STRUCTURATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE

NAMIBIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

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Abstract

This study examined public relations in the Namibian public sector from three key perspectives; the PRO, the public and the permanent secretaries who are the official accounting officers of ministries. The research sought responses from different groups of respondents who all have a role to play in PR practice in the public sector.

The purpose of the research was to bring PR practice in the public sector to the fore and highlight how the PROs carry out their tasks in the public sector where productivity is often hampered by political factors and issues of hierarchy. The views of the Permanent Secretaries were gauged in order to gain insight into the PR practice in government from management's perspective.

The methodology used in the research was a mixture of qualitative and quantitative approaches. A survey was conducted for the larger sample of the study which was the public at large and focus group discussions and interviews were used to obtain the views of PROs, Permanent Secretaries and one Director of Information and Research.

The major findings were that there is a lack of emphasis placed on the importance of Public Relations (PR) in the public sector in Namibia; this prohibits PROs in the public sector from successfully carrying out their tasks and fulfilling the communication needs of government and the public. Effective PR is essential and especially so for the public sector in a democratic state. The electorate need to hold the leaders accountable and communication plays a big role in this accountability.

This research is significant because it creates a window into the PR function in the public sector; some respondents alluded to PR being new in government and especially in certain ministries. The research can thus act as a catalyst for PROs, the general public and the management of the public sector to improve public communication for the good of all the stakeholders.

Based on these, the study calls for PROs in the public sector to be more proactive in terms of carrying out their tasks and equipping themselves with knowledge about their employer in order to assist the public when the need arises. They should also not shy away from certain responsibilities but instead embrace every opportunity as a chance to learn and improve

Public sector management should empower PROs more often by involving them in management meetings so that they are aware of the strategic decisions made in their workplace, additionally management should re-look at the red tape that prevents PROs from pronouncing themselves publicly on issues concerning their OMA.

The general public ought to increase their efforts of retrieving information from OMAs as access to information about public offices is essential for them to be active citizens and understand what their rights and responsibilities as citizens are.

Table of contents

List of figures

Dedication

I dedicate this research to my beloved late mother, Edith David**.**

Acknowledgement

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the almighty God for the opportunity and wisdom to further my studies. I would also like to acknowledge my research supervisors for the advice and guidance throughout my entire research process, especially my main supervisor Prof. Akpabio. I would also like to acknowledge my family and my friends, especially Taimi , Lucia , Anna Marie and Melissa for their unwavering encouragement and support.

Declaration

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Aurelia David   Date: October 2017

CHAPTER 1

ORIENTATION OF THE STUDY

1.1   Introduction:

This chapter provides details on the background of the study and the purpose of carrying out the study. The significance of the study, along with its objectives, are also highlighted in this chapter.

1.2   Background of the study

Namibia is currently two years into a new government. President Hage Geingob, who was sworn in as the country's third president, brought with him many changes,   including four new ministries and two deputy ministers for some of the ministries. The president constantly touches on accountability and transparency as one of the core values of his administration. For accountability to occur, there must be transparency, and transparency is aided by open communication, something which should be facilitated by PROs. Given that PR is a relatively new discipline in the Namibian public sector, few studies on the subject of government PR exist.

PR is essential, especially in these new ministries as the public needs to get a proper understanding of the functions of these ministries, and likewise the ministries need to be in tune with the needs of their public. In the Namibian public sector, certain ministries have only recently set up a PR department, and as one of the respondents of this study narrated, the importance of the function has immediately been recognised.

This is because public administrators have an obligation to the public due to the democratic context in which they operate public reporting; external communication and publicity to accomplish democratic accountability are inherent in the activities of government agencies and public service managers (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999; lee, 2001). Lee (2001) argues that while all the staff members in public institutions bear this responsibility, the obligation largely falls on the

specialized staff that has emerged as a sub-profession in public administration and deals routinely with the mainstream media

Interestingly, PR practice has assumed a significant role in the Namibian public service (Mutambo, 2014). He argues that despite the establishment of the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology (MICT) to harmonise the communication function in Namibia under one umbrella, communication remains painstakingly uncoordinated and fragmented across government institutions.

Mutambo notes that ministries still disseminate their own media releases, sometimes without the knowledge of the designated PRO. This lack of coordination often leads to PROs coming across as incompetent when they are contacted by the media and have no knowledge of pressing issues.

This can be attributed to the fact that in the past permanent secretaries and ministers served as the official spokespersons for ministries and other government offices and agencies before the appointment of public relations officers.

The confusing state of affairs in government communication reflects a concern of structuration which is "a process in which unintended consequences of action create norms, rules, roles, and other social structures that constrain or affect future action." (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011, p. 310).
The present study seeks to explore this complex communication scenario using the tenets of the structuration theory as a backdrop.

This research will look at the different ways in which the public sector PROs interact with the public and how the pubic perceive these interactions. The situation in the public sector is unique from contemporary organisation, hence this study will also explore how PROs in the public sector operate given their unique working environment and the bureaucracy that is often prevalent in the public sector.

Namibia has been a democracy for the past 27 years. As stated above, responsiveness is required from elected officials in a functioning democracy. The officials in the case of this study are the PROs. This study will look at the role of these PROs in a democratic society, as they are appointed to serve as the link between the government and its people. They have an important role to play in building the Namibian house. The research aims to establish whether they are fulfilling this role to the best of their abilities and whether the public is aware of its roles and responsibility in government PR as citizens of a democracy.

On 13 June 2017, minister of information and communication technology Tjekero Tweya tabled the government communication plan and social media use policy in the national assembly. In his motivating speech, Tweya said inter alia, the following: "The ministry of information and communication technology is mandated to coordinate information management within government and as such progress has been made in seeking better and innovative ways of making information accessible to our citizens. Hence a pillar on effective governance and service delivery was included in the Harambee Prosperity Plan (HPP). (Government communication plan and social media use policy motivation speech, 2017 P.4)

This pillar aims to improve accountability and transparency with the purpose of enhancing service delivery to the public. Through this pillar, the HPP therefore necessitated the need for government through the MICT to develop a communication plan for aligning the functions of public relations, media, information and liaison officers to their core function of information dissemination. This is with a purpose of providing unfettered access to public information and it will go a long way in enhancing the way government and its agencies manage and share public information with the public. The plan also outlines clear functions of public relations officers with the aim of creating a generic mindset by all those assigned to carry out this function.

In this regard, all Offices, Ministries and Agencies (OMA), regional councils and local authorities will be required to ensure that public information is made easily accessible to the public within a reasonable time. Therefore through this plan, public relations officers in all OMAs, regional councils and local authorities are expected to pro-actively communicate information on government programmes, policies and projects to internal and external stakeholders timeously" (Tweya, P 2.2017).

The researcher believes that the tabling of this bill is a step in the right direction for the effectiveness of government PR and it demonstrates the importance of information dissemination to the public, something that is at the crux of this study.

Tweya has in the past made public his desire to have PROs in government ministries and agencies empowered in order to frequently disseminate information to the public. Addressing a meeting of management cadres and PROs of all government offices and agencies at Ongwediva in 2015, Tweya said relevant government information should be distributed to the public in a timely manner (Ashipala, 2015).

The author further stated that the minister declared that information is meant for the public and it is not justifiable for the accounting officers to make it exclusive for themselves. According to Tweya, members of the public will make informed decisions once they are well informed about government programmes and/or activities at all times. Tweya urged the accounting officers to refrain from the tendency of blocking information that is meant for the public, adding that members of the public would revolt against the government when information concerning government activities does not reach them on time.

At a separate workshop for regional and local authority PROs held at Otjiwarongo, Tweya told the civil servants to promote accountability and transparency through information dissemination to the general public, using website**s** and social media. He said the public must have electronic access to public policies, statements, decisions and regulations passed by regional and local authority councillors (Nakale, 2015).

1.3   Statement of the problem

Prior to the recent appointment of public relations officers in certain ministries in the Namibian public service, permanent secretaries, ministers and directors were considered the official spokespersons of the ministries.   The role of public relations officers in government is not clearly defined**.** This often leads to miscommunication of messages to the public which can have adverse consequences.   These consequences may not be immediately apparent because of *distanciation* − where effects of an act are separated from everyday action based on time and space (Littlejohn & Foss, 2011).

Hence this study intends to explore the impact of the communication environment in the public service at the site of conception, implementation and reception as a first step towards redress. This means from the point of view of management (conception), PROs (implementation) and the public**s** (reception) to determine the impact (or otherwise) of government communication.

1.4   Objectives of the study

-to explore attitude of ministry management to public relations and communication with the public;

-to shed light on how public relations officers in government perform their functions given the changes in the communication environment;

-to determine public attitude to government communication;

- to determine perception of and attitude towards public relations officers by the public.

1.5   Significance of the study

Public relations is a significant function of organisations and government institutions are no exception. The present study is significant because upon successful completion, it will help shed light on the role of PROs in the public service given the changes in the communication environment, determine the attitude of ministries' management to public communication and offer an assessment of public attitude to government communication. The findings of this study can thus bring about changes in government public relations in Namibia by highlighting issues that require attention and improvement. The study could also serve as a benchmark or reference for future researchers who might show an interest in this topic or topics similar to this one.

 Many public relations practitioners count communication and strategy as the most valuable skills in their field. But in practice, one cannot put those skills to good use without a foundation of research and information gathering. It's important to know a client's needs, target market, and available resources in order to draw up a good PR plan: (*The importance of research,* 2016)

 Hence this study will assist in establishing the needs of the public as the general public are also respondents in the study and the researcher can establish their stance on PR in the Namibian government.

The study will contribute to literature on government public relations which the researcher found generally hard to come by, with most literature focusing on corporate PR. The voice of the public needs to be heard at the policy table, hence PR communication needs to be built into the policy process from conception.

1.6   Limitations of the study

The secrecy culture of the public service as well as unwillingness of employees to criticise the system are possible limitations. This will be obviated by promising participants confidentiality.

1.7 Delimitation of the study

The focus of the study will be an audit of communication in government ministries only, hence the study does not cater for state-owned enterprises and the organised private sector.

1.8   Definitions of terms

 public relations -   a distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communications, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues ; helps management to keep informed on and responsive public opinion; defines and emphasizes the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilise change, serving as an early warning to help anticipate trends, and uses research and sound and ethical communication techniques as its principal tools (Seitel, 2014)

public relations officer- someone whose job is to build a good reputation for an organization and manage its relationship with the public (Cambridge, 2015)

public sector- those parts of the economy that are either in state ownership or under contract to the state (Flynn, 2007)

 Government- the organization, machinery, or agency through which a political unit exercises authority and performs functions and which is usually classified according to the distribution of power within it a few. *meriam webster online*

Permanent secretary-a permanent secretary is the most senior civil servant in a department. Each supports the government minister at the head of the department, who is accountable to parliament for the department's actions and performance. The permanent secretary is the accounting officer for their department, reporting to parliament. They are responsible for the day-to-day running of the department, including the budget. (Our governance, 2017)

Pressure groups- a group of people who share an interest, concern, or set of opinions and who try to influence politics or the policies of government, business, etc. *meriam webster online*

Chapter 2

Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1   Introduction

This chapter gives a detailed review of the literature surrounding the research title, with special emphasis at the methodologies and theories used in   previous studies. The chapter also gives an overview of the theoretical framework applied in the study.

This literature review places emphasis on structuration in the public sector and how it impacts the role of the PR practitioner, public attitude towards government communication, how public relations officers in government perform their functions given changes in their working environment and the attitude of public officials to the PR function.

2.2   Understanding public relations

 Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies policies and procedures of an individual or organization with the public interest and plans and executes a programme of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (Heise, 1985). Public relations

has also been defined by (Warnaby, Vercic & Moss, 2008)   as the art and social science of analyzing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders and implementing planned programmes of action, which will serve both the organisation and public interests.

Ocksiutyz, (2015) stated that public relations in a democratic context enables open**,** accessible and transparent dialogue between a diverse group of participants through relationship-building and the promotion of trustworthy and open communication**.**

This type of practice from public sector PROs is likely to contribute to the lack of credibility and relevance placed on the PRO in the public sector. It is evident in Namibia that PROs in the public sector are not viewed as credible, even more so by their own managers (ministers and directors). An example of this was observed in 2016 when Tweya argued that the government should censor the media, and they would seriously consider doing so (Kahuruika P.3). Tweya insisted that a statutory body be set up to watch over the media, noting that**:**

2.3 The history and status of public relations in Africa

Skinner (1994) noted that public relations can be traced far back in history as not one well-known culture can be named in which men and women did not operate professionally in the service of kingdom and church and for the maintenance of important relations. He argues that the application of some public relations techniques goes back to the dawn of civilization. In ancient Egypt, for instance, the pharaohs proclaimed their achievements through word-pictures on impressive monuments. Skinner used a literature survey in order to establish a framework of theoretical perspectives regarding the following:

- The evolution of the global information society and its influence on communications policy and practice;

- The impact of these developments on communication, and in particular on the nature, role and importance of the PR profession;

- The paradigms of PR as an art, science or set of techniques;

- The various approaches to social investment research and social responsibility;

- Analysis of South African companies in the latter context

In his quest to address his essential problem of the study - which was the question of legitimacy and the so-called place of PR in society, the author made use of conceptualization (which involved the literature review mentioned above), personal interviews with PR practitioners and three case studies. Very little has been documented about the practice of PR in developing countries, which also holds true for those in Africa.

Van Heerden & Rensburg (2005) posit that PR practitioners, especially those in African countries such as South Africa and Nigeria with a well-developed public relations infrastructure, have a responsibility not only to the global PR society but also the practitioners in other less developed countries on the continent. This responsibility includes the empowerment of African PR practitioners with the necessary knowledge and skills to serve their societies, to build PR theory and to contribute to the understanding of PR in Africa. They noted that in ancient Greece, the leaders showed a thorough understanding of the value of communication by word of mouth to persuade people to a certain line of action.

Akpabio (2009) argues that ancient roots of public relations on the African continent can be found in the town crier, gatherings in the public square and the rhetoric of chiefs. Aggrey (2009) added that it is difficult to pinpoint when the practice of public relations started in Ghana. This he attributed to the lack of appreciation and knowledge of the field.

Meanwhile (Rensburg& Cant 2009) posits that in South Africa, public relations also goes back decades, if not centuries. Parallels between the task of PR practitioner and that of a spokesman at the chief's seat of power in traditional South African villages have been drawn. It is claimed that no African chief or elder statesman spoke directly to a visitor. He further stated that all communication was channelled through a spokesman who assumed eminent position in the society and was highly respected by the people and this is still the case in some remote and rural areas of modern-day South Africa.

 The authors added that public relations is also expressed in the use of traditional music, dancing and beating drums to communicate to the inhabitants of African villages. All in all, the concept of PR is neither alien nor a practice that arrived with colonialism, commercialization, or western media imperialism - it has been around on the African continent in a different format for centuries. The field of PR in South Africa can be characterized by search for identity, legitimacy and professional recognition, and its role is shaped by the dynamics of an ever-changing and developing society.

  According to Keenan (2009), the beginnings of modern mass media in Egypt date back to 1798, when the first mass circulation newspaper in Alexandria was established by Napoleon Bonaparte. He notes that today, the Egyptian press consists of national daily and weekly newspapers and regional publications centered in the larger cities. Most media are in Arabic (the official language of Egypt), but there are also a daily and weekly newspapers in English, and a daily newspaper in French.

Furthermore, the author found that the PR profession is continuously growing in Egypt. Some obstructions remain that will constrain the growth, and it is not likely that Egyptian PR will ever mirror the western model completely. However, as the economy continues to move in towards privatisation and as the Egyptian government, culture and the media become more welcoming of

the conditions that accompany the privatisations, PR will find an environment where it is increasingly welcome and necessary.

2.4   Public relations and the public sector

Studies on public sector communication are still limited (Liu and Horsley, 2007) despite the fact that communications about policies, initiatives and activities have an important role in democratic societies. It is believed, in fact, that informed citizens can make reasoned choices and participate in policy discussions and public decisions (Thomas, 1995).   According to (Heise, 1985) most of the studies on public sector communication focused on country and/or institution-based government communications and practices.

These investigations show that civil servants working in information and communication often deal with: Monitoring media coverage, briefing and advising political officials, managing media relations, informing the public directly, sharing information across the administration and formulating communication strategies and campaigns, and researching and assessing public opinion (Lee, 2001).

 According to Fitzpatrick**,** (1948)**,** the process of government sometimes appears to consist of a continuing controversy between the administrators and the public. Nevertheless, it is generally accepted that whenever the American people are properly informed of governmental activities, they are more likely to understand what is being done, and why. He added that when this is achieved, the job of the government administrator is less miss- apprehended and the abuse heaped upon him less violent. In addition, the average citizen is stimulated to cooperate with the administrator and to comply with the law more willingly. This is the reason for the existence of the government information officer.

The public sector is defined by Flynn (2007) as those parts of the economy that are either in state ownership or under contract to the state.   Botan & Hazelton (2006) posit that PR theory and

practice have the unique potential to change, create and maintain relationships between citizens and governments. The authors found that when communication and PR are viewed as tools for creating and maintaining nationally, then the nation state emerges as a truly communicatively constructed system.

The authors added that PR can be used to improve citizens' lives and promote democracy in the developing world. They stated that this can be done through literacy campaigns using PR strategies and tactics to empower the uneducated and offer them opportunities to participate in the political process.

Kim and Yang (2008) adopted content analysis of an international newspaper and a government publication to examine the influence of newsworthiness and PR efforts on international news coverage. They found that government public relations directly and indirectly affects a country's credibility to other countries, and can cause an important gain or loss in political and economic relations with other countries.

L'e tang (2009) adds to the importance of public sector PR by describing PR as the occupation held responsible for the management or improvement of organisational relationships and reputation. It encompasses issues of management, public affairs, corporate communications, stakeholder relations, risk communication, and corporate social responsibility. PR, according to the author, operates on behalf of many different types of organisation both at the governmental and corporate levels and embraces small business and voluntary sectors.

She further posits that PR practitioners have an intercultural role, both between organizational cultures and within increasingly multicultural contexts. PR arises at points of societal change and resistance. PR is the discursive and relational function present in public communication processes, visible and invisible. Power has political, economic, cultural, and religious dimensions, and elite status that facilitates media access. Relationships with and ability to

influence, local, national, and international media agendas are of crucial importance in shaping public discourse.

The elevation of PR to the level of a scientific discipline and securing its recognition as an integral part of modern management is a major problem. These are the views of (Sarkhedi, 2016) who added that it is, per se a difficult task, because the results of PR cannot often be immediately measured in concrete terms, but only in the long run, and at a moments of crisis. PR for public enterprises is a far more difficult task.

The author further added that the public sector in the past has ignored even the communication aspect of public relations. Adverse criticism has made top management and government aware of the need at least to provide information. However, this information must also be valid and relevant to the people concerned. He concluded by emphasising that the information must be available at the right place and the right time.

2.4.1 Exploring the attitude of ministry management to public relations and communication with the public

Liu and Horsley (2007), reviewed the public sector environment literature and identified, attributes that affect government public relations: Politics, focus on serving the public, legal constraints, extreme media and public scrutiny, lack of managerial support for public relations practitioners, poor public perception of government communication, lagging professional development, and federalism. According to Seitel (2014), the public relations function should by definition report to top management, arguing that if PR is truly to be the interpreter for management philosophy, policy and programmes, then the PR director should report to the CEO. In many organisations, this reporting relationship is not the case. PR is often subordinated to advertising, marketing, legal or human resources. The reporting relationship in the Namibian

public sector is a complicated one, which often makes it challenging for the PRO to perform their task effectively.

According to Mutambo (2014), little recognition is accorded to public relations in the public sector. He argues that where such a PR position is incorporated in a particular institution's structures, it is often used as a crisis management tool, not as a strategic management function. Few government institutions allow their communication practitioners to form part of the management meetings. This, he said, strips this important function of the armour of information they need to successfully defend their institutions or the first-hand information to discharge their functions in a manner that adds value to the organisation.

Mutambo further argues that public relations professionals in managerial positions experience the following problems with people who apply for PR positions: Lack of critical thinking, poor grammar and editing skills, lack of ability to grasp new things that are not within the scope of PR, and lack of ability to conduct environmental scanning to find communication gaps or issues that can potentially harm the organization.

In a key note address at a workshop for PROs, Tweya urged government officials to stop depriving the public of information it is entitled to.

According to (Nakale, 2015), Tweya, stated that some PROs sit on questions put to them by the media or members of public, or literally refuse to give out information concerning government's developmental projects. He said the situation is sometimes caused by permanent secretaries and other senior government officials, who refuse to share public information with PROs. Tweya, added that the PROs need the full support and cooperation of management to reach out to the public.

He emphasized that PR is about managing reputations, gaining understanding and support for clients, as well as trying to influence opinion and behaviour, however, the minister added that the PROs should also understand the purpose, or objective, of their organisations to convey the correct message about the organisations to the public effectively.

With regards to the management, Tweya said the following; "The management needs to understand the environment in which PROs are functioning and also allow them to execute their responsibilities with their blessings.

The ICT minister urged PROs to stop the tendency of withholding information meant for public consumption, because people sitting in public offices have a mandate to promote unfettered access by the media to public information.

Tweya urged the PROs to refrain from saying that they cannot respond to the public. He added that PROs should bear in mind that they are employed in a public office and they should thus report to the public as the public is entitled to the information they have.

Sarkhedi, (2016) posits that PR is still considered a fire-brigade operation and just a communication problem. This limited understanding of PR permeates practically every gathering of public relations practitioners. He added that, as a result, there is very little discussion on problems, policies and practical aspects of public relations activities. On the other hand, there is a great deal of whining and moaning about the lack of status for PR practitioners and non-recognition of their importance by management.

2.4.2 How public relations officers in government perform their functions given the changes in the communication environment

Theaker (2004) posits that working in the public sector is a challenging area of PR. As well as all the normal legal, ethical and technical considerations, public sector PR involves a greater range of stakeholders than in the private sector. These stakeholders are more likely to have overlapping characteristics. She added that a local council is often the largest employer in its community, so residents may be employees, council tax payers and recipients of a vast range of services - from education for their children to refuse collection.

Finally the author found that public services such as the fire brigade, ambulance and police; involve a highly emotive level and their work is complicated by questions of funding and national governmental policy over which they may have limited control. Similarly, (Mares, 2013) posits that authority and responsibility in the government tends to be asymmetric while authority and responsibility in the private sector are more clearly balanced. Responsibility in the government can be enormous while authority is frequently quite limited. Authority in government may be ambiguous and unclear in some circumstances. In other cases, it is very clear and tightly restricted through laws, regulations, policies and directives that leave little, if any, room for individual initiative.

Holtzhausen (2009) stated that a post-modern analysis of public relations offers a new critical approach to public relations theory and practice and suggests that public relations should be freed from its narrow definition as organizational communication management. She added that public relations can contribute to grassroots democracy through activism and radical politics. In their quest to identify the common challenges and opportunities faced by government pros, Liu and Levenshaus (2007) conducted in depth interviews with 49 PROs who identified eight primary communication challenges and opportunities faced by government public relations practitioners in the US. These are: Politics; the authors found that politics includes both external and internal

influences that affect government communicators' daily activities. Although corporations face internal and external politics, government organisations are defined by them.

Public good and poor perception was the second challenge identified by the authors who stated that public relations is not only about listening to the publics to better adapt to their interests in the way that companies do, but it focuses on meeting the needs of the public. Legal frameworks was the third challenge identified by the authors who posit that legal constraints often limit governments' ability to communicate fully and openly.

Media scrutiny was also singled out as a challenge for public sector PROs by the authors who stated that public sector organisations face greater media scrutiny than private sector ones. According to the authors, federalism is also a challenge for the PROs. They stated that US government communicators work within a system of federalism, which is a complex system of organisation in which the federal government oversees and creates policy for programmes that are actually implemented by state, county, and city agencies.

This, they said, can often lead to state and federal agencies communicating on issues that sometimes overlap jurisdictionally. Finally, the authors identified devaluation of communication as a challenge   for public sector PR. They posit that historically management tends to devalue government communication's importance. Repercussions include the early elimination of communication positions during agency budget cuts, leaving unskilled communicators to fill the void.

In an article in the Economist newspaper**,** Mutambo stated the following: "The PR industry in Namibia is still in its teething phase and the public relations institute of southern Africa

committee would like to put a few concrete building blocks in place in the near future to professionalize the industry and ensure that public relations practitioners in both the public and private sector get the recognition that befits the profession" (Ngulu, 2016 p2).

Mutambo (2014) added that PR officers should be allowed to conduct research in order to add value to their function and ministry. These sentiments are echoed by (English, 2000) who said that research is the foundation of effective public relations. She further added that quite simply, without research, one cannot demonstrate the efficacy of their programmes.

2.4.3 Determining public attitude to government communication

According to Johnson (2017), public relations may benefit from a deeper understanding of the complexity of the public interest and the ways in which it is viewed and adopted in other disciplines in order to more robustly connect with democratic processes and social change agendas. This is more so because the concept of public interest has failed to attract public relations scholars in the same way it has other disciplines. Hence as Bagnall (2011) notes regarding the UK, "there is an important principle that a PR officer working in government may inform and explain but that it is the role and responsibility of elected representatives to defend and justify". Consequently, it is unusual for government PR officers to go on public record on issues where media questioning may touch on the rights or wrongs of government actions and policy (although they may brief the media on the background and factual details surrounding it). Bagnall is of the view that this does not apply in the private sector, where PR representatives are often called upon to act as media spokespersons on issues that put their organisations in the media spotlight (especially if the issue has the potential for negative publicity and requires a professional response), neither does it apply to PR advisors directly hired by politicians and their

political parties who are not only free to praise their party's policies but are often very well paid for doing so.

"Going forward, the ministry of information and communication technology will insist and drive the agenda that a statutory body should be created as a matter of urgency to ensure that the media is held responsible in the event that they abuse their power to report, write and broadcast, and make themselves guilty of defamation and slander of people's character in public, and get away with murder. This tendency must come to an end'' (Kahuruika, p3)**.**

The president, however, did not support the line minister's stance and was quoted as saying the following: "Information minister Tjekero Tweya has created a furor with comments about media regulation in the country , the minister's remarks are not the stance of cabinet".

Salor (2002) conducted an impression management study on what the public thinks about public relations. He found that motives play a large role in how people view public relations. This was attributed to the notion that PR often attempts to serve two masters: The employer or sponsor and the public. It was also discovered in the study that the self-interest and intentionality components of public relations advocacy may cause the reputation of the profession to be diminished under some conditions.

Mcnair (1996) argues that public relations in the public sector remains hidden from public view. He notes that governments have become custodians of a vast machinery of suppressing, censoring and at times falsifying information which the citizens of a country have the right to receive in an unadulterated form. Hence the people believe that there is something intrinsic and

one-sided about PR that calls its reputation into question. This brings to the fore the issue of credibility in public sector PR.

A clear and transparent public communication is essential for successful public organisation in order to get the message through and disseminate information to all accessible channels. Yet, media and general public are critical to the messages coming from public sector at a glance (Cacarun, 2017). The author adds that it could be argued that messages are often being misinterpreted and even misleading for the final beneficiary – the citizen. In those situations, a thought of placing an advertisement in mass media sounds as an inevitable and even wise option. However, this is rarely realized.

2.4.4 Determining perception of and attitude towards public relations officers by the public

Castelli (2007) conducted a quantitative study on government public relations practitioner's roles. She found that governmental organizations have a need for a good public relations campaign because they suffer from a lack of confidence from the public. She found out that only 42% of Americans trust the government to do what is right and local government agencies enjoy the most trust and confidence when compared to state and federal levels. In addition, only 6% of the public expressed a significant level of trust and confidence in local government. These findings show a general distrust or lack of faith from the public in public sector PROs, albeit from an American perspective. To ensure a better relationship, Goodsell (1994) suggested that public administrators should plan events for citizens to obtain their input as well as have dialogue with them, rather than wait for a concerned groups to initiate the conversation.

South African scholar Hopkins (2015) posits that when politicians attempt to communicate their views in the public forum, the public view it as a prerequisite of the democratic process. The researcher believes that this may put the public relations practitioners in government in a tough

predicament because the public may not take their communication seriously or regard it as relevant.

The author added that most ministries have a special group called activists. These groups are an integral part of the public relations function of any organisation as they help public relations practitioners gain legitimacy and increase their usefulness to their organization when activist pressure is present. Grunig and Grunig (1997) claim that pressure from activists stimulates an organization to develop excellent PR departments.

Smith and Ferguson (2001) point out that interacting with activist groups is something that many organizations try to resist and that activists are often viewed and treated as threats to the organization. Castelli (2007) is of the view that building and fostering relationships may help build confidence in today's local municipalities.

Shergold (2008) stated that freedom of information acts must mean exactly what their titles claim, as they do in the better democracies. Only in the most exceptional circumstances should anyone have the power to deny information on the grounds that it is not in the public interest. Sembor (1993) argues that low public involvement in a democracy has been viewed as symptomatic of a serious democratic deficiency on the part of the citizenry. It has also been seen as an indicator of a low level of confidence in the electoral process and elected leaders. A way to correct this is to develop a transparency model for government communications. Fairbanks, Plowman and Rawlins (2007) interviewed several federal government communicators and found that the majority recognized the need for and benefits of transparency and believed that it is essential to a functioning democracy.

Although many government communicators valued transparency, their model posits that there were other factors that influence the practice, namely the communication practices of the agency, the organizational support for transparency, and whether there are adequate resources. Many communicators, in their study, expressed concern about how to determine how much information to release. There was a fear of releasing too much information and that it was often safer to be more conservative with messages, unless there was strong organizational support for transparency. At the same time, transparency requires significant resources: Upkeep of web pages, responding to requests, and working with media requires additional time, personnel and money.

2.4.5   Importance of public relations in the public sector

PR is an essential and integrated component of public policy or service. The professional public relations activity will ensure the benefit to the citizens for whom the policies or services are meant for (Palaniappan & Ramachandraiah, n.d). The authors identified that government public relations contribute to implementation of public policy, assisting the news media in coverage of government activities, reporting the citizenry on agency activities. Increasing the internal cohesion of the agency, increasing the agency's sensitivity to the publics and mobilisation of support for the agency itself.

Debussy and Ewing (1995) posit   that contemporary organisations rely on a wide range of publics or stakeholder groups in order to achieve their corporate objectives. The specific publics involved vary from organisation to organisation and situation to situation but typically include customers/clients, end users, shareholders/investors, employees, suppliers, governments, pressure groups, local communities and the media. Unresolved conflicts between organisations and any

one or a number of these can seriously compromise the achievement of marketing and other corporate objectives.

According to Meyer (2011), public relations in the public sector is important because it guides public policy change and reform. More so as public administrators can be considered the link between the public and policy makers.

She argues that to operate effectively, public administrators should consider the public's desires and concerns.

Good communication skills can help public administrators engage with members of the public in debates and discussions, and the issues raised during these exchanges can then be discussed with policy makers. Additionally, Meyer states that while the policy makers may not always act exactly as the public would like, the public can feel satisfied that policy decisions occur when information flows freely. Thus public relations helps persuade decision makers to enact change, good communication takes the concepts developed by a public administrator and turns them into a reality.

 She further adds that good communication can be persuasive and powerful, not only imparting knowledge, but also turning the listener around to the speaker's way of thinking.   Hopkins (2015) found that government cannot take a stand on a particular issue if there is no awareness or interest among its citizenry. This subsequently creates an ideal environment for the government to start the communicative process on an issue affecting the public. Some believe that, in addition to informing the public, government public relations should also influence public opinion.

Turney (2009) emphasized the importance of government PR by stating that government communicators can and do make life or death differences in people's lives. For instance, needy people who learn they're eligible for free food or medical care by reading government produced and distributed brochures for Food Stamps, the Women, Infants and Children (WIC)

Supplementary Food Program, the Surplus Commodity Distribution Program, Medicare, or Medicaid; victims saved from further abuse, or even death, because television public service announcements about child abuse, spouse abuse, and elder abuse publicized toll-free hotlines and encouraged people to use them for reporting abuse

2.5 Theoretical framework

2.5.1   Structuration theory

The way in which the public views PROs resonates with the symbolic interaction theory, which according to (Crossman, 2017) suggests that people are motivated to act based on the meanings they assign to people, things and events. Anthony Giddens' theory of structuration has been very influential in the social sciences for his analysis of the relationship between structure and agency. The underlying concepts of the theory are   power, identity   and social systems. Central to the theory of structuration is the concept of "structure'', a concept which Giddens described as not having any physical existence but is rather manifested through routinised activities, involving the application of rules and manipulation of resources (Ma, 2010 p.2).

The ontological appeal of Giddens' structuration theory lies in the definition of structuration as the structuring of social relations across time and space in virtue of the duality of structure (Giddens, 1986). Giddens argues that structuration theory views the subjectivity and objectivity of social realities as equally important. He adds that according to structuration theory, cultural

context is generated and regenerated through the interplay of action and structure. It recognises that we actively shape the world that we live in at the same time as it shapes us .

This theory ties in well with the study, with the researcher aiming to discover how PROs in the public sector perform their functions and to what extent they have influence in a highly structured government setting.

According to Frey (1994) structuration theory is lauded for the fact that it examines structures in action by focusing on the structuring process. Thus, attention is on small group interaction and how group members appropriate, adapt, create, and maintain rules and resources. Secondly, structuration theory is applicable to a variety of small groups, not just those who perform decision-making and problem-solving functions. In this way, structuration theory can help us understand an array of small groups, from corporate committee to self-help groups. Thirdly, structuration theory takes into account environmental forces that may impinge on group processes. The author added that in spite of its strengths, structuration theory suffers from several weaknesses as well.

First, structuration theory to date has not provided a way of predicting which circumstances will result in the development of particular structures. That is, structuration theory is largely descriptive in nature. Second, because structures are both system producers and the outcome of systems, it is difficult to research structuration in small groups. Researchers must examine group member communication as they put structures into action, as well as the structure that arises from that interaction. Third, the very definition of structuration implies that group structures change over time. Finally, Frey alluded that it is often difficult to pinpoint which structural changes occurred and when by examining group interaction on a day-to-day basis. Finally, the author states that research in structuration theory relies primarily on case studies.

Structuration theory can be adapted to individual cases, but because it is flexible, it is difficult to make generalizations based on structuration theory. Sean (2005) made some criticisms of the structuration theory by pointing out that renowned sociology professor Magrath Archer suggested an alternative theory called morphogenesis. She implicates structuration theory for combining individual agency and social structure into a single recursive relationship that subsumes individualist and structuralist theories without providing an operational methodology. She suggested that Giddens' duality structure cast too wide a net, which inappropriately captures the contradictory entities of hyperactive agents and inviolable structure.

This study will apply Giddens' structuration theory which according to (Gibbs, (2014) offers perspectives on human behaviour based on a synthesis of structure and agency effects known as the duality of structure. Instead of describing the capacity of human action as being constrained by powerful stable societal structures (such as educational, religious, or political institutions) or as a function of the individual expression of will (i.e., agency), structuration theory acknowledges the interaction of meaning, standards, values and power, and posits a dynamic relationship between these different facets of society.

Lipuner and Werner (2009) described structuration theory as a collective term denoting approaches of social theory that describe the making and maintenance of social order without giving priority to either side of social theory's classical opposition; that is, structure and agency. Additionally, they stated that in order to dissolve this dichotomy, structuration theory focuses on social praxis as a structured and structuring production of social reality. One of the most important applications of this theory to information systems lies in the recognition of structure and agency as 'duality' – making clear the distinctions between structure and agency yet recognising them as dependent upon each other (Giddens, 1986).

Heath, Houston and Motion (2010) found that, viewed from a structuration perspective, public relations has been championed for its ability to help connect or disconnect organisations and individuals to power structures, whether internal, local or global. Structuration theorists argue that groups and organizations create structures which can be interpreted as an organization's rules and resources. These structures, in turn, create social systems in an organization. Structuration theorists posit that groups and organizations achieve a life of their own because of the way their members utilize their structures. The authors add that power structures guide the decision making taking place in groups and organizations.

The theory of structuration ties in well with the study because it is concerned with order and routines, something which is at the crux of this study in terms of the role of the PRO in the public sector and to what extent they hold influence and are allowed to overcome barriers and routines in their respective ministries.

Structuration theory is applied in accounting research, information systems research, management research, integrated care and knowledge management. Applying structuration theory involves identifying all components of a system, describing the relationship between them and describing how they work together (Lock, 2013).

Structuration and public relations

According to Falkheimer (2007) structuration theory has advantages as well as disadvantages when it comes public relations. PR is a communicative structuration force, transgressing the constructed borders in and between organisations and society that either may reproduce or transform social structures. On the other hand, he added that structuration theory could be valuable as one part of a constructionist and communicative turn in public relations theoretical development.

Falkheimer further posits that structuration theory challenges the modernist notion of organizations and society as two different stable systems as well as the division into internal and external communication. The author continues by adding that the systems perspective analyses organizations as organisms and assumes that the survival of an organization is enhanced or constrained by consequences of the actions of its conflicting or relevant publics.

Shotter (1993) posits that structuration theory is not in total opposition with the systems perspective, but has closer links to constructionist, cultural and critical perspectives. He further added that one difference is that structuration describes rather than prescribes the role of public relations. A second difference alluded to by the author is that the theory does not view organisations as stable, rather as dynamic and transforming. Finally, he found that the organisational as well as societal structures are produced and reproduced by the members of the organisation through communication.

The dualism between structure and agency is replaced with a relational approach that gives public relations a vivid role (Cozier & Witmer, 2001). They added that from a stucturationist perspective, public relations is a communicative force in society that serves to reproduce and/or transform an organization's dominant ideology, rather than solely adapting to a stakeholder group or public.

2.3   Conclusion

From the literature, it is clear that the function of PR is multi-dimensional and requires a sound perspective. Morley (1980) posits that PR covers all aspects of communications between any organisation and the audiences it wishes to reach. It does not take much to realise that the permutations within the communications field are almost endless. The researcher believes that these challenges faced by PROs are not unique to the United States, especially the issue of lack of support from management which appears to be prevalent in most of the literature. The scholars

touch on important aspects for this research. With the ever-changing world of technology and PR officers in the public sector taking over from people who are not qualified PROs, to what extent are they allowed to do research for new ideas and gaps in their field.

Chapter 3: Research methodology

3. Introduction

 According to (Gerring, 2012) research methodology is the process used to collect information and data for making decisions, and studying phenomena for exploratory and descriptive purposes. Methodology may include interviews, surveys and other research techniques as well as both present and historical information.

This research will involve an aspect of explanatory technique. Neuman (2014, p.114) states that explanatory technique begins with the premise that when we study social life, we study both the 'thing' itself and how people think about or understand the 'thing' we are studying. In this case**,** the 'thing' being studied is public relations   practice in the public sector and the views being sought are those of the general public, the PROs and permanent secretaries.

This chapter discusses the research methodology as well as provides justifications for the chosen research methods. The chapter starts off by describing the research design, followed by the research population and sample size respectively, the research instruments used, procedure to be followed during the data collection process, data analysis and lastly, the research ethics applied in the study are discussed.

3.1   Research Design

This research will make use of   a mix of   qualitative and quantitative   methods, involving in-depth interviews, focus group discussions (FGD) and survey questionnaires as data collection methods.

Mixed research, or what is referred to as mixed-methods research, involves "mixing [or combining] quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study" (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 17). Thus the mixed methodology allows the researcher to freely present and analyse the data without being restricted to either   narrative explanations or statistics. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2000), the qualitative research method generally provides very detailed information about the reasons why respondents give certain answers and allow for observation of non-verbal cues.

Additionally, Rubin and Babbie (2013) describe qualitative methods as being   more flexible than quantitative methods in that they allow research procedures to evolve as more observations are gathered and that they typically permit the   use of subjectivity   to generate deeper understanding of the meaning of human experiences. Denscombe (2010) posits that qualitative data mostly represents data in the form of text and pictures that provide the basis for the interpretations of the meaning they convey. Unlike quantitative data in the form of numbers that provide objective measurements of observed events.

 The research will follow an inductive process which is defined by Rubin and Babbie   (2013, p. 58)   as a research process based on   inductive logic, in which the researcher begins with observations, seeks patterns in those observations and generates tentative conclusions from those patterns.

3.2   Population

A population is a group of individual's persons, objects, or items from which samples are taken for measurement (Mugo, 2002). The population of the study will comprise of the 23 PROs and the 23 permanent secretaries in the 23 government ministries as well as 322 000 residents of Windhoek (World Population Review, 2017).

3.3   Sample

A sample is a group of representative individuals from a population, through their response to standardized questions (Lapan, Marlynn & Quartaroli, 2009). The sample consists of 12 PROs which represent 50% of the total population and four permanent secretaries. The PROs were selected using systematic sampling. According to Mugo (2002), a systematic random sample is obtained by selecting one unit on a random basis and choosing additional elementary units at evenly spaced intervals until the desired number of units is obtained. As a consequence, the study population were assigned numbers 1 to 23 and 12 numbers were picked at random.

The permanent secretaries were purposely selected on the basis of their familiarity with and experience as spokespersons in the earlier communication dispensation. Since the population of Windhoek residents was large, the 300 residents of Windhoek were selected through multi-stage cluster sampling.   Dudovskiy (2016) defines stratified sampling as a probability sampling method and a form of random sampling in which the population is divided into two or more groups (strata) according to one or more common attributes

3.4   Research instruments

Interview guides were used for the in-depth interviews, and questionnaires were used for survey components of the study respectively. According to Armstrong (2014), questionnaires are an

efficient measuring tool for unique data collection such as culture, knowledge, attitudes, beliefs and behaviour and they aid in in collecting data without exposing the identity of the participant.

Denscombe (2010) found the advantages of questionnaires to be that they are easy to arrange and the data is mostly accurate. The advantages of interviews are the following: They provide a depth of information, require simple equipment, flexibility, high response rate, validity and interviews and it can also be therapeutic for the researcher. According to De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Deport (2011), focus groups allow the researcher to investigate a multitude of perceptions in a defined area of interest and promote self-discourse amongst participants.

De Vos et al further state that the advantages of focus groups is their ability to produce concentrated amounts of data on the topic of interest, the reliance on the interaction of the group to produce data is deemed as another strength of the method by the authors. Welmuger, Kruger and Mitchell (2005) posit that focus groups provide sources of information that can be obtained rapidly and at a low cost. They added that in a FGD, the researcher can easily clarify some aspects of the questions put to the respondents and that the group provides a stimulating and secure setting for members to express ideas without fear of criticism. Finally they posit that the synergy of the group has the potential to uncover important constructs, which may be lost with individually-generated data.

3.5   Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the supervisors of the PROs in order for the PROs to be part of the study. This was be done via email and telephonically. Prior to taking part in the study, all participants were given consent forms. Permission was also sought from the other participants of the study which are the permanent secretaries and Windhoek residents.

The participants were informed in writing about the purpose of the study and appointments were made with regards to interview and FGD dates respectively. All participants were provided with

consent forms which they were required to sign before taking part in the research. The survey respondents were given a deadline in which they had to return the completed questionnaire to the researcher. Interviews and FGD were scheduled at times and venues that suited both the researcher and participants well.

3.6   Data analysis

Bogdan and Beklein (1982) state that there are two approaches to data analysis; these are the inductive and deductive modes. The inductive approach contributes to the emergence of new theories and generalizations (Dudovskiy, 2016). Coding of responses facilitate interpretation. According to Lockyer (2004), coding is a systematic way in which to condense extensive data sets into smaller analysable units through the creation of categories and concepts derived from the data.

She added that coding facilitates the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data and leads to conclusions on the basis of that interpretation. Finally, she notes that for surveys or questionnaires, codes are finalized as the questionnaire is completed, whereas for interviews, focus groups, observations, etc., codes are developed inductively after data collection and during data analysis.

Data will be analysed and interpreted question by question. Analysed qualitative data will be presented in a narrative form. The quantitative data will be analysed using SPSS software package's descriptive and inferential statistics features and presented in graphs and tables. The researcher will scrutinize the findings carefully and listen to recordings attentively in order to properly translate the findings into the report. The researcher will identify themes, patterns and similarities in findings and group these accordingly.

Welman, Kruger & Mitchell (2005) identified some of the techniques used to create themes as follows: Word analyses, reading of larger units (for example comparing and contrasting material and searching for missing information), and intentional analysis of linguistic features.

Shannon (2005) found that it is important to cross check data. Cross checking will be applied to the findings. This is because it lets researchers make sense of and analyze data. For qualitative studies, it can help generate a general theory. The type of statistical analysis to use depends on the type of data collected, how it was collected, and how it is coded.

Swartout (2014) identified the following data analysis techniques for a mixed-methods research: Data reduction, this includes reducing the dimensionality of the qualitative data (e.g., via exploratory thematic analysis, memoing) and quantitative data (e.g., via descriptive statistics, exploratory factor analysis, cluster analysis). Data display involves describing pictorially the qualitative data (e.g., matrices, charts, graphs, networks, lists, rubrics, and Venn diagrams) and quantitative data (e.g., tables, graphs).

The findings of this study were subjected to the techniques of data reduction and data display.

3.7   Research Ethics

Ethical issues are present in any kind of research. The research process creates tension between the aims of research to make generalizations for the good of others, and the rights of participants. Ethics pertains to doing good and avoiding harm (Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2000).

The researcher obtained an ethical clearance letter from the University of Namibia before embarking on this study. Research participants were required to sign consent forms that informed them about the purpose of the study and their role. Confidentiality and anonymity were applied across the board to all respondents. Respondents were not required to provide their names, hence the responses cannot be linked to them in any way.

Lapan, et al (2009) states that respondents are more likely to provide honest, accurate answers if they trust that data will not be disclosed.

The researcher being a public relations officer at the office of the Ombudsman, the study will exclude the ministry of justice in order to avoid any conflict of interest. The research data will be used only for academic purposes and stored for five years before being destroyed. No harm was caused to participants and participation in the research was strictly voluntary. Respondents were not coerced to participate in the study.

3.8 Summary

This chapter encompasses the plan of the research and outlined how this plan was be carried out. The research methodology is guided by the mixed-research method of quantitative and qualitative, and allows the researcher to represent the data in many different forms without any restrictions. It also allows for the survey component to form part of the research, the respondents of the survey are an integral part of the research as it is important to gauge the views of the public and not just those of the PROs and permanent secretaries. Had the researcher chosen only the qualitative or quantitative methods on their own; she would be restricted in terms of data presentation to implement the findings of this research.

Chapter 4: Data presentation and analysis

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the study's qualitative and quantitative data. For the latter, of the 300 Windhoek residents surveyed, only 202 fully completed copies of the questionnaire were retrieved, thus equalling a response rate of 67%. For the former, 12 PROs participated in the focus group discussion while the key informant interviews involved three permanent secretaries and one director of information and research.

4.2 Section A

4.2.1 Responses from permanent secretaries

A total of three permanent secretaries and one information and research director were interviewed face-to-face. The desired sample was four permanent secretaries, however the researcher found it difficult to get the permanents secretaries to participate in the study and upon consultation with the supervisors, it was agreed that a director can be interviewed to fulfil the sample quota. The interviews were all conducted face-to-face and recorded and the responses were transcribed and are summarized below. The responses are presented in a flowing narrative form.

The permanent secretaries are referred to as *PS1, PS2* and *PS3* whereas the director is referred to as *D*. The questions were asked in order to attain the following objective: T*o explore attitude of ministry management to public relations and communication with the public.*

4.2.2 Attitude of ministry management to public relations and communication with the public

4.2.2.1 How important is communication to the work of your ministry?

PS1 noted that communication in her office is extremely important and emphasized the importance of communication in government in general**.** She referred to communication as key, especially in government, adding that serving members of the public is extremely important hence the employees of the organisations also need to know and understand their functions well. PS2 used a metaphor to describe the importance of communication in government by equating it to breathing in and out. He referred to the information the government disseminates as carbon dioxide and the responses of the public as the oxygen. He added that communicating with the electorate is regarded by his ministry as a duty and not a privilege.

According to PS3, for the public to be aware of the functions of his office, they need to communicate, especially since it is a public office. He alluded that communication is not only important externally but internally as well, stating that where there is no effective communication , there are many negative implications as you create room for perceptions and misunderstandings. According to D, the communications department in his ministry started four years ago. He noted that now that the department of PR is operational, it is evident that communications functions, not just at his ministry but in all ministries, are extremely important.

4.2.2.2 Can you confidently say that citizens understand your ministry's job function and they know how to access services?

PS 1 admitted, that she cannot confidently say that citizens understand the function of her office. She added that she has been employed in government for 20 years and is unsure of the function of many ministries because people are either not willing to inform or do not know the function of their ministry or office. She added   that when she needs information about a certain ministry or government office, she calls them directly and this does not always yield satisfactory results.

PS2 confidently stated that citizens understand and appreciate the function of his ministry but ruled out perfection. He referred to NBC television and radio which allows them to reach out to the nation in indigenous languages. NBC radio has services for all 10 indigenous languages in Namibia. Through these platforms, citizens know who to direct their concerns to as most of the population is reached through these platforms. The radio shows offer opportunities for the public to call in to voice concerns.

To PS3, understanding the remit of their ministry depends on which citizens one is referring to, as some citizens are more informed than others. The former are learned and have better access to information. The interviewee notes that the response is both "yes" and "no" because whether or

not the public are aware of the ministry and its functions depends on who such citizens are and their exposure, accessibility and ability to understand information.

D added that the office is still in the infant stages, however a lot has been done in the past three to four years to educate the public about the ministry and the functions and services it provides. Management is frequently on television and other media, talking about issues related to the ministry and the minister herself is quite vocal about the ministry.

4.2.2.3 Are members of the public aware of channels for seeking redress as regards to your ministry's services?

PS1 states that with regards to members of the public being aware of channels for seeking redress, the ministry has a Facebook page where members of the public are welcome to seek redress. She added that they have an open door policy which means that members of the public are not required to make appointments before they are assisted, ''we assist them as they walk in' she said. Hence one can say the public are aware because the staff are trained to inform members of the public about different channels of seeking redress and express dissatisfaction with a service rendered.

PS2 singled out New Era newspaper which is a daily government-owned publication and has been running an SMS page for the past two years. Members of the public send an SMS with their grievances or questions and the responsible ministry responds to this SMS. The ministry aims to expand the page and translate the responses into the indigenous languages. He added that members of the public also make use of the NBC radio platforms to seek redress with regards to his as well as other ministries.

PS3 posits that his ministry has a website where contact details of relevant staff are available. He adds that government has recently been advancing the communication charters for public offices which calls for government institutions to provide feedback boxes in their offices, something he states is provide in this ministry. However he narrated that members of the public rarely utilize the feedback box, hence he is not confident that they are aware that it ia a channel to seek redress. This he added, brings us back to the issue of exposure and access to information.   Furthermore he posits that instances of people seeking redress are few or far in between, and it is difficult to say whether this is due to members of the public not needing to seek redress or a lack of information about the channels available.

D   declared that her ministry's Facebook page is extremely popular and serves as a good platform for redress. She added that sometimes people call in to enquire and follow up on matters.

4.2.2.4 In your ministry, would you say the PR roles/function are properly spelt out?

 PS1   maintains that PROs throughout government are not sure exactly what their functions are, and it was clear to her that the different PROs have different briefs and some are even used as personal assistants and secretaries. She stated that this can be attributed to the fact that PROs in government are relatively new and emphasized the importance of a properly spelled out job description for PROs across government with special specifications for the specific ministries.

PS2   stated that employees across government   are recruited on job descriptions that are clearly spelled out.   He however added that PROs felt that they are not properly placed in the structures

of the OMAs and bemoan the lack of proper technology such as cameras or recorders. This was discovered in   the last two years when   the ministry started   engaging PROs across government more frequently in efforts to hear their concerns and expectations.

Last year a meeting was held at Ongwediva with permanent secretaries and directors responsible for PR in government to emphasize the importance of PR in government.   At that meeting**,** it was agreed that PROs needed to be properly equipped with the technology such as laptops, cameras, recorders and whatever else they may need in order to carry out their functions.

 He however stated that   not all OMAs might have heeded to the call of the ministry of ICT on the importance of PROs to government. At the same meeting it was deliberated that there was no need for PROs of OMAs to be part of management but that the PROs needed to have access to permanent secretaries and accounting officers of parastatals and ministers so that they can have access to first-hand information. He added that this deliberation was taken to Parliament by the minster of ICT and it was received well by cabinet members who mostly consist of ministers.

PS3 stated that their role and functions are clearly spelt out. He was however concerned about the government PROs being unfamiliar to members of the public.

D   affirmed that the functions of the PROs are well spelt out and that everyone knows how important the work of the PROs is to her ministry.

4.2.2.5 Are PROs fully empowered to carry out their function?

 PS1 said PROs in government are not   fully empowered and mentioned the public service staff code which restricts   staff members in general to communicate to the public, requiring approval of the permanent secretary. She added that PROs should be empowered in a different manner as

they carry the torch for the ministry and added that they should be empowered to do so because they are trained to ensure that the public is aware about current events in the OMAs.

She posits that PROs in government are not empowered enough and not many perform the function of a PRO. Furthermore she stated that PROs in government are still considered to be 'new' and no one has taken initiative to work out a comprehensive job description for them.

PS2 insists that the PROs are empowered, but only to a certain extent, whereas PS3 maintained that he disagrees that PROs are not fully empowered, and stated that they were in fact "very much" empowered, particularly in his ministry.

He stated that they have the liberty to speak on behalf of the ministry but this must be done in consultation of the accounting officer. He narrated from his experience in previous ministries; he noticed that the focus of government PROs is much more in terms of print media. Those who claim to not be empowered are perhaps speaking in terms of resources.

D adds that all official correspondence must addressed to the PS, hence all important information only goes out through the PS. The PS is the only one, other than the ministers and her two deputies, who can speak to the media. PROs are not empowered, which she described as a good thing due to the sensitive nature of some of the issues dealt with by the ministry.

4.2.2.6 Is there interference in PROs job function?

With regards to interference in the job functions of the PROs, PS1 added that it was difficult to generalise, since in her office they don't interfere with PRO functions, but could not speak for other ministries. She added that politics in public service make it difficult for PROs because they may be reluctant to share certain information because of political implications. She said that PROs should have a clear job description in order to be more empowered more and bargain for more sharing of information with the public. She added that the PRO in her office is encouraged

to have relationships with the media and to disseminate information about the office on various platforms.

PS2 added that there should be no reason for interference in an OMA where there is a PRO because everyone in government is recruited on the basis of a job description. He however added that at times, for the sake of emphasis, effectiveness and authenticity, the director will be required to respond to an issue. He however stated that this does not mean that the director should do so simply because they are superior to the PRO in terms of structure, adding that there should be justified reasons in such cases, and the PRO should be in agreement and be aware of what is being said.

PS3 echoes the sentiments of PS2 by stating that there should not be any interference in the functions of the PROs as PROs are directly accountable to the accounting officers because they have the final say in the final message being publicized. He added that he would like to see government PROs as more prominent in terms of clarifying information and speaking to the media as well as the public and generally disseminating information on behalf of ministries. The PS should only give guidance where required.

D further supported the notion of no interference by emphasising that for as long as communication meant for public consumption goes through the PS, there should be no problems experienced. However, she stated that the sensitive nature of some information requires input from higher authorities.

4.2.2.7 How can PROs be more effective in their job of communicating with your publics?

PS1 added that when it comes to PROS being more effective in carrying out their job functions, PROs should do the tasks they are employed to do and not be treated as secretaries. She further calls for a comprehensive almost standard job description across government with specification

of ministries, forums for pros in government to engage with each other, workshops, training workshops, media workshops**.**

PS2 singled out the PROs having love for what they do, adding that PROs must love the fact that they are entrusted with a very important role in government which is to communicate information to the public.   He posits that the OMAs need to trust and have confidence in their PROs and this will ensure that the public trusts in the information being transmitted.

PS3 believes that in order for PROs to be more effective, they need to be more visible. He stated that very few people know the PROs of government institutions. PROs need to acquire confidence to speak on the radio and television. PROs need to be keen to publicly represent their ministry; this can be done by growing their confidence. He however cautioned that, acquiring this confidence requires practice. An example of how this confidence can be acquired would be to allow PROs to   sit in on management meetings.

Although he advocates for this to occur frequently, he added that some PROs are not too keen to attend management meetings as they feel they don't belong there because they are not part of management. This attitude hinders their progress. He however added that some PROs are not keen to do certain things such as appearing on television or head a major event such as a conference and acting as a director of ceremonies at work events.

D   added that PROs should have a good newsletter and a good data base to share information with the public and have a service charter. She states that communication with the public is also very important, she emphasised that   getting back to the public   in a timely manner and communicating to them regarding   when one   will be able to get back to them makes communication more effective. She further identified Participating in exhibitions and shows   as means that help to improve communication.

4.3 Section B

4.3.1 Survey responses

4.3.2 Demographic information

The survey respondents were required, via close ended questions, to indicate their gender, age, marital status, profession and academic qualifications. This information is significant because it helps to determine similarities and differences between responses based on respondents' social status, age and occupation.

The researcher wanted to know from the respondents how they viewed public relations practice in the Namibian public sector to gauge their overall view of the sector and to establish how they rate communication in the public sector. The results of the demographic survey are as below.

4.3.3 Age

Participants were asked to indicate their age by ticking the options available to them. There were five age categories from which participants chose their ages. These were: Under 25; 26-35; 36-45 and 56 years and above. The figure bellows indicates the ages of the participants in percentage (%)**.**

figure1:Age
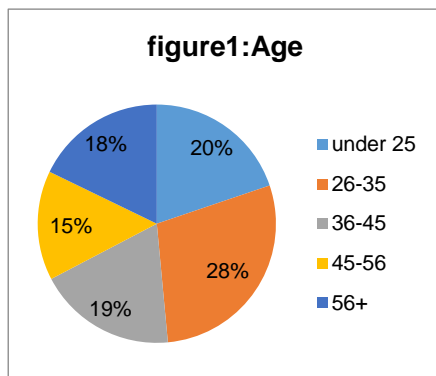
The figure shows that members of the public aged between 26-35 were the most willing to take part in the survey while the members of society aged 45-56 were the lowest represented age group, only making up 15% of the population.

4.3.4 Gender

Participants indicated their gender by ticking one of two close-ended options; these options were male and female. The table below shows the gender representation of the study. Females made up more than half of the sample with 59% participation while the males were represented by 41% participation.

Figure2: Gender
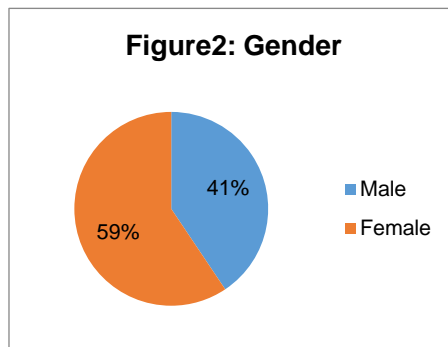
4.3.5 Marital status

The close ended options provided for the participants with regards to their marital status were: Single, married, divorced/separated and in a relationship. The marital statuses of the participants are indicated below in percentage.

Table 1: Marital status

Single	Married	Divorced/separated	In relationship
100	52	18	32

4.3.6 Profession/occupation

This category was also close ended with participants choosing from   four different occupations. The purpose of this was to establish how people employed in the civil service, in the private sector; business people and students view PR in the public sector. The figure shows that the occupation of the participants was almost evenly distributed with private sector and public sector employees combining to make up 60% while the students and business/self-employed made up the remaining 40% of the population.

46

Figure 3: Occupation
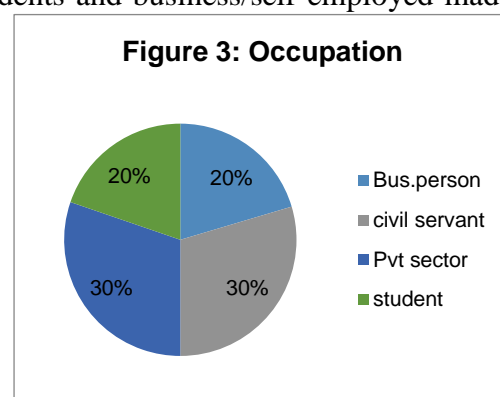
4.3.7 Highest qualification

In order to establish what people with different levels of education thought about government PR, the researcher requested the respondents to indicate their highest academic qualification. The results of this question are as per the figure below. Those with degrees made up 25% of the population. Participation is mostly high amongst fellow academics that have conducted research before and perhaps have a better understanding of the importance of the research.

Figure4: Highest qualification

- Grade10 — 11%
- Grade12 — 16%
- Certificat — 16%
- Diploma — 18%
- Degree — 25%
- H.Degree — 14%
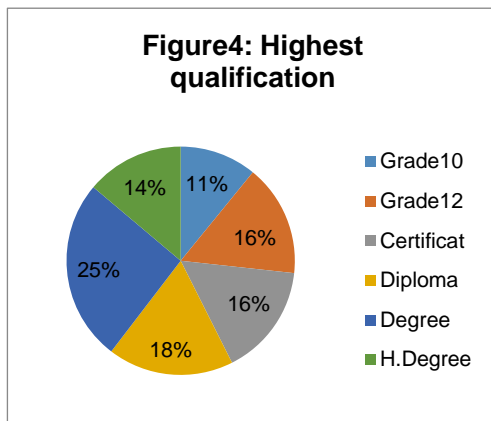
4.4 Respondents' attitude to government communication

This media by which members of the public are mostly informed about government is newspapers and television (see Figure 5). The 'other' mediums referred to were emails and internal circulars; these were all indicated by public servants. The respondents who chose newspapers and radio as their main medium of information were mostly those in the age group of 56 upwards.

Figure5: Medium of communication

- Radio — 16%
- TV — 20%
- Newspaper — 31%
- Social media — 15%
- Billboards — 11%
- Interpersonal communication — 6%
- others — 1%
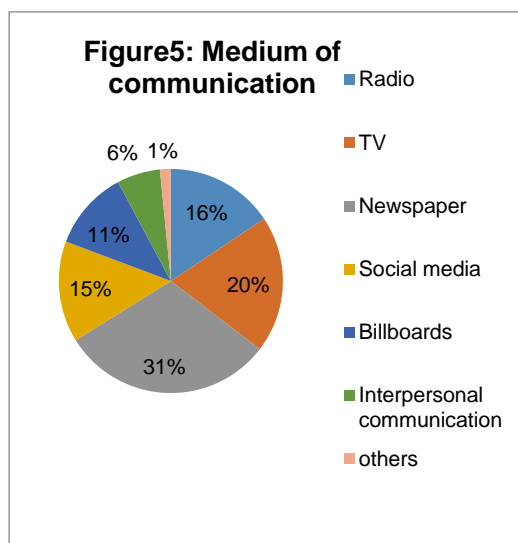
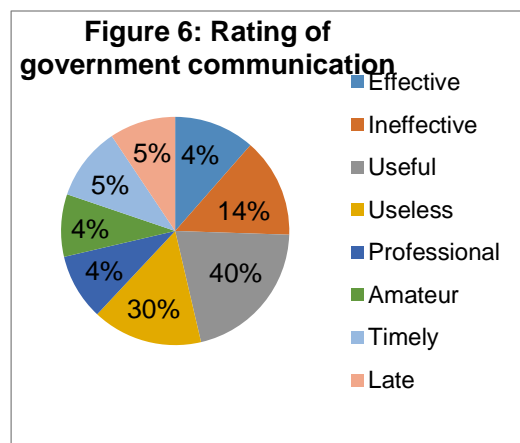The main source of the communication indicated by respondents were ministers, followed by the President. Only 19 of the respondents claimed to have seen or heard of communication conveyed by PROs. Respondents were asked to choose more than one option, the responses are indicated in the table below.

4.4.1 Table 1: Source of information

President	Vice President	Prime Minister	Deputy Prime Minister	Ministers	Presidential spokesperson	PROs	Local GRN officials	Other GRN officials
38	6	30	15	46	28	19	21	28

4.4.2 Overall rating of government communication

A rating   scale was used to establish how respondents rate government communication, the function which is at the crux of this study. The figure below shows that most of the respondents (40%) rated government communication positively by indicating that they deem it as useful, whereas 30% rated government communication as useless.

Figure 6: Rating of government communication
- Effective 4%
- Ineffective 14%
- Useful 40%
- Useless 30%
- Professional 4%
- Amateur 4%
- Timely 5%
- Late 5%

4.5 Respondents' perception of and attitude towards PROs

The findings show that respondents' perception and attitude towards PROs is not positive albeit by small margins (see table 2). The table below show that 34% of participants do not think that PROs provide timely information, whereas 30% feel that they are kept in the dark by PROs and 40% feel that they are not provided with guidance   with regards to channels of seeking redress.

In terms of PROs doing more to gauge public opinion, 32% of respondents feel that this should

be done and 15% strongly disagree.

Table 2 : Rating of PROs

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PROs in government ministries provide timely information	12%	22%	22%	34%	10%
Namibians are kept in the dark by PROs about the activities of ministries	15%	30%	25%	20%	10%
PROs should be proactive rather than reactive	18%	22%	30%	10%	20%
PROs in ministries provide guidance on how to access services and seek redress	15%	16%	24%	40%	5%
PROs should do more by gauging public opinion and reacting as appropriate	32%	21%	18%	14%	15%

With regards to PROs in government providing timely information, only 12% of respondents

agree that this is the case. Notably, most of the respondents (40%) claim to not be aware of

channels to seek redress and services; this is in correlation with 32% of the respondents who

agree that PROs should do more by gauging public opinion and reacting as appropriate.

Respondents had a rather neutral stance on whether PROs should be proactive rather than

reactive. This however does not take away from the fact that 30% of respondents agree that they

are kept in the dark about the activities of the ministries.

4.5.1 General rating of PROs

The overall rating of PROs by respondents was not favourable, with the majority of respondents

having a neutral stance on public sector PROs (see figure 8). The findings show a

slightly neutral view by the public. This can be due to the fact that 32% of respondents

are of the view that PROs do not do enough to gauge public opinion and 40% of respondents do not believe that PROs provide timely information.

4.6 Demographic attitude and overall attitude towards government communication

4.6.1 Table 3: Attitude by gender

Gender	Favourable	unfavourable	Neutral
Male	23%	35%	42%
Female	38%	31%	31%

4.6.2 Table 4: Attitude by Age

Age	Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral
Under 25	26%	26%	48%
26-35	40%	30%	30%
36-45	28%	62%	10%
45-56	50%	12%	38%
56 +	32%	46%	22%

4.6.3 Table 5: Attitude by academic qualifications

Highest qualification	Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral
Grade 10	20%	33%	47%
Grade 12	28%	44%	28%
Certificate	33%	18%	49%
Diploma	24%	52%	24%
Degree	50%	38%	12%
Higher degree	45%	38%	17%

4.6.4 Table 6: Attitude by occupation

Occupation	Favourable	Unfavourable	Neutral
Business person	40%	32%	28%
Civil servant	30%	42%	28%
Private sector employee	15%	48%	37%
Student	50%	36%	14%

4.6.5 Discussions of demographic attitude

The findings indicate that women hold government communication in a higher regard than men. This can be attributed to the fact that more women (59%) participated in the survey than men (41%). It was also established that those in the age group of 36-45 overwhelmingly found government communication to be unfavourable by 62%, whereas 50% of those in the older demographic of 45-56 years found government communication to be favourable. The findings further revealed that men had a more neutral view on the rating of government communication than women. Those under 25 years old had a rather neutral view (47%) of government communication. This is the youngest demographic who might not be well acquainted with public sector communication.

With regards to academic qualifications and the rating of government communication, participants with degrees provided the highest ratings of 50% and 45% respectively. Those with diplomas rated the communication as unfavourable by 52%. The neutral respondents in this demographic turned out to be those with Grade 10 and certificates with the former rating government communication as neutral by 47% and the latter by 49%.

It is interesting to note that a large percentage of civil servants (42%) rated government communication as unfavourable, whereas 48% of those in the private sector rated it as unfavourable, a difference of only 6%. Students had a favourable view of government communication as 50% rated it positively whereas only 36% rated it negatively.

The findings show that self-employed, more educated , older and female demographics respectively view government communication in a more positive light. In contrast the female, less educated, younger and private sector employees view government communication negatively.

4.7 Responses from PROs

4.7.1 PROs and their operating environment

The responses from the 12 PROs are grouped together and summarized below. The questions asked were aimed at attaining the following objective: To shed light on how PROs perform their functions given their complex working environment.

A total of 12 PROs were interviewed for the study. Of the 12 respondents, seven are male and four are female. The gender disparity is reversed in this sample as compared to the survey sample where more women than men agreed to participate in the study.

Figure 7: Gender
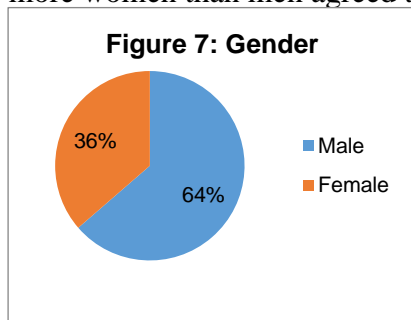
More than half of the respondents identified themselves as PROs, 23% identify as senior PROs whereas only 15% identify as information officers. Although the names differ, the functions remain the same.

The majority of the respondents (65%) have been in the public sector for five to 10 years, whereas only 2% have 10 + years in the public sector. This shows that PROs in the government are relatively young or new to the job market.

Figure 8: Role/job in public sector

Figure 9: years in public sector

52
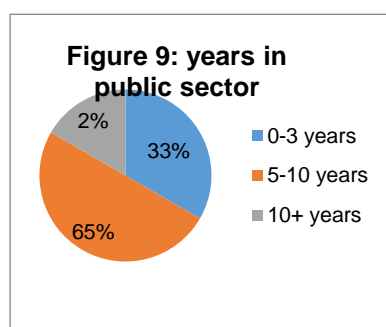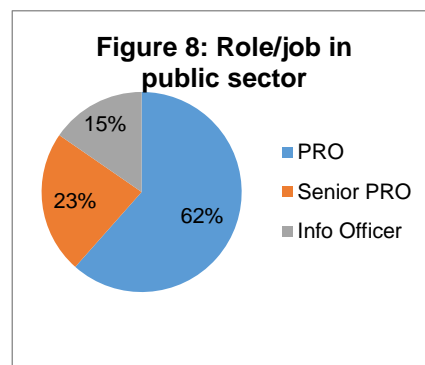
What is your take with regards to ministers, permanent secretaries and directors serving as a spokesperson in your ministry?

Nine of the respondents were not in favour of their superiors performing their functions, stating that this makes their jobs redundant and more difficult to execute. The four who agreed mostly had conditions stating that as long as they are involved when someone else is taking up their task, they do not see a problem with it because the permanent secretary is the accounting officer of a ministry and has an obligation to account for and respond to issues regarding their ministries. They added that ministers, directors and PS's performing their function diminishes their roles and functions. They further called for their colleagues to consult them on a more consistent basis when they want to do something related to their function.

The same applies to ministers who are eligible to communicate exclusively on political matters affecting their respective ministries. Two respondents felt that directors should only share information with the PRO and PS but not act as spokesperson. One respondent shed light on the implications of directors serving as spokesperson**s**, especially without informing the clearance or without. The respondent stated that it can damage the reputation of a ministry if one disseminates information without having all their facts straight.

Do ministers, permanent secretaries and directors still serve as spokespersons in your ministry?

All but three of the 12 respondents answered "yes" to this question. Although there was no follow up question or elaboration required, 75% of respondents singled out the PS as the person carrying out the spokesperson's role. One respondent indicated that the ministers permanent secretaries and directors in their ministry do not exclusively serve as spokespersons**,** only when required. Another respondent justifies this by adding that the ministers are legal representatives of the government in respect to the ministries they serve, hence they are the ones to be held accountable for whatever is spoken or publicised regarding their ministry

Indicate when PROs took over the function of spokesperson in your ministry

This question brought   many mixed responses with six of respondents saying that they are not aware. This can be attributed to the fact that most of the respondents have not been in their position for long and therefore are unaware of the history of their ministries. One respondent stated that in his ministry, the PRO is only allowed to speak when permitted to do so by either the minister or the PS.   The remaining five stated that the PROs took over the function as soon as their ministries were formed. Two of these ministries were formed two years ago and the three were formed 27 years ago at independence.

In your ministry, would you say the PR roles and functions are properly spelled out?

The responses to this question produced   some   interesting information on structure and job descriptions for PROs in the public sector. It was evident that although all of the PROs know their roles and functions, they were however not provided with a specific   job description. Of the 12 respondents,   three stated   that they were given job descriptions, the other nine respondents did not touch on the aspect of job descriptions at all. It is worthy to note that these respondents were not asked about job descriptions, they just tied it in the aspect with their responses.

One respondent added that although his roles and functions are clear, a lot of his colleagues don't understand   the importance of   his role in the ministry. Others added that the roles were clear but the mandate to perform the roles was not made clear to them.

Are PROs fully empowered to carry out their functions?

The majority of   respondents (72%)   answered no to this question while the remaining 28% said there were not fully empowered. Those who said no stated that they were held back by issues of

structure stating that not being close to management in their organizational structure held them back. They added that not being informed or aware of deliberations made in management meetings somewhat holds them back from properly carrying out their functions. One respondent added that she had to tread lightly when it came to sharing certain information as some information in her ministry is deemed as sensitive.

Is there interference in PROs   job function?

The interference in the PRO job function   was evident in the responses with four of the respondents   elaborating by stating that this interference came from senior staff members. They added that when it came to things like organizing fairs, exhibitions and   shows, other offices often took over the function. Two respondents added that colleagues who are considered to be senior staff members tend to interfere with the PR function, even if they are from other departments. This is a good example of seniority and structure and how it affects the functions of PR.

Is the public service, as presently constituted, a conducive environment for the   PR function?

The public service is generally not conducive for the PR function; this is the view of 60% of respondents. The respondents gave varying reasons as to why this is the case, whereas those who answered "no" gave no reasons. They stated that the PR function is not able to thrive in certain ministries, this according to two respondents can be attributed to the fact that PROs in the public sector are not given enough freedom to carry out their functions. One respondent added that they do not feel empowered in their job. Another respondent posits that there is nothing wrong with the public service and suggested the government look into the gradual incorporation of the PR function into management and to properly identify and understand the PR roles and functions.

Is the public service as presently constituted as   a conducive environment for   effective PR?

More than half (60%) of the respondents referred the researcher to their answers in the previous question. They viewed the two questions as similar and thus chose not to give different responses.

Would you say that you are communicating timely messages to the public?

Half of the respondents said yes, 20% said no and the remaining 30% stated that this was only done sometimes. Those who gave reasons for answering in the affirmative stated that there is still room for improvement and added that the question is not so much about timeliness but rather about effectiveness. They further added that the information occasionally reaches the media late because the people required to give the final approval before the message is made public are not available.

How would you rate the level of effectiveness of government-public communication?

There was no scale or interval for the respondents to indicate their responses. The responses are depicted verbatim as per below**:**

- *I would rate it as only 50% effective as government communication can be much better if the PROs are properly integrated into the ministries and agencies and allowed to use their expertise to carry out government communication.*

- *Non-effective for most of the ministries, except perhaps for the ministry of health and social services*

- *I would rate it as good, perhaps 4/10*

- *I think there is still room for improvement*

- *On a scale of 1-10 , I would rate it at 4*

- *I think from 0-10, whereby zero (0)= extremely bad, I would rate the government at 6*

- *I would rate it as neutral, not good not bad*

- *If there were any scale, I would say 2/10*

- *I would rate it as effective but only for certain ministries*

- *It depends on what you mean by effective*

- *Generally effective*

4.7.2 Conclusion

The research findings show that the permanent secretaries who are the accounting officers of the Ministries, appreciate the role of the PRO in the public sector and at the same time acknowledge that more needs to be done to make public sector PR more effective. This is evident by the information provided by one of the Permanent Secretaries who indicated that the politics in the public service make the job of the PROs as divulging certain information may have negative political implications.

The findings reveal that Permanent secretaries and directors perform some of the functions which are meant for PROs and that PROs are mostly not officially made aware of their duties, to some the roles were clear but the mandate to carry out those roles was not necessarily given to them by their superiors. This was evident in 72% of respondents saying that they were not fully empowered to carry out their functions.

The findings show that the role PR in the public sector is acknowledged and even welcomed, but it is yet to be fully embraced and integrated into the organisational structures.

The way in which the public view and understand public sector PR plays a crucial role in the success and effectiveness of the function. The findings show that most of the respondents rate government communication negatively, this can be attributed to the fact that respondents feel that PROs do not provide timely information and guidance on how to seek redress and access services. Government Offices mostly provide crucial services to the citizens and accessing these services effectively requires information which is at the centre of PR.

According to Newson, Turk and Kuckberg (2013) the lack of consistency in PR is due to its rapid growth and its need to develop within the cultural, religious, socioeconomic and political context in which it being practiced. With Namibia being a melting port of diversity and culture, it is comprehensible that the members of the public feel the way they do. The authors further posit that PR provides useful information to people about various aspects of their lives. The researcher believes that this notion on PR creates in the public, an expectation for constant effective communication from PROs.

The findings further show that PROs in the public sector feel that there is room for improvement and that they believe that the can efficiently carry out their duties if they are properly integrated into the public sector and given more leeway to perform their tasks. Facets of Giddens' structuration theory are order and routine and this is indicated in the findings were PROs are in a way confined to a certain order of doing things.

The structuration theory examines structures in action by focusing on the structuring process (Frey, 1994) this study focused on the PROs and the Permanent secretaries who are the accounting officers of government ministries. Although it was found that PROs ought to report directly to the PS, this is not the case in many ministries where PROs find themselves in the lower structures of their offices. The structures and systems set in place in the public sector are

58

hard to overcome, hence the findings show that the PROs find it difficult to break into their roles in the public sector.

Chapter 5 Discussions

5.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the research and how those findings helped attain the research objectives.   The researcher will highlight each research objective and discuss the findings as per the objective in order to determine whether   the objectives were answered**.**

5.2 Discussions

To explore attitude of ministry management to public relations and communication with the public

 Based on the findings of the study, the general consensus of the public sector managers is that PR and communication with the public are essential to their offices. The respondents called for PROs to be more visible and involved in the activities of their respective ministries.

The importance of communication, not only in with the public but internally as well as a lack of effective communication internally reflects negatively on the institutions was highlighted . This was amplified by a respondent from a ministry where the PR function is only four years old. Despite the function being new to the ministry, the public and people from other departments have come to appreciate its importance. This is an aspect of the Gidden's structuration theory which according to (Lock, 2013) identifies all aspects of a system, describes the relationships between them and giving a description of how they work together.

The researcher believes this to be a step in the right direction for public sector PR as support from their managers is essential for them to successfully carry out their tasks. The respondents

are agreement   about the PROs needing more exposure and freedom; they however maintain that all communication from a ministry needs to go through the PS before it is made public.

The attitude of the respondents is positive overall, but in spite of that they still maintain their stance on the fact that communication cannot simply flow form the PRO to the public, it is mandatory for the PS to be aware of what is being communicated to the public. The respondents touched on the issue of PROs missing out because they are not part of management by stating that the PROs do not necessarily have to form part of management to be effective.

Grunig (2001) however argues that strategic decision-makers of an organization should interact with stakeholders through the PR function because their decisions have consequences on the public or because the organization needs supportive relationships with stakeholders in order to implement decisions and achieve organizational goals. Stakeholders seek a relationship with an organization in order to seek a consequence from the organisation to solve a problem it recognizes. The author further states that public relations are becoming a management function rather than only a technical communication function.

Similarly, Seitel (2014) argues that PROs should by design report to management in order to effectively carry out their duties of acting as the interpreters for management's philosophies, policies and programmes.

The respondents call for PROs to be more proactive and show more of an interest in the activities of their ministries. This was endorsed by one respondent who claimed that PROs are not keen to appear on television or act as masters of ceremonies at events. Generally PROs are viewed by management as being on the back-burner. This   the researcher found can be due to a

combination of a lack of exposure and experience, as well as limitations placed on them by their position in the organisational structure of government OMAs.

To shed light on how public relations officers in government perform their functions given the changes in the communication environment

The findings revealed that PROs in the Namibian public sector operate under somewhat complicated conditions. Most of the PROs work without having been given specific job descriptions. PROs in the public sector do not form part of management and hence do not attend management meetings, certain PS's and ministers however don't mind if they do. The responses to questions 11 and 12 show that there is a sense of frustration from the PROs. Many of them do not believe that they communicate timely and only 33% rated the government communication positively.

Theaker (2004) identified a greater range of stakeholders for PROs in the public sector as a challenge for public sector PROs. She added that these stakeholders are more likely to have overlapping characteristics.

With regards to the expectations government PR stakeholders, Fairbanks (2006) added that citizens expect their governments to be transparent about fiscal, safety and policy issues that affect them. He added that government communicators value transparency, but their practice is affected by perceived organizational support, availability of communication tools and provisions of resources. The researcher found that the PROs in the Namibian public sector have somewhat gotten used to their roles which mostly include placing adverts in newspapers, manning stalls at trade fairs/shows and updating social media pages.

Valentini (2013) found that the majority of public communication officers are not involved in the strategic management of public administrations but rather contribute to operational activities,

such as development and maintenance of internal communication, public information, or media relations programmes, as well as formal research like press clippings. This shows a low knowledge potential for the managerial role since public communication officers agree more with statements describing technical/operational activities rather than strategic ones.

The findings by Valentini were mirrored by Mutambo (2014) who added that little recognition is accorded to public relations in the public sector. He argues that where such a PR position is incorporated in a particular institution's structures, it is often used as a crisis management tool, not as a strategic management function. Few government institutions allow their communication practitioners to form part of the management meetings. This, he said, strips this important function of the armour of information they need to successfully defend their institutions or the first-hand information to discharge their functions in a manner that adds value to the organisation.

Mutambo further posits that government PROs should be capacitated to be at liberty to do research and present at management platforms with recommendations towards good governance and deliberate communication strategies based on clear/key strategic initiatives to influence good public and transnational perception.

The literature shows that much is expected from public sector PROs. The findings however show that these expectations, which include the publicising of information in a timely manner and providing opportunities for redress amongst others, are not always met. The findings also show that the majority of the PROs did not seem too bothered about permanent secretaries, ministers and directors acting as spokespersons for their ministries, with one respondent adding that legally, the PS is considered the official spokesperson of a government office or ministry.

To determine public attitude to government communication

The respondents in this case were members of the public who singled out newspapers as their main source of information regarding public sector. The general perception and attitude of the public towards government is somewhat indistinct. This is indicated by the findings which show that 40% of the respondents rated it as useful and 30% rate it as useless.

Woolpert (1940) spoke on the relationship between a city government and the public. He stated that it is not a unilateral but rather a two-way relationship. The author added that there is a tendency in discussions of PR to say that good public relations exist when public attitudes toward the government are favourable or friendly. Finally, the author posits that this is only one side of the picture. Unless attention is given to the attitudes of public officials and employees toward members of the public, it will be impossible to develop and sustain the relationship. The findings showed that at least 20% of respondents have a degree, 14% have higher degrees, and 18 % have diplomas.

This is an indication that the respondents are learned and are able to do better in terms of accessing information about government. The fact that 30% of the respondents agree that Namibians are kept in the dark by PROs about the activities of ministries is worrisome, to say the least. According to Bowen (2010) who conducted a study on how PR students view the industry relation and function,   it appears that public relations has failed to communicate its worth to society as a whole as a valuable contributor to the communication allowing society to function.

To determine public perception and attitude towards public relations officers

The majority of respondents (42%) rate the performance of government PROs as neutral, whereas 32% rate it as favourable and 26% as unfavourable. The respondents also feel that PROs in ministries do not provide enough guidance for them to seek redress and access the services of

ministries. Furthermore, respondents posit that government PROs keep them in the dark about certain activities in their ministries.

This negative perception of public sector PROs is not a good indication as it points to a lack of trust in the government PROs and possibly a lack of understanding regarding the position of the PROs by the public. This negative view is possibly driven by the lack of timely information provided to the public as only 20% of respondents rated the government communication as being timely.

In a related study, Bowen (2010) found that there was a general idea that public relations is lying, manipulation, covering up the truth, or spin of a message into something positive. The respondents of the study which were students seemed to hold the idea that public relations is manipulative or deceptive by nature. With this being the view of PR students, albeit in the US, it is clear to see why the general public who have little to no knowledge on PR feel this way about government PROs.

The researcher believes that there seems to be a general lack of trust and understanding of the PROs roles, functions and motives by the public.

Salor (2002) conducted an impression management study on what the public thinks about PR. He found that motives play a large role in how people view PR. This was attributed to the notion that PR often attempts to serve two masters – the employer or sponsor and the public. It was also discovered in the study that the self-interest and intentionality components of PR advocacy may cause the reputation of the profession to be diminished under some conditions.Mcnair (1996) added that PROs in government generally remain hidden from the public. This the researcher believes is a possible cause of frustration for the general public as they are not able to put a face, or   sometimes   even   a   name,   to   certain   public   sector   PROs.

Chapter 6: Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter encompasses the recommendations by the researcher. The recommendations are based on the findings and can be considered by the stakeholders of government PR.

6.2 Recommendations

6.2.1 Recommendations for government

In order for government PR to thrive, a few barriers to the profession need to be dismantled. Firstly, government PROs need to undergo induction training to prepare them for what lies ahead. This training is important because being employed by the government requires employees to acquaint themselves with certain laws and political protocol. Government needs to properly integrate the PROs into the system; however the PROs must also do their part by being more proactive and demonstrating a deeper interest in their jobs.

Not all the PROs who were subjects of the study were given job descriptions upon being hired, this narrative needs to change. PROs, although aware of their duties need to be issued with job descriptions so that it is categorically clear where their functions end. Job descriptions can help prevent confusion and determine what exactly is expected from the PRO in a specific ministry.

PROs need to be accorded more freedom to act as spokespersons for their ministries. This will not only give them more confidence but will also give the public a chance to know who they are. On a daily basis we see front page headlines about government offices, with an image and comments from the PS rather than the PRO. This takes away from one of the main functions of a PRO which is to convey communication to the public on behalf of their employer.

Government should also look into investing more into their PROs by providing them with on-the-job training and induction into the public sector. This will improve the confidence of the PROs and lead to them performing their duties more effectively. Most PROs in the public sector

are graduates and were not previously employed somewhere else. They need to be aware of what is expected of them as PROs in the public sector.

6.2.2 Recommendations for the public

Members of the public need to become more inquisitive and make use of resources such as the internet to access websites of public offices and not rely solely on the PROs for information regarding OMAs. The public need to play their part by showing an interest in the activities of government and educating themselves on ways to get services, information and redress as regards to ministries.

The public should familiarise themselves with different laws and rights regarding access to information, they should attend public consultation and make enquiries in order to be well informed. Additionally, members of the public should not be too harsh on public sector PROs. They should instead make their views known on the various platforms available for redress, especially those with access to internet and telephones. They can also find out whether a certain OMA has a PRO or information officers who can assist them.

The ministry of ICT has publications and service charters of different ministries; additionally they occasionally upload information about other ministries on their site. The public are encouraged to regularly visit the MICT website to acquaint themselves with the goings-on of government and to download important public documents. The ministry also has a government web portal link where members of the public can find the contact details of all the OMAs at the click of a button.

6.2.3 Recommendations for PROs

Public sector PROs should familiarise themselves with their duties and be proactive when carrying out these duties. The PROs should also show initiative and drive, they should not merely rely or wait on their supervisors to tell them what to do. The PROs should study their public in order to determine what their specific information and communication needs are. They

can make presentations to management or their supervisors and come up with ideas to meet the needs of the public more efficiently and effectively.

PROs must show a desire to learn new skills and they should show an interest in what goes on in their OMA. It is their responsibility to be interested and show a willingness to learn when they are not aware of or understand a certain matter.

PROs should be inquisitive and not be afraid to approach management or their direct supervisor when they are unhappy about something or when they feel like expressing themselves. Since PR in the public sector is relatively new, another recommendation for the PROs is for them to form a close working relationship with the person who previously performed their functions. This will help them get familiar with their tasks and they can know what to expect. The PROs also ought to show an interest in new media technologies as the internet and social media like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, play a big role in modern day PR.

Non-profit organizations contribute to a democratic society by allowing those with diverse opinions to assemble and voice these ideas. Social media has provided an extensive new marketplace in which such organizations can give voice to their ideas (Auger 2013).

The sentiments of the author highlight the importance of social media for non-profit organisations, hence PROs need to be technologically savvy in order to fully capitalise on the incorporation of social media into their job functions. PROs should visit the Ministry of information and communication technology's website to acquaint themselves with what is required from them as PROs in the Namibian public sector. The government communication plan which was launched in 2016 gives a clear description of the roles and functions of PROs and the document is available on the Ministry of information and coomunication technology's website.

6.3 Conclusion

Based on the findings, the researcher has come to the conclusion that there is room for improvement for PR in the Namibian public sector. The importance of PR in the public sector was emphasised by all four managers who took part in the study. Whether this importance is taken seriously depends on the relationships between the managers and their PROs.

The findings reveal that PR in the public sector needs improvement from all stakeholders, not just the PROs and the management but the public as well. The findings further create room for more research in public sector PR in Namibia, something that the researcher found has not been tapped into enough.

This can be attributed to the secrecy culture of the public sector and a general reluctance by public sector employees to participate in research. The researcher experienced this personally. Whether this is due to a lack of knowledge or fear of misrepresenting the OMA is yet to be established. The most challenging aspect of conducting the study was setting up appointments with permanent secretaries but surprisingly they were keen on answering the questions and showed support and their desire for the PR practice in the public sector to grow.

The study also revealed that the PROs in the public sector are not in the forefront of the communication activities as much as they should be. This some of the respondents attributed to structural issues and a lack of proper induction for PROS when they start employment in government. These findings are significant because they can help diagnose the areas in the government PR sector that need corrective action and they can also assist in rooting out patterns and attitudes that are destructive to the profession.

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Appendices

Appendix A : Questionnaire

My name is Aurelia David and I am conducting a study titled **"Structuration and public relations practice in the Namibian public service"** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master's degree in Media Studies at the University of Namibia. Kindly tick (√) the options that best correspond to your views. Your response will be treated with utmost confidence, hence you do not need to supply your name or any other means of identification. Thanks for agreeing to participate in this study.

1.   Indicate your age

        Under 25 years _____

        26-35 years _____

        36-45 years _____

        45-56 years _____

        56 years and above _____

2.   Indicate your gender

        Male _____

        Female _____

3.   Indicate your marital Status

Single _____

Married _____

Divorced/Separated _____

In a relationship _____

5.   Indicate your profession/occupation

Business person _____

Civil servant/State employee_____

Private sector employee _____

Student _____

6.   Indicate your highest qualification

a. Grade 10 _____

b. Grade 12 _____

c. Certificate _____

d. Diploma _____

e. Degree _____

f. Higher Degree _____

7.   Have you ever received communication/messages from Namibian government ministries,

agencies and/or offices?

Yes_____

No_____

(If the respondent answers "no", discontinue the survey)

8. Indicate which of the following media/medium was used to communicate (You can pick more than one)

Radio_____

Television_____

Newspaper_____

New/Digital media (Facebook, Twitter, SMS etc.) _____

Billboards_____

Interpersonal communication_____

Others, please specify _____

9. Who was the source of the communication?

President_____

Vice President_____

Prime Minister_____

Deputy Prime Minister_____

Ministers_____

Presidential Spokesperson_____

Public Relations Officers_____

Local government/councils_____

Other government officials_____

10.   How would you rate government communication based on the following indices:

Effective _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Ineffective

Useful _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Useless

Professional _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Amateur

Timely _____ _____ _____ _____ _____ Late

11. How would you rate the performance of public relations officers in ministries?

Favourable_____

Unfavourable_____

Neutral _____

12,   Indicate your agreement/disagreement with the following statements

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
PROs in government ministries provide timely information					

Namibians are kept in the dark by PROs about the activities of ministries					
PROs should be proactive rather than reactive					
PROs in ministries provide guidance on how to access services and seek redress					
PROs should do more by gauging public opinion and reacting as appropriate					

13. What constitutes your overall attitude to government communication?

    a. Favourable

    b. Unfavourable

    c. Neutral

Appendix B: Interview Guide (PROs)

My name is Aurelia David and I am conducting a study titled **"Structuration and public relations practice in the Namibian public service"** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master's degree in Media Studies at the University of Namibia.

1. What is your role/job title in the Namibian public service?

2. What is your take as regards ministers, permanent secretaries and directors serving as spokesperson in government ministries?

3. Do ministers, permanent secretaries and directors still serve as spokesperson in your ministry?

4. Indicate when PROs took over the function of spokesperson in your ministry.

5. In your ministry., would you say the PR roles/function are properly spelt out?

6. Are PROs fully empowered to carry out their function?

7. Is there interference in PROs job function?

8. Is the public service, as presently constituted, a conducive environment for the PR function?

9. Is the public service, as presently constituted, a conducive environment for effective PR?

10. Would you say that you are communicating timely messages to the public?

11. How would you rate the level of effectiveness of government-public communication?

Appendix C: Interview Guide (Permanent Secretaries and Director)

My name is Aurelia David and I am conducting a study titled **"Structuration and public relations practice in the Namibian public service"** in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the award of a Master's degree in Media Studies at the University of Namibia.

Interview Guide (Minister of ICT and Permanent Secretaries)

5 How important is communication to the work of your ministry?

6 Can you confidently say that citizens understand your ministry's job function and they know how to access services?

7 Are members of the public aware of channels for seeking redress as regards to your ministry's services?

8 In your ministry, would you say the PR roles/function are properly spelt out?

9   Are PROs fully empowered to carry out their function?

10   Is there interference in PROs job function?

11   How can PROs be more effective in their job of communicating with your publics?

Appendix D: consent form

STRUCTURATION AND PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE NAMIBIAN PUBLIC SECTOR

.

Consent Form

This study seeks to explore how Public Relations Officers (PROs) navigate and cope with the complex communication environment 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 indicate otherwise. No discomfort, stress or risks are anticipated.

I agree to participate in the study titled **"Structuration and public relations practice in the Namibian public service"** by Aurelia David 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 UNAM Research Director, Kapenda, Hileni, (hkapenda@unam.na; 061-2063239)

Appendix E: Permission letter from UNAM

University of Namibia, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek, Namibia
340 Mandume Ndemufayo Avenue, Pioneers Park
☎ +264 61 206 3111; URL.: http//www.unam.edu.na

UNAM
UNIVERSITY OF NAMIBIA

RESEARCH PERMISSION LETTER

Student Name: Aurelia David

Student number: 200846868

Programme: MA (Media Studies)

Approved research title: Structuration and public relations practice in the Namibian public service

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

Dr M. Hedimbi
Director: Centre for Postgraduate Studies
Tel: +264 61 2063275
E-mail: directorpgs@unam.na

23/06/17

Date

Centre for Postgraduate Studies
Office of the Director
2017 -06- 23

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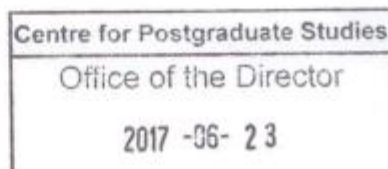
Appendix E: Ethical clearance certificate

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Ethical Clearance Reference Number: FHSS /239/2017   Date: 27 September , 2017

This Ethical Clearance Certificate is issued by the University of Namibia Research Ethics Committee (UREC) in accordance with the University of Namibia's Research Ethics Policy and Guidelines. Ethical approval is given in respect of undertakings contained in the Research Project outlined below. This Certificate is issued on the recommendations of the ethical evaluation done by the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee sitting with the Postgraduate Studies Committee.

Title of Project: Structuration And Public Relations Practice In The Namibian Public Service

Researcher: Aurelia F David

Student Number: 200846868

Faculty : Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Supervisors: : Prof. E. Akpabio (Main) Ms. Antonette Kakujaha (Co)

Take note of the following:
(a) Any significant changes in the conditions or undertakings outlined in the approved Proposal must be communicated to the UREC. An application to make amendments may be necessary.
(b) Any breaches of ethical undertakings or practices that have an impact on ethical conduct of the research must be reported to the UREC.
(c) The Principal Researcher must report issues of ethical compliance to the UREC (through the Chairperson of the Faculty/Centre/Campus Research & Publications Committee) at the end of the Project or as may be requested by UREC.
(d) The UREC retains the right to:
(i) Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance if any unethical practices (as outlined in the Research Ethics Policy) have been detected or suspected,
(ii) Request for an ethical compliance report at any point during the course of the research;

UREC wishes you the best in your research.

Prof. P. Odonkor: UREC Chairperson   Ms. P. Claassen: UREC Secretary

Appendix F: Intention to submit form

ANNEX 4A: NOTICE OF INTENTION TO SUBMIT THESIS/DISSERTATION FOR EXAMINATION

(To be completed by student)

Date 23/10/2017

The UNAM Post Graduate Committee
The University of Namibia
Private Bag 13301
WINDHOEK
Namibia

Dear Director,

NOTICE OF INTENTION TO SUBMIT THESIS/DISSERTATION FOR EXAMINATION

I, Aurelia David _____ (Student no : 200846868) hereby
notify the Postgraduate Studies Committee of my intention to submit my th[X] / dissert[ ]
on 23/10/11(date) for examination. I attach the abstract of my thesis/dissertation.

The title of my thesis/dissertation is: Structuration and public
Relations practice in the Namibian
public Sector.

Aurelia David ....   Abu 23/10/2017

Name of Student   **Signature**   **Date**

Prof. Eno Akpabio

Name of Supervisor (Main/Co-) **Signature**   **Date**