functions. The public relations officer should have educational knowledge to discharge the management role (Blinder, 1950; Botan & Hazleton, 2006).)

The Excellency study indicated, regarding the structure of the PR department, that there should be a Manager to direct PR programs, and it is more advantageous to possess the technical expertise especially in media relations; as well as an expert to carry out the technical role –daily communication activities of PR departments (a technical expert should possess vital supporting role to the management role) and an administrative expert (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). Likewise, Marland (2017) emphasized on the building of media- PR relations and stressed the importance of having a designated official to handle PR related functions. Botan & Hazleton supported “the integration of PR programs into a single department" or coordination of all PR "programs managed by different departments" (2006, p. 44) adding that "excellent communication departments also seek support from outside firms" (2006, p. 46) to assist with either "all or some of their communication programs or… techniques" (2006, p. 43).

2.3.2 The Principles of Excellence Theory

In order to maximize the PR value to the organizations and the society – stakeholders, the PR functions, as per the Excellency Theory, should be as follows:

A. Involvement in Strategic Management

According to Grunig (1992) public relations plays both Strategic and Administrative Management roles. Strategic Managers play an essential role in identifying and capturing new strategic opportunities; inventing new business models; direct operations; decide how resources can be orchestrated and allocated; and exercise their discretion to achieve the goals of the organizations (Augier & Teece, 2009). On the other hand, the Administrative role is about the type and variety of work to be done and the extent to which the responsibility can be passed up the line for someone else to make a decision (Tower, 1954). The Theory dictates that the PR should be involved in strategic management or be empowered by having access to the decision making bodies.

As clarified by Fitzpatrick, (1947), the Government PR managers / professionals should work directly under the Executive offices to avoid bureaucratic processes which hinders the public relations effectiveness and contributes to the delays of PR activities. "Without a clear path to the CEO, public relations cannot contribute much to the organizational effectiveness" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 40). The public relations departments are hardly involved in strategic management, nor do they have power to affect key organizational decisions except they are members of or have direct access to senior managers who also have power in the organization (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). In addition to that, PROs should have a “good deal of freedom to make decisions about public relations problems without excessive clearance by other managers”, (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 39). It is prudent to note that public relations heads / officers “cannot act unilaterally” (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 40) they are required to solicit top management inputs “to ensure accuracy and involvement of management” (2006, p. 40).

B. Sublimation of Public Relations functions

As pointed out in previous sections, the studies (Grunig et al., 2006; Grunig, 1993; Grunig, 1992) showed that the effective public relations departments are those headed by public relations managers who are members of dominant coalitions. Fitzpatrick, (1947) also echoed similar sentiment that Government public relations practitioners or managers should have a direct access to the Executive Director of an organization for effective public relations department.

For the reasons elucidated above, the PR functions should therefore not be sublimated to any other functional area in the organization as it is an indication of encroachment of functions which degrades the PR functions (Grunig et al., 2008). They argued that sublimation of PR functions has a negative consequence on PR as the “PR person is unlikely to become a top-level manager because the role of the practitioner typically is relegated to that of technician” (2008, 195). They further said that confining PR to the technical dimension “limits the ability of the department to fulfill its potential within the organization” (Grunig et al., 2008, p. 196). “If the public relations unit is headed by someone who is not a manager and who lacks power in the organization, that person will fail to maintain the department as its own domain" (p. 194).

Sublimation of PR functions causes the organization to lose the PR valuable function of managing the interdependency with the public which compels organizations to pursue and meet their goals (Hallahan, 2009). Grunig et al., (2009) however supported the integration of all communication activities under the PR department. They argued that a study conducted on organization where the sublimation of PR functions to other functional area such as marketing, took place, showed positive result because the head of PR is a member of dominant coalition.

C. Symmetrical system of internal communication

Employees are perceived as incredible source of information in the organization, they can obtain and disseminate either valuable or negative information about an organization to the external public (Minjeong & Minjung, 2017; Bowen, 2005d, as cited in Hallahan, 2009). Grunig, (1992), cited in Minjeong & Minjung, (2017), stressed that excellent employee engagement using symmetrical internal communication has a great positive impact to the organization as it makes them automatic good advocates for the organization, unlike employees with poor relationship who are likely to disseminate negative information to the public.

For symmetrical internal communication to be effective, there should be "trust and satisfaction along with commitment and control mutuality as the key mediator connecting symmetrical internal communication to employee engagement (Minjeong & Minjung, 2017, p. 88). Enhanced employee engagement results in positive outcome such as high productivity, customer satisfaction and loyalty" (Maslach et al., 2001; Saks, 2006 as cited in Minjeong & Minjung, 2017). Hallahan (2009) added that communication with internal publics is essentially akin to that of the rest of the publics, therefore dignity, respect and dialogue with employees should be maintained).

A study (Minjeong & Minjung, 2017) revealed that in some countries, poor employee relationship has no effect on the organizations due to cultural belief. Minjeong & Minjung (2017) said in countries such as Korea, people view their organizations as second families and therefore "it is possible that employees consider the act of bad mouthing their employers to the outsiders an undesirable thing even when they are not satisfied with the company" (p. 95). In such cases, culture may play a significant role, regardless of the state of the relationships. It is thus imperative for a PR practitioner to take cultural aspects of the employees into consideration.

D. Gender mainstreaming in PR department

There might be different definitions of the concept 'Gender Mainstreaming', but they all simply point to the integration of gender equality perspective into sectoral policies and programmes (Webster, 2006), "to ensure that women from different groups are considered in policy making" (Donaghy, 2004, p. 393). The main aim of mainstreaming gender is to achieve gender equality (Margaret, 2006) in all professions, therefore public relations profession is not an exception.

Trzcinski & Holst (2012) cited a report titled *Gender and Sustainable Development* by OECD (2009a), which revealed that "greater gender equity in management and leadership positions can improve economic performance of companies and organizations" (p. 450). In addition, they said that the increasing number of women in management positions can benefit women, society and the economy.

In the same vein, Botan and Hazleton (2006) pleaded that “the growth in the number of female practitioners (PR) should not hinder this empowerment of the public relations function; indeed the growth should be valued for the diversity it brings to public relations” (p. 38). Botan and Hazleton (2006) further added that public relations should embrace both gender (men and women) regardless of cultural and racial background.

Botan and Hazleton (2006) seem to advocate for and encourage women inclusivity in public relations profession, unlike in the early 19th century when women were “excluded from professional journalism organizations for decades”, (Voss and Speere, 2013, p. 48). Botan and Hazleton (2006) indicated that their research findings have shown that public relations departments are excellent as often when women are the senior communicator as when men are in that role. Likewise, increasing the number of women in the public relations department and in managerial roles had no effect on excellence… public relations departments are valued when they bring gender and racio-ethinic diversity into the function *(p.41).*

2.3.3 Origins of PR Ethics

Public relations was initiated in the early 19th century whereby the organizations used publicity to raise funds, promote their goods and boost commercial ventures (Ewen, 1996; Cutlip et al., 2000, p. 103). The main focus of PR was to take business’ side, to influence public opinion and to persuade politicians (Cutlip et al., 2000) and publicize their organization, (Voss and Speere, 2013).

The father of public relations, Edward Bernays, referred to the practice as “the public be damned era” (Cutlip et al., 2006). “Since Press agents who use ‘Press Agentry’ model of communication, were concerned with generating publicity at any cost, their approach stimulated the unethical reputation of modern-day public relations" (Bowen, n.d., par. 8.). Shannon & Bowen further reported that ethics entered the development of modern practice in about 1906. The prominent practitioner Ivy Lee emerged with his declaration which moved the practice into "the public be informed", (Shannon & Bowen, Year unknown, page not numbered). Lee's emphasis was on telling the truth and providing accurate information. The practice eventually evolved into encouraging ethical communication, and matured from the profession of simple dissemination of information into one which involved the creation of ethical communication, (Bowen, n.d.).

Public Relations is branded by some as "the 'invisible men' who control our political debates and public opinions, twisting reality and protecting the powerful from scrutiny" (P.R. Watch, n.d.) "Many critics argue that there can be no ethical public relations because the practice itself is akin to manipulation and propaganda" (Bowen, n.d. par.3.). In addition, Ewen (1996) argued that PR was used as a propaganda by American Government during World War I which according to him evoked public skepticism towards public relations.

2.3.4 Public Relations Ethics

"There is no universal rule to keep the free flow of information and serve the interest of the public and clients at the same time" (Kim, 2003, p. 209), because people have different standards and perception in determining what is right or wrong. However, Kim revealed that Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) recommended that conflict of interests should be avoided in order to build trust; and to protect confidential information of clients. "It is a very common one today for people who operate in either government or business to make self-interested decisions" (Lee et al., 2012, p. 164).

Public Relations professionals and scholars seem to differ on the ethical framework and standards to comply to. The PRSA Code of Professional Standards for the Practice of Public Relations has been revised several times, but still scholars fail to reach a consensus (Kim, 2003). Nevertheless, when PR is practiced ethically and responsibly, it provides a significant communication function and creates an understanding among people in order to reduce conflict, but, if it is practiced in the opposite it can be manipulative and deceptive, (Grunig, 1993). Therefore Grunig recommended that organizations should communicate symmetrically with the public (Fitzpatrick, 1947).

Grunig and Hunt believed that the asymmetrical and symmetrical models are a replacement of the persuasion model which dominated the public relations from its inception. In the beginning, PR practice was regarded as 'publicity' and as a result 'it had bad reputation' (Lee et al., 2012, p. 20). Grunig and Tunt's argument denoted that the model which Grunig regarded as sophisticated was developed as an improvement of what was known or regarded as bad PR which was referred to as unethical, compared to the ethical PR which is based on "negotiation, compromise, and understanding" (two-way symmetrical communication) (Grunig & Tunt, 1984, p. v).

The two scholars (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) stressed that the "ethical practitioner needs a general principle of what it means to be ethical" in order to be applied to special cases as they arise. Therefore, they came up with two Principles of Ethics: i) **The will to be ethical** – the ethical practitioner should have a will or intention to be honest; trustworthy and should avoid hurting others intentionally. The second one is (ii) **Action without adverse consequences** – the ethical practitioner should carry out his duties which have no adverse consequences to others.

The two seem to believe in morality and discipline. To have a will to be ethical or act without hurting others requires morals. A person with moral behavior would not want to act in a way which is hurtful to others, but rather act in an honest and trustworthy manner. Such a person would not desire to jeopardize his/her reputation by acting contrary to morality. Now that there is no consensus regarding ethics in PR, some Scholars, (Grunig & Hunt), appear to be comfortable with regardless of the action, as long as practitioners act morally. Lee et al, (2012, p. 158) concluded that the ethical challenges in Government are perhaps more complex than those found in any other arena".

2.4 Conclusion

There are various definitions of public relations by different scholars. Roughly PR can be defined, according to the Excellence Theory which undergirds this study, as a "management function which helps the organizations to interact" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 55) with its stakeholders through research and environmental scanning as well as by evaluating its communication programs to determine whether or not it achieved its intended organizational goals / objectives. (Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

Organizations can solve or create problems in the society. The theory emphasized on developing and maintaining organization-stakeholders' relationships. PR departments which do not scan their environment and evaluate their programs are likely to be less effective and have no or pathetic organization-stakeholders' relationships.

Regarding effective PR communication, the Theory indicated its support for Grunig's symmetrical model of communication which is research based to allow effective interaction with the public. Symmetrical communication provides opportunities to organizations to know the opinions of the publics and at the same time stimulates mutual (organization-publics) benefits.

Generally speaking, all models of communication are positive in their own merit depending on the type of business / organization message to be put across. The most preferred, Grunig's model of communication, may not be appropriate for most of businesses especially external stakeholder, but appears to be perfect for the internal stakeholder, because the goal of the symmetrical communication model is for organizations to reach mutual (both organization and public) benefit. It however obviates the negative perspective towards PR profession which is regarded as "manipulation and propaganda" (Bowen, n.d.).

Perhaps the Symmetrical communication model is preferred simply because it is said that it aimed at establishing long-term relationship between an organizations with its publics. It may therefore be appropriate mainly for internal stakeholders as it may contribute to "employee retention" (Manchester, 2012, p. 952.) whereby the organization is expected to have "a clear and individualized communication" (Johnson & Fahsholtz, 2010, P. 19) with its employees. "Employees who are empowered to participate in decision –making and to engage in symmetrical internal communication are likely also to be effective symmetrical communicators with members of external publics" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 53).

On the other hand, symmetrical communication also appears to be effective in organizations which sell products as this benefits both the organization (sells products and make profit) and public (buy and use products). For instanc, the Ministry of Works and Transport, through the Roads Authority, builds roads infrastructure, gets money, through car and driver's licenses etc., from the public, and uses the proceeds to maintain roads to be used by the public. Both the Ministry and the public are benefiting. In this case, the symmetrical communication can be used to identify the need of the public and in return mutual benefits is achieved. Although symmetrical information is the preferred model for excellence PR departments, it may not be appropriate for all organizations due to different services offered as well as different public.

The Theory revealed that excellent public relations functions become more effective when they are integrated through “someone with public relations background…or through a single public relations department” (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 55).

The literature (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) indicated that whether or not government PROs are members of dominant coalition or report directly to the CEOs/EDs, they still cannot release information to the public unless it is authorized by the CEO/ED. Although government established PR departments, it appears that government PROs in general have limited control of the communication programs unless if they are members of the “dominant coalition” or have direct access to that group.

The Theory further supported and highlighted the importance of integrating gender, especially female, which were previously restricted from entering the profession (Voss and Speere, 2013), into PR profession, regardless of colour and language (Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

Mostly, activism is about the “expression of underlying tension” (Tindall, 2004, p. 163), hence are not pleasant to any country, but the Excellence Theory found activisms as an effective method because they “provide impetus for excellent public relations” (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 56). Activism can be defined as “collectivities of people who are engaged in trying to create or resist social change” (Tindall, 2004, p. 163). Activism is “a movement of actors and organizations who seek to alter power deficits and to effect social movements by mobilizing regular citizens” (Caren et al., 2010, p. 288).

Organizations which react to activists stand a good chance of having competitive advantages (over other organizations who do not) because somehow they are forced “to behave in a way that is acceptable to publics to avoid bad publicity” (Botan, & Hazleton, 2006, 56). Such organizations may act out of their way just to please the activists and defend their images.

The Excellence Theory urged PR professionals worldwide to embrace the Principles of Excellence Theory. Although the study which produced the Excellence Theory was conducted in three countries in USA, it is argued that its Principles are not limited to those countries, but applicable to any PR department worldwide. Therefore, PR professionals are encouraged to gain ’broad perspective’ in order to work anywhere in the world (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). The Theory however pointed out that in applying the Principles, PR departments should consider culture, language, political, economic and media system, the level of economic development and extent and nature of activism (Botan & Hazleton, 2006).

The theory is silence about the ethical practice in PR profession (probably because of failure to reach consensus about ethics in PR) but however stressed that is should be embraced to avoid damage to reputation of PR practitioners and PR departments. Similarly, PR training or recurring courses is crucial to avert lack of PR knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter mainly highlighted the method which was employed to collect data and the challenges encountered during the research process as well as how the researcher circumvented those challenges.

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed-method design consisting of participant observation and key informant interviews because they allow for detailed and elaborate information gathering (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006). The researcher attended a 5-day meeting for the Government Public Relations Officers (PROs) on 03-07 September 2019, at Protea Hotel, Walvis Bay, organized by the Ministry of Information Communication and Technology (MICT), the custodian of all Government PROs.

The meeting discussed the implementation of the Government Communication Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20 and Social Media Use Policy 2016/17 – 2019/20. Participants, which were mainly the substantive PROs and acting PROs presented their achievements, and challenges encountered during the execution of their daily work. The researcher took minutes / notes of the discussions which were relevant to the research topic and asked questions for clarification. In addition, a total number of twelve (12) PROs and 3 senior officials were interviewed.

3.2 Population

The population of the study comprised of the Executive Directors and PROs in the 34 government offices, ministries and agencies in Namibia (Government of the Republic of Namibia).

3.3 Sample

Purposive Sampling and the sample consisted of three senior government officials, 12 PROs in ministries and seven PROs in offices and agencies.

3.4 Research Instruments

A checklist detailing the characteristics of excellent PR departments was used to evaluate public relations practice in offices, ministries and agencies as this aids understanding, and gives new and fresh insights (Wimmer & Dominick, 2006), thus assisting in achieving the objectives of this study. Interview guides were used to gain clarity on data from the benchmarking exercise as well as for the key informant (senior officials) interviews with the Executive Director, 2 senior officials and 12 PROs.

3.5 Procedure

Permission was sought from meeting organizers to permit the PROs to participate in the study while appointments made in advance to interview the Executive Director and other senior officials. The interview discussions were recorded after obtaining authorization from the respondents (recorder - using the I-phone 8 and Samsung S7) including the notes taken by the researcher) to ensure security which were later consolidated.

3.6 Data Analysis

The analysis took a narrative form involving pattern matching (the practice of PR in the Namibian public service was benchmarked with the characteristics of excellent departments). The analysis of data and report writing was a time-consuming and difficult process. There was no problem with the quality of the audio recording because the cellular phones (Samsung S7 and I-phone 8) used are of the best qualities. The substantial data was collected by taking notes of the presentations by participants during the PROs meeting. Again, there was no problem encountered because the researcher took notes, analyzed the data and produced the report.

The responses of the participants were correctly recorded and phrased. Interviewees' similar responses were encapsulated in one statements while the exceptional / unique ones were recorded separately. Questions were translated into themes and responses were recorded under related themes. The data was supported by the related literature. The final report was submitted to the University of Namibia.

4. Research Ethics

The researcher obtained the ethical clearance letter from the University of Namibia prior to embarking on this study. All participants' rights to participate was explained and consented to be interviewed without any pressure or intimidation. Interviewees' identities were masked by not divulging their names or affiliation, thus fulfilling the promise of confidentiality. As an employee in the public service, honesty and integrity was a guiding principle in conducting this study, coupled with a strict application of the scientific method, with the research data being used only for academic purposes and stored for five years before being destroyed, as per the University of Namibia's prescribed rules in that regard.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The chapter presents the core findings of the study derived from the method applied to gather data as indicated in the previous chapter. It highlights the application of PR practice in Namibia Civil Service in comparison to the principles of the Excellence Theory. It underscores the daily activities, stakeholders' engagement and problems encountered by the Government PROs. The findings however provide the answers to the research questions which underpinned the study.

4.2 The synopsis of the Government PROs meeting

Government Public Relations Officers (PROs) attended a 5-day meeting on 03-07 September 2019, at Protea Hotel: Walvis Bay. The meeting was organized by the Ministry of Information Communication and Technology (MICT), the custodian of all Government PROs. The overall aim of the meeting was to take stock of what happened since the resolution, to implement the Government Communication Plan and Social Media Use Policy, was passed in 2016. The MICT developed the Government Communication Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20 and the Social Media Use Policy 2016/17 -2019/20, which were launched in 2016. At the meeting, the PROs were requested to present their achievements in implementing the Government Communication Plan and the Social Media Use Policy; and highlighted the challenges identified while carrying out their duties and provided recommendations for improvements. The meeting was well attended by forty-two (42) participants, including the senior officials from MICT and the PROs from all Offices / Ministries / Agencies (O/M/As), only two institutions out of the invited Government institutions could not turn up for the meeting.

The development and the launch of the two communication guiding documents: Government Communication Plan and the Social Media Use Policy were necessitated by one of the pillars of the Government's Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP), 'Effective Governance and Service Delivery. According to the Government Communication Plan, "Pillar One (Effective Governance and Service Delivery) of the Harambee Prosperity Plan under the responsible social media deployment perspective, requires that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology develops a Social Media Use Policy and an Implementation Plan by July 2016 as part of the overall Government Communication Strategy," (Government Communication Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20, p3).

4.2.1 The Government Communication Plan 2016/17 – 2019/20

The Government Communication Plan serves as a guiding document for Government PROs to discharge their duties effectively. Generally, Communication Plan assists PR departments and eventually the organizations to achieve the mission which they have set out to accomplish (Gardner, 2015). The PROs were directed to implement the two aforementioned initiatives. Government Communication Plan requires all O/M/As to cascade the Plan into their individual Annual Communication Plan, whilst the Policy compels the O/M/As to ultimately make use of the Social Media to communicate effectively with stakeholders to ensure the fulfilment of the Harambee Prosperity Plan which dictates that 'no one should feel left out'. Gardener, et al, (2015) contended that "Communications Plan is a living document, throughout the year, we refine it as circumstances change and further opportunities to communicate" (p.103), with stakeholders. If O/M/As develop "well-articulated, systematic and purposeful Communications Plans" (Gardner, et al., 2015, p. 100), they will strengthen their relationship with stakeholders.

It should be noted that the study aimed at benchmarking PR practices in the Government of Namibia's civil service with the Principles of the Excellency Theory, which is regarded as a "Dominant Paradigm" (Macnamara, 2012, p. 370), to ascertain how the PR practitioners apply the tenets of the theory in the daily duties. As explained above the Communication Plan serves as a guiding document for Government PROs. It is therefore perfect to evaluate the extent to which the Government PR applies the principles of the theory.

"The Government deals with issues of life and death, such as: natural disasters; terrorists and issues that directly affect the citizens such as: taxes, elections and public policies" (Liu et al., 2012, p. 597) hence the Government must have effective and devised communication programs to reach to its citizenry. It is worth noting that communication / interaction between the organization and its various stakeholders is very crucial (Grunig, 1993).

Participants from all institutions which were represented indicated that they have implemented the Government Communication Policy and Social Media Use Policy 2016/17 – 2019/20. The only aspect of Government Communication Plan which is not yet implemented is the development of individual Annual Communication Plans of which O/M/As were directed to ensure were in place before the end of November 2019. Few of the PROs have aligned their Performance Agreement to the Government Communication Plan. Future research could investigate the effectiveness of individual Communication Plans.

The Government Communication Plan outlined the following "guidelines for effective information dissemination by PROs as indicated below. Under each guideline, PROs also have indicated what they have done (achievements).

4.2.1.1 Conduct Press Conferences/ Briefings on a Regular Basis

It requires the PROs to create platforms to disseminate information and enhance the PROs-Media relationships. Indeed, platforms have been created, information circulates from the government to the people.

In order to ensure that right information reaches intended stakeholders, PROs use different platforms and publications (newsletter, brochures, and annual reports) to reach to mainly external stakeholders. One of the PROs said his Institution employs “press conferences only when necessary”. One of the institutions indicated that they use different channels to get information from the publics such as: “live support chat, sms aggregator, and interactive feedback kiosk and e-mail survey”. Those are the platforms, through internet and other electronic gadget, used by the institutions to interact with its publics. Different platforms used by the PROs are reflected in the text.

4.2.1.2 Effectively utilize Electronic Media

Encourages talk shows on Television; and Radio stations; and the use of other electronic gadgets. Few respondents said their Ministries have unique and good relationship with stakeholders and singled out the media as the means of communication. One said they “communicate regularly with stakeholders, using different platforms to reach to our external stakeholders such as attending to trade fairs, utilizing the radio slot to respond to queries emanating from the radio program called ‘Open line / People’s Parliament’. The other PRO said “Our Ministry has monitors for clients to equip themselves with our services while waiting to be served”. Other PROs stated that the PR divisions organize with the media mostly NBC TV for the Principals to speak about issues which need to be discussed during the programs such as: One-on One TV show or Good Morning Namibia.

In any case, when the media representatives fail to turn up for an event, few of the respondents said that they “record the proceeding and forward the video to the media houses such as, Namibia Broadcasting Corporation (NBC)”. “Videos and audios new releases supplied to the media by companies are…seen or heard as news” (Howard & Mathews, 2006, p. 6) therefore they are acceptable and used by “both TV and radio to fill the void in their newscast” (2006, p. 6).
The institution “maintains a good relationship with NBC radio services, regularly go on radio to disseminate information about activities, and we have SMS line for clients” another PRO informed. Another O/M/As has “WhatsApp groups, SMS for specific campaigns/services”. Another PRO said their O/M/As shows “live stream on our Facebook page and have established Desk Officers in 14 Regions”.

One of the PROs informed the researcher that they “engage stakeholders (Stakeholder engagements) often to inform them of our planned activities and obtain inputs from our key stakeholders in order to avoid self-interest (as recommended in Howard & Mathews, 2006). “Media are fully engaged – we place messages in different platforms with slight alterations depending on the platform, the general public are always informed well in advance prior to undertaking of our activities. We carry out several outreach programmes” Another PRO added.

4.2.1.3. Embrace Social Media Use Policy

The Plan stipulates that, "all O/M/As, regional councils and local authorities, should embrace the use of social media platforms such as Face book, Twitter, You Tube, Instagram, WhatsApp, Blogs and Linked-in.

The Policy also provides the guidelines to be observed whenever PROs make use of social media such as upholding integrity, maintaining credibility and honesty, among others.

"One main advantage of online communication is that it enables two-way communication among an unlimited number of individuals" (Etter, 2014, p.323). It also enhances the maintenance of relationship and sustainability. One PRO indicated that "members of the publics are engaged through our Facebook account, we ask them questions about our institution, by that we know if we are doing what we are supposed to be doing, where we are failing, and we learn how to respond to failure". Another said, "We give response to customers through the Ministry's social media platform, and utilize 'Google alert' which alerts us on any query on the ministerial internet account". Another pointed out that "the questions that we receive from the publics is an indication that the Communication Plan which we implemented is doing wonders". Gardener at al., (2015) also referred to questions received from stakeholders as a sign of success of the Communication Plan, "one of the indicators of this transformation is the number of questions we receive" (p.103).

Another PRO said their institution extensively make use of social media adding that, "we have a Facebook page which is regularly updated, we inform the public on outreach dates and events, any press release we send out, we post on Facebook, we receive complaints and queries via Facebook inbox, we update the public when we have new publications on the website such as Annual reports and special reports."

Etter (2014) observed that “the emergence of social media” (2014, p. 293) has improved the pace of communication from being sluggish to being fast by obviating formal hierarchy while encouraging a balanced communication. “With social media, there are new opportunities for symmetric communication and for relationship management online because social media tools” according to Fieseler et al., (2010) as quoted in Etter (2014, P323) “have almost no gatekeeping mechanism, enabling conversation without formal hierarchies”. “Anyone now can be a journalist, members of publics can talk freely to each other about organizations, and information is widely available to everyone with little cost and effort” (Grunig, 2009, p. 4). Cacciatore et al., (2017, p. 293) cited Kent & Taylor (2002) and Macnamara (2014) saying that researchers discovered that PR practitioners “rely on using social media as a content delivery system, instead of initiating two-way dialog with stakeholders”. Grunig, (2009) however argued that the emerging media made communication utterly impossible to control because the publics can talk about anything about any organization. This however gives rise to a new challenge as PROs may experience tough times dealing with the publics as information can easily be distorted.

Although social media appears to be cheap and fast (Grunig, 2009) not all O/M/As seem to be impressed by this emerging trend (Etter, 2014). One of the respondents commented that there is “no approval granted to implement the use of social media (no presentation to brief management on the pros and cons of having social media platforms); no social media platform (apart from a WhatsApp Group created for journalists)”. The other PRO said there is pervasive “change resistance in the Ministry, social media is deemed as informal, and Facebook is blocked”.

4.2.1.4 Oversee Regular Update of the Websites

PROs should upload information on their institutions' webpages and continuously update them for the purpose of informing their stakeholders timeously.

Although PROs expressed their difficulties in relation to their institutions' webpages, they "constantly upload and update the webpages". One of the PROs said that lack of equipment / tools needed to carry out the PR functions has ever been the obstacle to a point where the webpage cannot be furnished with information. "I have an outdated computer, hence I update information from another institution. That is one of my hardships but I defeat the odds. With access to a proper and modernized computer, my work should be done". Some O/M/As perceive the websites as another effective tool to reach to their stakeholders. On the contrary, PROs with effective webpages stated as follows: "I work closely with OPM, Division IT to ensure the update of our website. Our website is regularly updated with news and publications". Another PRO whose O/M/A extensively utilizes their website revealed that "they normally have an average of 14 000 visitors to their website monthly. Generic web content is updated on a regular basis and same for the news and events sections".

Due to lack of human resources in O/M/As, most of the PR functions in O/M/As are carried out by one (1) PRO contrary to Botan and Hezleton (2006) and Kornegay and Grunig., (1998) who said the roles should be performed by different communicators within PR departments. Kornegay et al., (1998) pointed out that the role of the communication technician should be that of publishing e-newsletters, e-press releases, setting up teleconferences, and developing Web pages. Kornegay et al., further urged communication managers to use computer-based technology and the media to scan their environment and conduct evaluation research. According to them, such activities will cause the communication managers to gain power and connect with the dominant coalition, in order to enable them to contribute to decision-making processes. Such linkages will result in improved relationships with the publics and result in greater organizational effectiveness (Kornegay et al., 1998). Botan & Hezleton (2006) also indicated that a technician caries out all PR day-to-day work.

As for the O/M/As, this tactic may not augur well, as most of the PROs "do not attend the management meetings" because "their positions are below management level", as indicated by one of the senior officials. One of the PROs further reported that, "there is no PR division in the Ministry. The PR practitioner is serving under the Chief Control Officer instead and all of the O/M/As' websites are hosted externally which makes it difficult to upload information". This however may result in failure of the PR strategy as some PROs are not members of the dominant coalition, unless the proposed elevation of PROs' positions materializes.

4.2.1.5 Engage Print Media for dissemination of Information

All print media (newspapers; Magazine and Newsletters) should be utilized as mediums to disseminate information to the public.

This study revealed that not so many O/M/As publish newsletters "to keep their potential /current constituents" (Kovac, 2003, p. 217). One of the PROs confirmed that the Ministry has "no publication of Quarterly Newsletters for internal information sharing". One of the PROs who produced information materials informed that "we publish annual reports, newsletters, brochures, pamphlets and many more".

4.2.1.6 Monitor the media regularly

Regular monitoring of the media allows PROs to pounce on queries for information or services by the public and provide timeous feedback to those queries.

A senior official reported that "an arrangement was made with the Government newspaper to provide special space for Government institutions to respond to questions from the public but PROs are not optimally utilizing such space". "All PROs are expected to regularly monitor the media in order to pick up any report pertaining to their respective institutions and provide feedback by utilizing the already provided space by the New Era Newspaper or any other medium," said one of the key informants. Another key informant said, "the Ministry monitors and does content analysis daily to see if there are issues which warrant response by O/M/As for public consumption and should we find any we involve the O/M/A responsible and urge them to respond". "Some O/M/As are lagging behind whist others are up to speed with their tasks". Senior officials affirmed that "media monitoring helps the ministries to be on track with media reports and results in improved services as different O/M/As disseminate information through feedback platforms such as the designated page in the New Era newspaper; TV and Radio slots".

The organization which frequently monitors the media is likely to become effective as it may be both proactive and reactive (Etter, 2014) in addressing issues without delay and reactive to issue as they arise in the media. Some PROs respond to the call of regular monitoring of the media. One PRO said, "I monitor the media regularly (Namibian Sun & Republikein only), respond to media and the public queries posted in the newspapers, and respond to Facebook comments/messages".

4.2.1.7 Corporate Identity to be developed and maintained

This requires that PROs must ensure that the correct information is provided and that they should make sure they correct any misrepresentation of facts about their respective institutions.

One of the key informants affirmed that “Our aim is to establish, defend, uphold and maintain our corporate image in the eyes of the public, thereby providing correct information about our institutions and maintaining close and good relationship with all our stakeholders including the media”. The media, in attendance at the PROs meeting, on the other hand complained that, “Government PROs do not respond to our questions on time perhaps because of bureaucracy. They are mostly not in the know, while some do not respond at all”.

Supa (2014) cited Howard & Mathews (2006) that managing media-PR practitioner relationship requires that the practitioners should provide ‘relevant’ information about their organizations in order to “maintain communication, build credibility and trust” (2014, p. 1). Supa however added that “journalists tend to distrust public relations practitioners” (2014, p. 3) probably on the basis as stated by one of the journalists who attended the PROs meeting at Walvis Bay, that PROs “do not respond to our queries on time … they are mostly not in the know”.

Corporate image is very important thus needs to be sheltered and maintained (Szczypka et al., 2007; and Chang & Lii, 2010). The journalists also have to protect their institutional images which is why they need to obtain truthful information from reliable sources. As one of the journalists stressed, “we will never report fake news or twist facts because we have integrity to protect. Instead we report truthfulness”. On the contrary, the media has been accused of deliberately distorting and misinterpreting information (Aochamub, 2016, par. 5). It should be noted that these two professions (journalism and PR profession) need one another to develop and maintain good images of their institutions. The Media need to be furnished with the right information in order to produce reliable and trustworthy news. Likewise, the organizations need good reports to uphold their credibility and integrities. Corporate image campaign has a major shift in rekindling the image (Szczypka, et al, 2007). The PROs may strengthen the cooperate campaign to enhance their institutional images.

4.2.1.8 Re-brand O/M/As in line with government policies

The MICT has observed that the national symbols are not used correctly including the font sizes, colours and spacing, hence the guidelines to ensure uniformity across Government institutions. MICT facilitator during the foregoing PROs' 5-days meeting lamented the inconsistency in terms of the usage of national symbols, stating that O/M/As use different colors, sizes and sometime font types. MICT emphatically requested "all O/M/As to use the right national symbols to ensure uniformity across government". Zhu et al., (2017) stressed that the logo or the organizational symbols are the most fundamental part of the organization and a symbol of a corporate image. Its original purpose of increasing organizational visibility has now shifted to being seen as playing a role in communicating corporate strategy (Zhu et al., 2017). The majority of PROs concurred that "there is not consistency in using the national symbols and that is because we probably are not aware of the slight differences in few of the colors", affirmed one of the PROs.

4.2.1.9 Collaborate with government central communication unit at Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT)

All the Government PROs are required to develop (if not developed yet) and maintain a good and close relationship with MICT, the mother Ministry which develops, reviews and monitors the flow / dissemination of information by the O/M/As. This was confirmed by one of the senior officials who maintained that, “the Ministry monitors and does content analysis daily to see if there are issues warrant response by O/M/As for public consumption and should we find any we involve the O/M/A responsible and urge them to respond”. That is a demonstration of the importance of MICT - PROs relationship which should be maintained.

4.2.1.10 Participate in Trade Fairs/ Trade Expos/Exhibitions to bring information closer to the people

The majority of the Government Institutions demonstrated that they have moved beyond the one-way Public Information Model to Symmetrical Communication Model in line with the literature (Akpabio, 2009; Grunig, 1992; Grunig 1993; Botan & Hazleton, 2006). Instead of providing information to the public they engage the public during the trade fairs; visiting schools; Universities and career fairs, the activities which Grunig (2009, p. 4) termed “communication campaigns”). Such stakeholders’ engagements provide good opportunities to O/M/As, not only to distribute information materials to interested public members, but it also avails opportunities for face-to-face interaction with the publics. During these events, “members of the public are often times requested to state their opinions and expectations. Likewise, the institutions provide clarities and information on various issues and services’, said one of the senior officials.

In Government, 99% of PROs do not engage in PR research (scientific research) but have indicated that they extract and analyze meaningful public opinion regarding the service rendered to the public and analyze public perception towards their institutions. One of the senior officials stressed that “almost every year O/M/As partake in the educational event. For those O/M/As who do not participate yearly it could be as a result of budgetary constraints, otherwise they explore this platform extensively” (Kotler & Mindak, 1978) are of the view that conducting a research in PR is imperative as it is a tool which can be employed to obtain the public’s opinion prior to developing and launching a PR campaign. Similarly, Scholars such as (Grunig, 1992) and (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) who are also scientific researchers recommended that PR departments should engage in conducting research into public opinion.

The Excellence Theory (Grunig, 1992; Botan & Hazleton, 2006) likewise emphasized that excellent PR departments should engage in PR research in order to balance the interests of the organization and the public. The stakeholder engagement might be a best tool to get the public’s perspective but it should be augmented by the survey/empirical research to gain in-depth understanding of the public (Botan and Hazleton 2006). One of the PROs who maintained that the institution regularly holds stakeholders’ engagement said, “we go out to see if money is used for the right purpose and ask what people want us to do differently”.

Some respondents argued that although the Excellence Theory underlined the best PR principles, for effective PR they may not be applicable to all institutions because “O/M/As have different mandates, offer different services to different publics. It is thus the discrepancy which determines the PR communication program / activities to be undertaken.”

4.2.1.11 Coordinate the translation of information into national languages

This ensures inclusivity and upholds the Government Development Programme – Harambee Prosperity Plan 2016-2020, which demands that 'no one should feel left out' by producing information material in other languages rather than the national language, English. One of the PROs indicated that in terms of general information dissemination, "the generic pamphlets with the function of the office is translated into all local languages, we also have a simplified version of the official documents which is produced for young children and the layman". Another one said "Our PR division engages the public through Focal Persons in the Regions (who communicate in local languages) on radio". Another one stated that "we send them press releases which they disseminate in their different languages, we make use of staff who are conversant in different languages to conduct radio interviews".

4.3 Internal Communication

The Communication Plan also provided a guide for <u>internal communication</u> as well as the Implementation Plan guide to avoid ambiguity.

Although internal stakeholders (employees/staff members) could also be reached with the publications (such as Newsletters; Annual Reports; etc.), O/M/As resorted to the use of social media as the best and fast tool to reach and engage the employees. The tools used by O/M/As to get to the employees are- WhatsApp by creation of WhatsApp groups, Instagram, emails, websites and Facebook. Internal communication plays a crucial role. It motivates employees and as a result, adds value to the organizational performance (Sedej, and Justine k, 2013). Some O/M/As also engaged in the "internal stakeholders' information sessions to acquaint themselves with staff members, especially those who just joined their institutions", one of the PRO informed.

Another respondent who believed that their Ministry has the most effective internal communication proudly said:

"There is a suggestion Box for mainly customers but can also be used by internal stakeholders to express their views. The PR division communicates with employees via 'Alert Intra-communication'. We reach to them by placing messages on Notice Boards or elevators, we have a reward system called 'Production Charts' to complement staff members who reached their targets. We hold meetings every morning for different sections and departments, we have introduced grouped email service for departments to communicate to employees on specific issues to serve specific purposes. We introduced a communication line service where the clients can send messages and get immediate response."

It is evident that this O/M/A engages a strategy which promotes balanced communication (Grunig, 1993) and results in trustworthiness (Etter, 2014).

The use of WhatsApp was found to be the most effective platform especially among the staff members in a specific department/division or mostly during events. Respondents said their O/M/As use social media to create relationships with various audiences. O/M/As are in harmony with (Coupland, 2005) cited in (Etter, 2014, p.328) who argued that "in contrast to traditional corporate web sites, which address only a "broad and discerning audience" primarily through one-way communication," he found social media more "interactive and personalized" as well as highly engaging and providing easy access. The study finds that, in addition to telephone communication, e-mail is the most widely and effectively used technology in government when communicating with its stakeholders mostly employees in line with the literature (Rudnick, 1996).

One of the PROs said, “appreciating people is not about how long they have been in the office, but it is about what you have done or you are doing to them. Therefore we conduct internal surveys to find out how our employees perceive the office and what information they want in order to be happy at work”. Another said “we have introduced ‘suggestion boxes through which we receive queries from the public and we provide information through communication tools which include both print and electronic media, including social media”. This is in concurrence with (Greenberg, 2010) cited in (Etter, 2014) added that social media gives the opportunity for conversations in which customers may suggest, “ask questions and voice concerns to which company representatives can respond” (p.328), which in turn promotes trustworthiness.

4.4 Social Media Use Policy by the O/M/As

“New communication tactics have emerged in this era of information, and many practitioners have adopted social media as an integral aspect of their communication campaigns” (Supa, n.d., p.1). Similarly, Supa, (2014) affirmed that social media can be a very effective instrument to the organizations who make use of them as “the internet holds tremendous promise for improving communication” (Etter, 2014. p.326).

The Social Media Use Policy stipulates that the government is “required to deploy all available resources at our disposal to ensure that our citizens have access to relevant government information in order to make meaningful and informed decisions to improve their livelihood” (2016/20, p. 4). With Social media, members of the public can communicate freely about organizations, and anyone can access information at no or less cost (Grunig, 2009).

The Policy is aimed at improving government service delivery by distributing or disseminating the required and consumable information to the stakeholders. It was however emphatically cautioned that social media should not be a substitute of the ‘traditional media’.

The Policy also provides the guidelines and the Implementation Plan to ensure PROs maintain professionalism, honesty, integrity and observe all the core values of the Government in disseminating information through Social Media. The Social Media approved to be used are: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Blogging, Twitter, YouTube, Short Messaging Services (SMS) and LinkedIn.

Social media in the context of internal communications are vivid and growing in importance (Sedej, and Justinek, 2013). The use of social media was found to be a faster and easy way of transmitting information to the stakeholders (both internal and external), especially those who are in possession of or have access to smart phones and computers.

4.5. Stakeholder Engagements

Stakeholder engagements in various platforms where the publics can post comments or pose questions to which the organization’s “representative offer answers to queries and explanations” (Coombs & Holladay, 2018, p. 392). This provides an avenue for either two-way asymmetrical and symmetrical communication. The study discovered that stakeholders’ engagement can be done based on the organization’s publics, its size, its culture and the product/service it renders to the public (Gregory, 2003), more especially “where the interests of the organization are secure or where interests at least coincide” (2003, p.89). It simply means not all organizations may conduct stakeholder’s engagement as it is determined by various factors.

Some O/M/As have pro-active approach where they arrange for school visits to their institutions during school holidays or recess. For the sake of improving the service delivery and ensuring compliance to International Standards and Practices, some of the O/M/As benchmarked with the International Organizations to which Namibia has ratified.

The study found that some O/M/As were subjected to public survey "customer satisfactory survey' which was unilaterally and anonymously conducted countrywide by one of the country's prestigious High Institution of Learning. "The survey report was shared with individual O/M/As and the issues of concerns raised therein are still being addressed by O/M/As." "The institution of high learning conducted the Customer Satisfactory Survey, the Ministry got the extraction, we are currently busy working on the gaps which were identified" stated one of the PROs.

4.6 Challenges faced by the Government PROs in Implementing the Government Communication Policy and the Government Social Media Use Policy

Only one of the PROs reported using an outdated computer which necessitates the updates of information at another institution. During the interview with this specific PRO, it emerged that, besides out dated tools, there was no relationship with the media and the management. For (Childers, 1989, p. 88) "unless those with power in the organization understand and support the public relations function, practitioners are not likely to practice sophisticated techniques of public relations". Despite the challenge, this PRO said she "keeps on monitoring the media, although oftentimes she cannot provide feedback because information hardly comes on time to enable timeous response to media queries". This is actually a perfect hint that the PRO's functions in this Ministry are relegated to support functions instead of strategic management role (Tilson, 2009).

Although this PRO reports directly to the Executive Director (ED), as it was revealed during the interview, media queries are not attended to with urgency as the direct contact between this specific PRO and the Directors in the Ministry, for whatever reason, is purportedly not permitted. “I cannot contact the directors directly; I have to wait for response to come to me via the ED’s office. By the time I get it, the reporter’s due date for the specific article has already passed. This attitude of disregarding the media’s deadlines exacerbated the whole thing (PR-Media relationship).” “I was often times told that I do not work for the media therefore there is no need to work according to their schedule.” This is in contradiction with (Ahrens, 1959) who posited that media has deadlines to beat therefore PR personnel should provide response to media queries cognizant of media deadlines. The PRO stated that “this attitude stemmed a bad relationship with the media because they hardly get information from me”.

The PRO further said “Our Ministry has a suggestion box but hardly provides feedback on comments, complaints or suggestions from suggestion boxes because information does not flow well between the PR office and the management”. Some PROs said in their O/M/As the suggestion boxes are not effective as staff members flood it with personal problems with other staff members instead of addressing their issues procedurally.

Furthermore, financial constraints prevented the execution of PR activities in this Ministry, and to compound it all, PR functions are centralized and performed by one person. This case was regarded as an odd case and participants concluded that it should be as a result of little understanding of the importance and value of a PRO in the institution as stated in Grunig (2009), while some assumed that situation might have been influenced by some personal problems /issues.

Some of the common problems encountered by the PROS is that PROs are not in control of the ministerial websites for security reason, but the Office of the Prime Minister does, while the uploading of information on the webpages in all Government institutions is done by IT division. The PR divisions only provide information to IT to update the institutions' webpages.

PROs further felt that they are overworked as each O/M/A mostly has one PRO who works as "a photographer, scriber, spokesperson, coordinator and other PR related functions". According to literature "many practitioners play both manager and technician roles" (Botan, & Hazleton, 2006, p.41). Only probably one of the O/M/As which has failed to embrace the use of social media and oversee the regular update of website. Other challenges are: Lack of funds to participate in trade fairs, produce newsletters (quarterly), annual reports, pamphlets/brochures, customer service charters and procure banners and exhibition materials for marketing purposes.

While PROs feel overwhelmed by many problems, one of the senior officials refuted the claims saying "in the past PROs had many issues, but slowly we resolved them particularly, the reporting line and gadget issues." The senior official said "the MICT's role is to continue sensitizing and highlighting to O/M/As through the Management Meetings of Senior Civil Servants (Executive Directors Meetings) regarding the shortcomings that are still bedeviling the PROs, the urgency of them being attended to and need for effective Government communication with the citizenry". In addition, "the Minister also will communicate to Cabinet the challenges faced by the PROs despite the Cabinet directives to that effect, thereby giving O/M/As the opportunity to explain to both meetings such bottleneck".

The MICT, according to senior officials, is satisfied with the performance of the PROs adding that they have greatly improved compared to the low performance experienced in previous years. One of the senior official said “given the challenges and jungle of impediment the PROs face, one can proudly say the Ministry is 80% satisfied with the level of their performance”.

4.7 Diversification in PR

The participants were encouraged to carry out their duties /functions in complete consideration of cultural and racial diversity. “Women were excluded from other journalism organizations”, (Voss, & Speere, 2013), but looking at the composition of PROs in Government, it does embrace the Affirmative Action which encourages the consideration of previously disadvantaged people for employment in the Government Service and Namibia in general. (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) also emphasized that public relations should embody diversity, both genders (men and women) regardless of cultural and racial background, adding that “excellent departments should seek more of the scarce supply of minority practitioners”. (p.38).

When PR profession was introduced in early 1900s, women were marginalized in the newspapers and confined to women’s page, grounded in wedding news, fashion, society events and food, while men were quoted in the articles, (Voss, & Speere, 2013). (Grunig, 2009) prominently encouraged the inclusivity of gender (men and women) in PR profession “as practitioners of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds” (p.2). As per the researcher’s observation, it was evidently clear that PR in Government is undoubtedly dominated by women. One of the informants stated that “PROs are hired according to their qualifications”. The researcher could not determine the criteria used to employ or hire the PROs and the reason why women dominate the Government PR.

4.8 PR Structure / Reporting line

Cabinet, in 2005, directed the O/M/As to appoint the PROs who should report to the Accounting Officers. However, according to some PROs during their presentations at Walvis Bay, they still report to either Director, Deputy Directors or Chief Control Officers instead of the Executive. During the interview with one of the key informants, it was reported that "although Cabinet gave such a directive, it has not taken away the O/M/As' discretion to determine the reporting line of the PROs". (Grunig, 2009) contended that "excellent public relations units have at least one senior manager who directs public relations programmes" (p.2). For him, the day-to-day communication activities are carried out by the PR technicians while the PR manager plans, controls, manages and directs all PR programmes.

Cabinet Directive appears to take into account the importance of the PROs and the crucial role that the PR department has in an organization, particularly, the government institution in this case. While acknowledging the issues of confidentiality and secrecy in organizations, the significance of the PR function/department in O/M/As should be emphasized to make sure they are accorded the recognition owed to them. In doing so, even the O/M/As' discretion regarding the PRO's reporting line (chain of command) would not be determined contrary to Cabinet's directive. If the PR units are not headed by the PR managers to carry out the managerial roles and direct all PR programmes, such "direction will be provided by members of the dominant coalition who have no knowledge of public relations" (Grunig, 2009, p.2).

The research revealed that PROs have different reporting lines. Such reporting line does not guarantee PR excellence and cannot stimulate the PR departments to optimally contribute to the organizational effectiveness (Botan, & Hazleton, 2006). Some PROs responded as follow: “I report to both Director and Executive Director”. “I report to the Chief Control Officer” “I report to the Deputy Director” I report to the Executive Director”.

According to literature, a direct reporting to the CEO, (in the case of the Government - Executive Director) “appears to be a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for participation in strategic management, which is one of the most critical components of excellent public relations” (Botan, & Hazleton, 2006, p.40). Grunig (2009) advised that the PR department at least, by all means, should be headed by “one senior manager who directs public relations programmes” (p.2); instead of the PR department being headed by “members of the dominant coalition who have no knowledge of public relations” (p.2).

A survey on Public Relations Theory by Botan & Hazleton (2006) discovered that not all PROs or Communicators report directly to the CEOs. The report was that: Most of the top communicators in our survey reported directly to the CEO or indirectly through another senior manager. Such a reporting relationship does not ensure excellence, but we found that without such a clear path to the CEO public relations cannot contribute much to the organizational effectiveness. A direct reporting relationship, therefore, appears to be a necessary, if not a sufficient, condition for participation in strategic management, which is one of the most critical components of excellent public relations (2006, p.40).

If public relations programs are not directed by the public relations manager then they will be directed by “other members of the dominant coalition who have little or no knowledge of communication management” (Botan, & Hazleton, 2006, p.42).

The study found out that while some PROs (few) strive to put up with their supervisors' harsh directives and manners, some are contented with the superior's way of working. One of the PROs appreciatively said "I report directly to the Accounting Officer, I have good support from management in terms of providing the information necessary to compile documents, reports, memos and other documents, I attend management meetings have firsthand information on the developments taking place in the institution and in the regions, I am also encouraged to work hard and contribute positively to the institutional mandate and government at large".

4.9 Empowering of PRO

The key informants assured that the Government PROs are empowered, "yes they are 95% empowered, they are provided with all equipment and gadgets required to carry out their duties, and they have access to the principals and all management". On the contrary, (Botan & Hazleton 2006, p.41) asserted that "If the senior communicator is not a manager, it is not possible for public relations to be empowered as a management function because there are no managers in the department".

Although, the O/M/A may permit the PRO to attend all management meetings as stated by one of the PROs who stated that, "I attend all three Management meeting with an agenda item on PR matters", the effectiveness of the PR division, in light of the theory, remains questionable. The Excellency Study, which was conducted by Grunig et al., (2002) for over 15 years, led to the development of the Excellence Theory which undergirds this study. According to the report, "the most effective public relations departments participated in, or were consulted in the making of overall strategic decisions in organizations" (Grunig, 2009, p.11). It is through this participation in organizational decisions, that the excellent public relations departments attain great exposure which puts them in strategic position to scan the environment and identify the stakeholder/ potential public who would be or likely to be affected in one way or another by the decisions made by the organizations.

On the other hand, one of the key informants however believe that not all PROs are empowered due to his statement that “some PROs have access to decision making while others do not, and some have all that is needed and some have little, it all depends on who you work with and the organization you work for, there is no standardization in Government”. Participation in the organizational decisions is the key to effective PR units (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) while “less effective departments generally had the less central role of disseminating messages about strategic decisions made by others in the organization” (Grunig, 2009, p.11).

It is thus emphatically underscored that for the organization to be effective “the public relations function must be empowered as a distinctive and strategic managerial function” (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 38). The empowered PROs are the members of the “dominant coalition or have access to this powerful group of organizational leaders”, (2006, p. 38), “who make decisions in the organization” (Grunig, 2009, p. 2). One of the PROs indicated that “PRO does not partake in Top Executive Management meetings. Managers see PRO as a threat”. “The trust issues prevent PRO to sit in the Top Executive Management meetings”, said one of the PROs

The affirmation by one of the key informants that PROs are 95% empowered can be challenged by the complaints or nagging by some PROs who lamented that they are not members of the

Management cadre and they report to other officials instead of the Executive Directors. The PROs might be equipped with all relevant tools, but excluding them from being members of management cadre may negatively impact their performance, because they do not “play a role in making strategic organizational decisions” (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 38) as the Excellency Theory dictates. The principles of the Excellency Theory demand that the PROs “must have relative autonomy from excessive clearance rules to play the strategic role”, (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 38), therefore being a PRO but not a member of the “dominant coalition” it may compromise the PR function.

Grunig (2009) further asserted that participating in decision making leads to the identification of potential publics which further necessitates the development of strategic PR programmes to cultivate the organization-stakeholder relationships. Without that relationship, organizations’ decisions could fail where the publics do not support the decisions. The PR programmes should therefore highly consider such relationship to avert crisis. That is perhaps mainly the reason why Grunig (1993) emphasized that the excellence PR departments should develop effective programs and employ a two-way communication (symmetric –Grunig’s preferred model or asymmetric communication) of which both are also research based (Grunig, 2009).

4.10 Speaking to the media

Lee and Hamant (2013) cited Taylor (2000, 2004) who argued that the organisations - media relationship is essential for maintaining the communication with organizations’ key publics, adding that such relationship makes the public relations a building block and “a tool that brings together like-minded individuals … to articulate needs, pressure governments" (Lee & Hamant, 2013, p.84) and represent the needs of the public (Lee & Hamant, 2013).

Cultivating good media-organization relationship has crucial impact on media coverage to such an extent that the reporter can comfortably ring the public relations practitioner for a quote (Kovacs, 2003).

A journalist from one of the Government's owned media, who also attended the PROs' meeting at Walvis Bay, lamented the poor media-Government PROs relationship. The journalist alleged "lack of urgency from the PROs' side. Most Government PROs do not respond to our questions on time perhaps because of bureaucracy, that is why we skip them and speak to the Ministers". Skipping the PROs might be influenced by fact that "Journalists commonly rate public relations practitioners lower in status… and seem to treat PR and its practitioners with contempt" (Sterne, 2010, p.6-7) though intense study may need to be undertaken to dig deeper into this relationship. On the other hand, the PROs also assumed that "managers do not have understanding of the importance/value of the PR divisions".

Whatever the case might be, the fact is, the issue of "trust" (Grunig, 1999, as cited by Lee & Hamant, 2013, p. 86) might have crept in especially from the media side. "Trust is conceptualized as an organization doing what it says it will do" (Lee & Hamant, 2013, p. 86), and in the absence of that, trust vanishes. Generally, "media antagonism towards public relations is not peculiar" (Sterner, 2010, p. 5) who added that the relationship between public relations practitioners and media representatives, such as journalists, has long not been a good one. On the contrary, the two professions need one another (Sterne, 2010; Lee & Hamant, 2013), but "both complained of unrealistic expectations imposed on them by their counterparts" (Sterne, 2010, p. 6).

The PROs referred to by the journalists should have been contacted and promised to respond but, for whatever reasons, responses were either never received or received late, hence the journalists' lamentations. In addition, the journalists claimed that "Government PROs are mostly not in the know, while some do not respond at all". "The public's thirst never seems to be quenched" (Ahrens, 1959, p.6) hence, certain circumstances such as lack of response by PROs prompt reporters to "skip the PROs and directly contact the Executive Directors or the Ministers" for quick response in order to meet their deadlines (Ahrens (1959).

One of the senior officials in Government questioned the effectiveness of the PROs, especially those who do not attend the management meetings, "if a PRO cannot be part of the Management cadre, can he/she be able to carry out his/her function effectively?" Another senior official asserted that the duties of the PR function in any organization is to advise the management, hence a need to be part of management. One of the senior officials opposed the idea and argued that for a "PR practitioner to be effective in his duties, he does not require to be a manager, but the recognition of the PR profession and the importance placed upon the PR function, as the face of an organization, is what matters the most". (Botan & Hazleton, 2006) and (Grunig, 2009), revealed that in some countries, the practitioners who were less involved in strategic management were less valued by senior management, but the situation was dealt with by encouraging the top officials to support and empower PR managers, address the lack of PR knowledge and emphasize employees' relations.

The notion that public relations practitioners should provide information (Howard & Mathews, 2006) better be a norm which should be adopted for effective media-PR relationship. PR professionals, besides supplying information to the media and building favorable PR images among journalists, they should "have great knowledge of journalists' work habits and news values and adopt sophisticated strategies and well-planned, timely actions in relation to the media" (Lee & Hamant, 2013, p. 84 quoted Yoon, 2005). If the assumption by the PROs is in fact true that "managers have little or no knowledge of the importance/value of PR", given the level of Government PROs, the organization-media relationship may not be realized. The value of the PR divisions should also be recognized and treasured for effective development of media relationship.

The senior official further clarified that "Government PROs have taken oaths to perform their duties in a professional manner taking into account confidentiality and secrecy, but the oaths which were taken were measured for their levels, therefore such cannot guarantee their attendances to all levels of management, unless sanctioned by their Executive Directors". "Similarly, it is incumbent upon the Executive Directors of the respective O/M/As to determine what issues should be shared with or disseminated to the public because not all matters are public consumable at any given time. Some issues have to be interrogated thoroughly before they are disseminated to the public", the senior official stated. Furthermore, the senior official added, "the O/M/As have different mandates and deal with different issues. Confidential and secret issues are discussed at the management levels where decisions-making regarding their daily undertakings are made" (echoing Grunig, 2009). For that reason, the Executive Director may or may not permit the PRO to attend the management meetings.

The key informant however pointed out that it should also be noted that "Government PROs are not the ultimate spokesperson of their O/M/As and there are issues that they can speak about". In the same way, Fitzpatrick (1947) stated that some public relations practitioners secure the permission of high authorities before information is released to the public. “The way forward is for… practitioners to make their voices heard by showcasing the true face of public relations practice at every forum and at every opportunity” (Akpabio, 2009, p. 361).

On the other hand, journalists need their demands to be met, hence appealed that “we need strong news, positive, big developmental news, clean and not sensational news, I compete with my competitors therefore I need good news and proper stories not petty news so that I sell my product”.

One of the PRO complained that “Media take long to respond or publish articles on time, causing the news to lose its relevance”, while the journalist also criticized Government PROs for poorly written press releases. Sterne (2010) contended that media are likely to successfully publish PR material which are aligned to commercial values.

Another PRO accused the media of, sometimes, reporting or distorting information, but the journalist refuted the claim saying they “will never report fake news or twist facts because we have integrity to protect; instead we report truthfulness”. The PRO’s claim was supported by one of the Political Analysts in Namibia who stressed that journalists need training on accuracy reporting, especially on technical issues such as research findings (“Political analyst train journalists for accurate reporting,” 2019).

The journalists also complained about the conflicting role between the Personal Assistant (PA) to the Ministers and the Government PROs, stating that it should be addressed to avoid duplication of statements received by the media houses. It seems the role of the two (PA and PRO) is either not clarified properly or there is lack of coordination of activities when it comes to dealing with the media. The journalist said “we receive statements from both PA and PROs”.

4.11 Models of Communication

One of the senior officials interviewed said, “there is no uniformity in Government, O/M/As apply models of communication differently. Models of communication can be employed due to the matters at hands, the ideal of communication is to use mixed models, giving to the public and getting from the public, determine the impact of service delivery and communication and provide feedback to the principals as they also need to be informed of what is happening in the communities”. The senior official augmented his claim of lack of uniformity in Government through his observation saying “for instance some O/M/As have branches all over the country. They provide information, but they are not giving maximum exposure meaning the model they use is one-way model of communication (Public Information)”. One-way model of communication (Public Information) does not necessarily mean lack of exposure as the senior official has put it but it is used to “carefully disseminate balanced information to the publics” (Bivins, 1989, p. 66). On the other hand, it should also be noted that, as stated by Motschall & Liqun (2002) cited in Akpabio (2009, p. 353) “no single method of public relations practice will dominate in all settings”. Communication models should be applied based on the matter to be communicated and the level of recipients.

However, one-way Communication model in governments appears to be common and permeated, Aggrey (2009) revealed that:

> *In Ghana, a policy document issued by the Information Services Department (I.S.D) of the Ministry of Information and National Orientation1, provides that it is the duty*

of the practitioner to present the Ministry's policies to the public and seek to ensure that they are understood; and that, no matter the opposition, the practitioners' attitude must be one of firm support and helpful explanation of the ministerial line (p.400).

This study found out that, although one-way communication model is said to be practiced in O/M/As, most PROs have indicated that they use two-way communication model. That is an affirmation by literature that, "Public relations has moved beyond the one-way publicity model" (Akpabio, 2009, p. 353). Grunig's symmetrical communication seems to be a less famous model in Namibian Government. The symmetrical model focuses on creating a balance between the publics and the organization, (Grunig, 2002, cited by Laskin, 2009), while in Namibian Government, PROs seek first the consent of the high authority to release information to public (Fitzpatrick, 1947). It literally means the information which is released by the Government to the public is filtered, controlled/restrained prior to release through "mass media and controlled media such as newsletters; brochures and direct mail", (Grunig, 1993, p. 144).
This confirms that "the two-way symmetric model is not part of the job description for African public relations practitioners" (Akpabio, 2009, p. 354). In other words, O/M/As inadvertently manipulate the publics (Childers, 1989) because, as revealed by this study, the model used, although it is two-way communication it not fully asymmetrical or symmetrical model. That has led to the conclusion that in addition to the one-way communication model which is being practiced in Government, asymmetric communication model also has its roots therein.

During the 20th century when the Public Information model was conceived, Ivy Lee, PR guru, Grunig (1993) and Childers (1989) referred to public relations practitioners as live-in-journalists who disseminate ‘truthful and accurate’ information about their client organizations. In Namibian Government, besides filtered information being provided to the public, one can say such information is also accurate, given the fact that “PROs communicate government’s policies, activities and programs to the publics” stated one of the government senior officials. PROs also involve the publics through “stakeholder’s engagements programs aimed at getting the opinions and views of the publics” (according to one of the PROs). In return, the PRO added that O/M/As “address issues raised during the consultations programs (stakeholder’s engagements)”. Although such type of communication seems to be two-way communication, it lacks empirical research and hence cannot be called asymmetrical communication.

Of course, O/M/As provide information to the publics, but not necessarily doing what the publics want but rather advancing O/M/As’ interest as per Saxena (2012). Such model of communication is partly ‘asymmetric communication’ where “organizations believe that they can decide and then sell this decision to their publics” (Childers, 1989, p.87). The Namibian Government’s asymmetrical model of communication however lacks empirical research opposite to (Grunig, 1993; Huang, 2004; Hayenhjelm, 2006; Botan & Hazleton, 2006; Bivins, 1989) who contended that asymmetric model is research based. That type of model may be termed ‘Pseudo-asymmetrical model of communication’ given the fact that O/M/As, through stakeholder’s engagements, indeed listen to publics in an effort to determine how best to change their behavior to benefit the organization as stated in Botan & Hazleton (2006). It allows two-way communication with the publics who do not contribute to decision making (Akpabio, 2009). It lacks research, but unintentionally manipulates the publics to believe in the organization (Childers, 1989) and builds mutual trust (Hayenhjelm, 2006).

4.12 Conducting Research

The key informant revealed that “99% of the PROS are not researchers as they rely more on decisions which are taken within their organizations. They hardly go out to unearth what the public expect or get the views of the public regarding their organizations”, adding that “it is a deficiency in Namibia which cannot be ascribed to the PROs alone. The Excellence Theory revealed that the less excellent PR departments do not conduct research; they barely identify their new publics and they do not even evaluate their organizations’ objectives to determine the achievement (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). However, Botan & Hazleton found out that, although conducting the research is crucial in public relations departments, “the government PR program did not fit the pattern” because Government communication programs specifically “lobbying functions are controlled by lawyers and CEOs” (2006, p. 50) and that PR practitioners have little control over their programs.

The senior official further stated that, “it is a fact that in Namibia, research is not richly resourced even in institutions of high learning; in organizations it is a challenge, likewise in Government you will not find budgetary provision made for research on the mandate of an institution. As such, PROs cannot be condemned for not being research driven but they rather expected to be mere recipients of government decisions”. Botan & Hazleton (2006) stressed that the public relations department need to understand the publics they serve and that knowledge or understanding comes from the ability to conduct research. Researchers found that “excellent public relations is research based (two-way)” (Botan and Hazleton 2006, p. 48). “PROs should master the mandate of their organizations, be in a position to research on the level of service delivery and appreciation by the public and be able to contrast the two to determine whether the public is happy with the service delivery of that specific O/M/A, if not, then ascertain the cause of unhappiness in order to address the situation" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 48).

Aggrey (2009) affirmed that PR practitioners' knowledge would be limited and may not assert that they automatically know their work without conducting research. "Only with valid research can they present and advocate proposals supported by evidence and theory (Aggrey, 2009, p. 398). There might be a misconception that research in PR applies only to PR in private sectors which is "motivated by profit" (Aggrey, 2009, p. 398) and not in Government sector. Aggrey (2009) however pointed out that "research efforts must be viewed as equally important in both the public and the private sector" (2009, p. 398).

If the effectiveness of public relations departments can be attained through empirical research, then such PR effectiveness might not be fully realized in Namibia's context because "boundary spanning and environmental scanning is not part of the job description for African public relations practitioners" (Akpabio, 2009, p. 354). Conducting research in PR may have to be enforced in order for PR departments to optimally achieve their goals, because the first step to any public relations effort is to probe the opinion, attitudes and reactions of publics (Akpabio, 2009, p. 354). Like Botan & Hazleton, (2006) and many other Scholars, Akpabio (2009) also supports the use of Grunig's preferred symmetric model of communication in public relations practice.

Although, Aggrey (2009) maintained that public relations practitioners in both private and public sector should employ research, he also postulated that the organizations' motive or goals in the two sectors may play a prominent role in enforcing research in PR as a must-done. He said PR in private sector "emphazises sustained relationship with all relevant stakeholders" (Aggrey, 2009,

p. 399) whilst in government sector information management "is not necessarily based on the principle of mutuality, where the concerns of stakeholders are taken into consideration but the expediency of the organization's goals is what matters" (Aggrey, 2009, p. 400). He however asserted that government public relations programs deal with one-way communication directed to citizens.

It is argued that Governments have three things/goals in common: 1) informing citizens about the activities; 2) ensuring active cooperation and compliance with regulatory programs; 3) fostering citizens' support for established policies and programs. These goals are premised on the fact that government must keep its citizens abreast; and that it requires active citizen participation and support (Aggrey, 2009). The insinuation and conclusion on the absence of research in PR in government is that the organizational goals or objectives necessitate the research in PR.

4.13 PR as Technical or Management Function and the Integration of communication function

The Key informants stated that "PR in general is a management function because it is about managing relationships. Unfortunately the PR profession is not taken as seriously as it should but it is instead, viewed as a technical function. Similarly, the MICT itself is not among the senior Ministries in the Government which also speaks to the anchorage as PR is anchored to the portfolio which is not highly ranked. That is why PR cannot be an agile discipline in the Government as it should be".

Botan & Hazleton (2006) echoed the same sentiment that "the question of value of the public relations has been of great concern… because of the belief… that public relations is an intangible management function in comparison with other functions whose value can be described, measured and evaluated through systematic research" (p. 31). If then public relations department is regarded or viewed as 'face of the organization' as stated by one of the key informant and 'one that links the organizations with its various stakeholders' one wonders about why its value should be questioned.

One of the key informants told the researcher that the MICT will continue to advocate for the elevation of the PROs' positions because currently they are all at the levels below management. "If the senior communicator is not a manager, it is not possible for public relations to be empowered as a management function because there are no managers in the department" (Botan & Hazleton, 2006, p. 41). Wilcox & Cameron (2006) cited by Tilson (2009) echoed similar sentiment that if PR practitioners are relegated to support functions instead of discharging a strategic management role it causes them to have little knowledge of PR functions such as "research, environmental scanning, problem solving, and managing total communications strategies" (2009, p. 379). The relegation of public relations practitioners makes "organizations vulnerable to both internal and external threats…and leads to organizational crisis" (Tilson, 2009, p. 379). The PROs should be optimally and appropriately utilized to carry out their functions as heralded and implied in the PR definition which is a "management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the various publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Tilson, 2009, p. 380).

One PRO affirmed that "my functions as PRO are purely PR related, not doing other departments jobs except when they are PR related, I coordinate all PR activities from PR division". Another said that "I am acting PRO; I execute my duties as well as that of the PRO's". Grunig (2009) contested the sublimation of PR functions to other functions saying that such has adverse financial implication. As for the Namibian Government, PR functions are integrated but not "sublimated" Grunig (2009, p. 2).

PR functions in the Namibian Public Service are integrated in a single department, but those departments are manned by, mostly, "one person which results in work overload as I end up being the cameraman, scripter, photographer, driver and others" said one of the PROs, adding that "the department needs to be strengthened even with a seasonal PRO". Grunig however did not contend that the PR department should be managed by one PR practitioner but emphasized that an "excellent department integrates all public relations functions into a single department or have a mechanism to coordinate the departments responsible for different communication activities" (Grunig, 2009, p. 2).

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Summary

The Government of the Republic of Namibia continues to offer the services to the public through various O/M/As regardless the negative media reports. One of the research objective was to **determine the causes of the delays to provide responses to reporters' questions.** The study confirmed that the flow of information from the Government institutions is indeed very sluggish as alluded to by Itule and Anderson, (2008). Obviously someone should be blamed for this but it is quite intricate to pinpoint the one who is at fault.

As alluded to in the previous chapters, the study found out that the Government PROs are not the ultimate spokespersons in their respective O/M/As and they cannot disseminate information to the media and publics without authorization by the Executive Directors. As it is rightly stated by one of the journalists who attended the Government PROs at Walvis Bay, information goes through bureaucratic processes for the ED to make a decision (Tower, 1954), before it is finally released to the media. Therefore, for one to blame the PROs for delayed response to media queries could be unrealistic given the bureaucracy processes in the Government.

The study further revealed that there is no clear demarcation of responsibilities, for instance, who should be the spokesperson in O/M/As. Such confusion is also experienced by the journalists. In their search for information they contact either the PROs, or the Ministers or the Executive Directors. This is an indication that, in spite of the presence of the PROs in O/M/As, there is no designated persons in Government institutions to deal with the media.

The Government PROs are relegated to technical works. None of the Government PROs holds a management position. As public relations practitioners they should play both Strategic and Administrative Management roles (Grunig, 1992), which is very crucial as it empowers the PROs to have access and participate in the decision making and spearhead the management of PR programmes (Grunig, 2009).

To compound it all, some Government PROs have no direct access to the Executive Directors as supported by Botan, & Hazleton (2006), instead they report to other officials (Chief Control Officer, Deputy Director, Director, Deputy Executive Director) a practice which Botan, & Hazleton (2006) objected to, citing that it does not warrant any organisational effectiveness. Similarly, Grunig (2009) said PR practitioners who do not report directly to the Accounting Officers will be forced to report to other "members of the dominant coalition who have no knowledge of public relations" (p. 2).

Another disturbing findings is that 99% of the PROs do not engage in empirical research. The Excellence Theory, which underpinned this study, found out that less excellent PR departments do not conduct research (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). Although Botan & Hazleton (2006) argued that "the government PR program did not fit the pattern" because Government communication programs specifically "lobbying functions are controlled by lawyers and CEOs" (2006, p. 50) and that PR practitioners have little control over their programs, Aggrey (2009) objected the argument and pointed out that "research efforts must be viewed as equally important in both the public and the private sector" (2009, p. 398). The fact that PROs do not conduct the research makes it difficult for them to scan their environment and understand the publics' needs and expectations as stated in

Grunig (2006). This however addressed the **research's objective of finding out what causes the ineffectiveness of Government PR.**

The study noted that the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology is 88% satisfied with the PROs' performance and seeks Cabinet's intervention in addressing the plights of the PROs. The remaining 12% includes, among others, the failure of the PROs to optimally utilise the space provided for in the New Era Newspaper for O/M/As to address issues raised by the publics through the media.

Although, O/M/As failed to develop individual Communication Plans, the majority implemented the Government Communication Plan and Use of Social Media Policy effectively. They engage in various activities aimed at disseminating information to the public. Even though the literature (Grunig, 2009; Grunig, 2006; Botan & Hazleton, 2006) support the symmetrical communication model, the Namibia Civil Service does not employ the model, instead the one-way communication model dominates the Government's communication strategy as reported in Aggrey (2009). The model which the PROs use and claim to be asymmetrical model was termed as 'Pseudo-Asymmetrical model' by the researcher due to lack of empirical research in Government. O/M/As do engage the publics but do not conduct research.

Generally, there is unending war / hatred between the public relations and journalism worldwide (Sterne, 2010) and Namibia is not an exception. The journalists complained that Government PROs do not consider the reporters' due dates and that they lack knowledge of issues happening in their O/M/As. On the other hand, PROs argued that journalists have unrealistic deadlines, they distort information and that they need training on accuracy reporting.

The study confirmed that the Government PROs have little or no powers to speak to the media. Although they may speak to the media, no information is released without prior approval by the Executive Directors in line with Fitzpatrick (1947). On the other hand, the study discovered that some PROs have access to valuable information, except that they have no power to disseminate such unless authorised to do so, while some PROs have no access to valuable information at all and they are not allowed to sit in management meetings. In fact, there is no consistency in Government.

Should the Government consider the findings of this study it will be of assistance in identifying factors contributing to PR inefficiency and ineffectiveness such as: lack of proper communication of government services and causes of delay in providing feedback to the media for better improvement.

5.2 Conclusion

The study found that the Excellence Theory is regarded as a 'Dominant Paradigm' of public relations practices worldwide, but its tenets are seldomly applied by PR in Namibian Civil Service. It recommended for PR practitioners to be managers which will see the PR departments / units being headed by the managers - members of Dominant coalition – (Botan & Hazleton, 2006). Cabinet Decision of 2005 echoed similar sentiment that PROs should have a direct access to the Accounting Officers and report directly to the Executive Director (Grunig, 2009).

Regarding diversity, the PR profession is prominently inclusive of both male and female Grunig (2009). Despite Cabinet directive in 2005, O/M/As are yet to fully implement the decision. The study found that most of the PROs do not report directly to the Executive Directors, instead they report to other officials such as: Chief Control Officer; Deputy Director; Director or other "members of the dominant coalition who have no knowledge of public relations" (Grunig, 2009, p.2).

On the other hand, the research established that relegating PR functions (managerial functions) to that of support functions appears to be tantamount to disregarding the importance of PR profession. As a result, PR divisions headed by non-managers render insufficient services; at least public relations units <u>must</u> have "one senior manager who directs public relations programmes" (Grunig, 2009, p.2). The Namibian Civil Service PR division's structure may need urgent reformation for effective and improved service.

One of the findings which hampers the effective performance by the Government PROs is lack of human resource. Most of the O/M/As have one PRO who carries out all PR functions ranging from photography, scripting, video capturing and all other PR day-to-day activities.

Regarding communication of government services, PROs are doing well except that the use of Grunig's preferred model 'symmetric communication' did not come out clear, although seemed applicable only in some areas.

The one-way- communication and asymmetric communication (Grunig, 2009; Huang, 2004; Hayenhjelm, 2006; Botan, & Hazleton, 2006) dominate the PR communication in the Namibian Civil Service and top-down communication" (Etter, 2014.p.328) permeates O/M/As. However, lack of empirical research by PR is pervasive, one further wonders how PR measure their performance with only very few PROs indicating that they monitor and assess their performance for improvement.

The relationship with the media was emphasized but some PROs seem to be reactive to issues instead of proactive. Although the Government Communication Plan and Social Media Use Policy were meant to be implemented within a period of 5 years, to date, none of the O/M/As managed to cascade the Plan into their individual Ministerial Plans. During the discussions it emerged that the problem experienced in the government institutions regarding PR practice cannot be attributed to the PROs but rather to the Structure which is non-existing.

Kapitako (2013) believed that many government public relations officers are not trained hence the lack of good working relationship with the media. This study's focus was on the benchmarking of PR practice in Namibia's Civil Service with the Principles of Excellence Theory, triggered by negative reports against government PR in the media. Therefore, the allegation of Government PROs being 'untrained' could not be conferred and perhaps in future, other researchers would explore this area to ascertain the authenticity.

Although most PROs have indicated that they use two-way communication (which can be termed as 'Pseudo-asymmetrical model' because it lacks research), the public information model is rather predominant in Government institutions, given the fact that platforms where the purported two-way communication takes place such as Annual Industrial Shows, are occasional events while communication happens on daily basis. These findings support Gavrila (n.d.) who argues that the audience's answers have no follow-up, important issues remain unsolved while their questions remain unanswered, because the model used is mostly a one-way communication model.

Of course, O/M/As have implemented the Policy on the use of Social Media, but the absence of the dedicated person for solely social media, due to lack of human resource, led to the conclusion that the dialogue with the publics in Government institutions is either very limited or completely missing. As such most questions are likely to remain without answers from the PROs as Gavrila (n.d.) stated.

The research revealed that the custodian Ministry is making efforts to ensure the PROs are recognized by creating the management positions in O/M/As as well as encouraging direct reporting line for PROs to the Executive Directors.

5.3 Recommendations

Literature (Grunig et al., 2006; MacNamara, 2012; Wise, 2003) guaranteed that any PR department which practices public relations in line with the Principles of the Excellence Theory become effective. A special call directed to the PROs in Namibia Civil Service to align the practice to the tenets of the excellence Theory for best and effective PR.

When Cabinet approved the appointment of PROs in the O/M/As it directed that they should report directly to the Permanent Secretaries, now Executive Directors, but to date, only few O/M/As implemented the decision. O/M/As should put arrangement and structures in place to enable PROs who do not report directly to the EDs, to begin to do so to allow ease access to the principals.

The issue of lack of Human Resource in PR departments may be addressed now given the country's economic situation but it could be imperative if O/M/As introduce the use of seasonal PROs to assist the substantive PROs.

O'Connor et al., (2004, p. 28) acknowledged that there is a need for PR practitioners "to cooperate and exchange knowledge and ideas with fellow practitioners in order to advance the profession".

The Government PROs may therefore established a Communication Commission to exchange ideas and have the “capability to make a collective difference” (O’Connor et al., 2004, p. 28).

According to literature, as discussed in previous chapters, the empirical research is the most paramount tool which PROs may employ to scan the environment (Grunig, 2009) and determine whether or not the Government policies which are being implemented have the desired effect or impact as intended (as stated by one of the senior officials). Another senior official however stated that in Government, research is not richly sourced. It is thus discreet for the Government PR departments to engage in conducting empirical research to enable them to anticipate crisis and discover issues to be rectified before they surface.

One of the senior officials alluded to the fact that “PROs are not the ultimate spokespersons”. Speaking to the media is not one of the crucial PR functions and it ought not to be used for assessing the PRO’s performance. Speaking with the media, may be left to the discretion of the politicians and the Executive Director, though not entirely. In fact, politicians should regularly speak to the people who elected them to power.

The O/M/As may consider elevating the positions of heads of PR units to a level of a manager who will participate in decision makings and head the PR programmes.

There are numerous factors leading to negative image and reputation of either a country or an organization, of which human behavior is one. Recent reports portrayed South Africa as one of the most dangerous and unsafe countries to live in due to xenophobia attack (Mumbere, 2019); in other words human action destroyed the good image of South Africa. In the same vein, human behaviors can contribute to the enhancement or damage of an organization's image and reputation. If responsible persons decide to disregard communication with its stakeholders, people will develop different images in their minds. Therefore, PR departments should focus and put more emphasis on communication as "corporate communication is an important task in managing corporate image and reputation" (Chang & Lii, 2010, P. 6).

Namibia will soon enact Access to Information Law which aims at empowering members of the public and media practitioners to have access to timely and accurate information without any hindrance. The Government PROs should be prepared to receive unending requests for information from the media and the public. While employing reactive strategy (vital for limiting the damage) is supported by some scholars (Etter (2014), PROs must be proactive by developing articulated and comprehensive information programs (Steiner (1978), as well as examining their surroundings in order to understand the prospective challenges and develop strategies required to overcome them and succeed.

Likewise, the Government should take into account the fact that journalists work according to deadlines, therefore those mandated or responsible for information dissemination should be encouraged to do so within a reasonable time.

Journalists should consider the allegations made against them, for better reporting instead of pointing fingers to the PROs. Journalists need continuing training on accurate reporting and distortion of information"

5.4 Personal Reflection

Collecting data using the qualitative research technique especially Focus Groups and Face-to-Face interviews can be daunting and stressful for the researcher as it requires persistence, patience, determination and highly concentration, hence often times results in exhaustion. The exhaustion normally caused by the fact that the researcher has to be very much observant, listens attentively; takes notes; and pays attention in order to also capture the respondents' non-verbal communication (Fern, 1982). The researcher fatigue, if it is ignored, also can have a severe impact on the data being collected.

In addition to that, cancellation and postponement of meetings are the worst of the experiences, with the potential of disheartening and draining the researcher's energy. Appointments, especially with the working group, are hard to secure. During the study, some of the respondents who could form part of the Focus Group discussions, for whatever reasons, withdrew from participating just before the interviews, citing commitment to other assignments. On the other hand, suggested dates were not convenient to all. The withdrawal of those individuals eventually led to the cancellation of the sessions as the remaining participants could not meet the minimum number of participants required to form a Focus Group. "A Focus Group can be simply defined as a discussion in which a small number of (usually six to 12) respondents, under the guidance of a moderator, talk about the topics that are believed to be of a special importance to the investigation" (Folch-Lyon & Trost, 1981, p. 444).

The researcher was so fortunate to have attended the meeting where the Government PROs openly aired their views and opinions as well as the challenges they face. As a result, given the hurdle to get them in one room for a Focus Group discussion, the Researcher was left with no other alternative but instead opted to capitalize on the opportunity granted to attend the sessions and took minutes / notes of the discussions relevant to the research topic. In addition, a total number of twelve PROs were interviewed individually including the two top executives and two senior officials of different Ministries

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APPENDIX

Benchmarking public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the principles of the Excellence Theory

Interview Questions (MICT - Executive Director and Senior Officials)

1. Are PROs empowered enough to deliver in your ministry?
2. Is PR a management function in your ministry?
3. Is PR regarded as a technical or managerial function in your ministry? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Which model – press agentry/publicity, public information, two–way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical - predominates in your ministry's PR practice? Give reasons for your answer.
5. Are there unique PR practice that your ministry is engaged in given the context and your publics?

Benchmarking public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the principles of the Excellence Theory

Interview Questions (PROS)

1. Are all the units within the PR office or spread out to other departments?
2. Is PR a management function in your ministry?
3. Is PR regarded as a technical or managerial function in your ministry? Give reasons for your answer.
4. Which model – press agentry/publicity, public information, two–way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical - predominates in your ministry's PR practice? Give reasons for your answer.
5. What role does research play in your practice?
6. Which are the best tools/media for more effective reach of your publics?
7. Are there unique PR practice that your ministry is engaged in given the context and your publics?

Benchmarking public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the principles of the Excellence Theory

Checklist

1. Empowerment of PROs
2. Performance of a managerial role
3. Higher levels of technical expertise
4. Integration of all PR functions into a single department
5. Research-based or not
6. Model favoured - press agentry/publicity, public information, two–way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical
7. Basis - mediated or interpersonal communication
8. Activism and the environmental context of excellence
9. Involvement in strategic management

BENCHMARKING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE NAMIBIAN PUBLIC SERVICE WITH THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EXCELLENCE THEORY

Consent Form

This study seeks to benchmark public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the principles of the Excellence Theory by answering the following research question:

1. How does PR practice in the Namibian public service compare with the organization of the function as enunciated in the Excellence Theory?
2. To what extent do heads of PR departments enact managerial and/or technical roles?
3. Which of the four PR models – press agentry/publicity, public information, two–way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical - predominates in the public service practice environment?
4. What are the unique practices in the Namibian public service PR environment that will make a contribution to global theorizing on public relations?

You have been selected for this study because you oversee or manage public relations in the Namibian public service. You will be asked questions about public relations practice in the Namibian public service.

Participation is voluntary and your responses will not be credited to you except you choose otherwise. No discomfort, stress or risks are anticipated. Your participation in the study will aid the practice of public relations locally and globally.

I agree to participate in the study titled **"Benchmarking public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the principles of the Excellence Theory"** by N.T. Nambundunga of the Department of Information and Communication Studies, University of Namibia. I understand that this participation is entirely voluntary and I can withdraw my consent at any time without penalty and have the results of this participation, to the extent that they can be identified as mine, returned to me, removed from the research record or destroyed.

___________________	___________________
Researcher	Participant
Signature and Date	Signature and Date

Research at the University of Namibia that involves human participation is overseen by the Centre for Research and Publications. Questions and queries as regards your rights as a participant should be addressed to my main supervisor, Prof Eno Akpabio (eakpabio@unam.na; 061-2064794).

Research Permission Letter

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RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

Student Name: N.T. NAMBUNDUNGA

Student number: 9826068

Programme: MA (Media Studies)

Approved research title: Benchmarking public relations practice in the Namibian public service with the principles of the Excellence Theory

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I hereby confirm that the above mentioned student is registered at the University of Namibia for the programme indicated. The proposed study met all the requirements as stipulated in the University guidelines and has been approved by the relevant committees.

The proposal adheres to ethical principles as per attached Ethical Clearance Certificate. Permission is hereby granted to carry out the research as described in the approved proposal.

Best Regards

23/06/17

Date

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