

ICEMC 2021
International Conference on Emerging Media & Communication

**EXPLORING BEYOND TACTICAL AND MANAGERIAL
CONVENTIONS OF PUBLIC RELATIONS
FOR ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVNESS**

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Abstract

This research aims to position the practices of public relations (PR) at the strategic level of the organization. First, the study explores the scope of PR and its associated practices, while the following objective maps the practices to the strategic and less-strategic concepts of PR. Finally, the study assesses the need for PR practices towards meeting significant needs of the organization. Data collection comprise four methods; literature review, reference to industrial roles and responsibilities, a survey, and interviews with practitioners and senior managers from government linked companies, public listed companies and multinationals in Malaysia to gain insights on what is expected from the PR / communication practitioner. These methods serve to triangulate the findings in the aim towards optimizing the communication portfolio. The data analysis finds that, to elevate the communication portfolio of an organization to significant heights, there is a need to consider the alignment between strategic aspects of PR communication practices, present industrial practices, and formal PR education in the aim to position practitioners which would result in the PR role contributing to business significantly. From such a perspective, PR contributes to strategic business positioning while enhancing its reputation as an esteemed career to pursue. In short, this research explores the potentials of PR for enhanced levels of roles and responsibilities, particularly in its contribution to organizational business outcomes while proving its relevance within a disruptive business ecosystem thus being able to accommodate emerging trends.

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Keywords: Business, communication, organization, public relations, stakeholder; strategy



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1. Introduction

The PR field which has been evolving over the past few decades has been moving towards more strategic areas of function namely; corporate communication, relationship management, reputation management, and strategic management (McDonald & Hebbani, 2011). Such strategic PR establishes and manages relationships with stakeholders emphasising two-way communication (Grunig, 2011) of which Wilcox (2006) states that these functions involve:

- Tracking, analysing trends, issues that can affect the organization.
- Developing long-term relationships (trust and credibility) with key audiences,
- Training management to implement global strategies on a local basis, and
- Emphasising mutual understanding and conflict resolution,

This reflects the positioning of PR at the heart the organization comprising roles of establishing, enhancing and maintaining relationship with its stakeholders regarded as the core function of PR for present times (Fawkes, 2015) encompassing two-way communication, relationship building, dialogue initiation and persuasive initiatives to build, maintain and enhance organizational image, identity and reputation (Johnston, 2014). In such a context, PR serves as the “ears and eyes of the organizations” (Vercic & Zerfass, 2016) of which according to Thurlow et al. (2018) among others include:

- Defining, realizing and communicating values and purpose of an organization to its stakeholders,
- Advising the development of strategies to communicate organizational values, directions and priorities;
- Synchronizing communications strategy to organizational business plan(s),
- Conducting communication research and evaluating outcomes of communication initiatives,
- Understanding the risks and opportunities an organization faces,
- Managing relationships and building trust with internal and external stakeholders,
- Employing appropriate modes of communication for specific audiences,
- Translating organizational values and professional ethical standards into practice, and
- Managing risk(s), identifying potential crises while employing strategic response to crises,

Such justifies the professionalism of PR as a management function in which stakeholders are identified and programs are developed, making it a vital component towards endeavouring changes in ideas, attitude and behaviour of stakeholder entities, which is in contrast to the common practices of PR that usually encompasses propagandistic, journalistic and persuasion-based-communication (Grunig et al., 1995). To conclude, what may be required out of the PR portfolio is the ability to comprehend business demands and being able to flow along the current business trends which gives PR a strategic edge.

Hence, being one of the fastest growing occupation which is undergoing rapid transformation (Botan & Trowbridge, 2015), the PR profession may require to take pivotal roles in the organization structure while taking on senior management roles (Thurlow et al., 2018). In other words, the PR practitioner should assume a strategic and problem-solving management function, surpassing the publicist or the press agency

function to reveal a matured profession (Wilcox, 2006). Unlike conventional tactical/technical PR which influences media coverage, message dissemination and communications, contemporary circumstances now call for PR to assume a strategic function (Department of Trade & Industry and the Institute of Public Relations, 2003), one which contributes to organizational business objectives (Wilcox, 2006) linking closely to the concept of strategic organizational management by addressing market-related-issues, product or services offered or even satisfying customers as part of the business strategy (Anna, 2015). With PR taking a strategic stance, this not only initiates strategic thinking and implementation of communication strategies towards projecting a favourable image, but one which is regarded as relevant to the senior management of its contribution to the organization (Shamsan & Otieno, 2015). Such PR not only serves to establish and maintain relations with relevant organizational stakeholders (Rivero & Theodore, 2014) but manages support among a firm's internal and external publics (Thomas & Lane, 1990). This study serves to comprehend the potential of the PR role in its contribution to a company's competitiveness and profitability while paving ways to enter new markets, thus ensuring business sustainability in accordance to present demands while bringing value to the PR portfolio.

2. Problem Statement

Commonly, PR has been regarded a communication platform that the organization depends on towards establishing communication with its stakeholders or, in other words, a technical function to disseminate messages to stakeholders (Moss et al., 2000; Shamsan & Otieno, 2015; Steyn, 2007, 2012; Steyn & Niemann, 2008; Thurlow et al., 2018). Such a technical PR role had been unable to contribute to vital areas of business which reflects a limited PR 1schema that Steyn (2003) had argued on the inability of PR practitioners to assist organizations adapt to changing external conditions, while questioning the need to position PR into management based roles (Steyn 2003, 2007; Steyn & Niemann, 2008). The actual truth is that, the PR role should be involved not only in the achievement of communication goals, but involved in areas related to business goals (Shamsan & Otieno, 2015; Steyn, 2012; Thurlow et al., 2018). Such is arguable as the challenge for businesses today rely on delivering shareholder and stakeholder value (Jackson & Nelson, 2004) which takes importance in organizations paying attention to their stakeholders or forces in the business environment (Goi & Yong, 2009).

As a management function responsible of establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics (Cutlip et al., 1994, 2006), PR not only should take a communication role, but should explore further into strategic business motives (Argenti, 2007; Steyn, 2003, 2007; Steyn & Niemann, 2008; Van Riel, 1995). Such PR practise is coupled to the business process which necessitates its contribution to the short and long-term development of the organization. Viewed from such a context, the definitions transcend the traditional role of PR in the scope of communication but extend towards strategic roles. In short, the emphasis is to achieve a balance between commercial imperatives and its long-existed portfolio which has been an accepted norm (Steyn, 2003; Steyn & Niemann, 2008). This necessitates the need for PR to participate in strategic decision-making and strategy

¹ A schema reflects the set of roles within the limits of a stipulated boundary. In the case of PR, it encompasses only communication related roles which does not contribute to business strategy (Grunig & Grunig, 1992).

formulation for the growth and survival of organizations which face unstable and threatening environments (Grunig, 1992, 2006, 2011; Steyn, 1999, 2003) by assuming roles which contribute to core organizational needs (Steyn, 2003, 2009). Comprising the mirror and window function, the mirror encompasses the monitoring of development and changes in the business environment which potentially affect an organization's business and strategy, while the window reflects the strategies initiated by the organization to encounter the business environmental changes to portray a PR strategic stance (Van Riel, 1995). This translates to the fact that, organizations which fail to anticipate stakeholder developments and requirements not only risk losing business to competitors but may fail to compete or remain in the marketplace (Crals & Vereck, 2004). The impact of global business liberalisation which has brought about disruption in the business and economic landscape not only has paved the way for new possibilities and challenges but enhanced stakeholder-defined-standards. This reflects a 'stakeholder-centric' trend of which businesses are subject to stakeholder pressure along the value chain (Yu & Bell, 2007). Thus, it is not surprising that businesses today are subject to the scrutiny of stakeholders which calls for a more significant contribution of the PR role.

3. Research Questions

This study puts forth three objectives in replacement of research questions as follows:

- To explore the scope of public relations practices,
- To map the scope of public relations practices to strategic and less-strategic concepts,
- To assess the scope of public relations practices to meet strategic and managerial public relations / communication practices.

4. Purpose of the Study

This study aims to move PR from a tactical or a supporting role towards a more prominent position in the organization or, to optimize the potentials of communication that serve to position the business. Based on the outcome of this study, PR / corporate communication (CC) / communication graduates could better contribute towards serving their organizations however more significantly linked to the business outcome. Hence, this study serves the purpose of optimizing the PR portfolio.

5. Research Methods

Data acquiring encompass four methods. The literature review on PR practices, standard document search, primary research and the role expectation serve as a triangulation to develop a comprehensive understanding of the situation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). Weaknesses in the obtained data can be compensated for by the strengths of other data, thereby increasing the validity and reliability of the results thus reducing the risk of false interpretations (UNAIDS, 2010).

5.1. Literature Review

This serves to set a benchmark of reference for PR related roles.

5.2. Standard Job Designation

This determines if the job designation is involved in higher management roles / senior management involvement / decision making or, is designated within the middle management level supporting sales and marketing divisions or, is assigned a reporting or technical role. Identified sample comprised standard employment documents, response from communication practitioners and advertisements.

5.3. Primary Research

The survey and the in-depth interview were employed to gain understanding of the roles, responsibilities and tasks undertaken by the PR personnel. Information obtained was analysed for comprehending PR significance within the organization. Identified respondents comprised PR / communication personnel.

5.4. Role Expectation

This in-depth interview serves to address the gap between the practise and the expectation of the PR personnel / department particularly in areas where PR is required for strategical purposes. Identified respondents comprised senior management staff that the PR practitioner reported to.

5.5. Respondent Selection

Respondents for the qualitative study were selected employing the purposive selection method to select the respective PR / communication / corporate communication personnel from business organizations in peninsular Malaysia namely multinationals (MNCs), government linked companies (GLCs), Public listed companies (PLC's) and manufacturing enterprises of larger scale. An estimated of 8 to 10 practitioners and the same number of senior management staff were selected for the interview while for the quantitative survey, 250 respondents were selected from the organizations identified to respond through an online questionnaire.

6. Findings

6.1. Literature Review

Findings based on the literature identified three levels:

- i. Strategical roles which involve higher levels of communication such as business environment scanning for changes in stakeholder requirement, changes in business trends, detecting crisis, identifying global / regional changes that has the potential to affect business and functions that has the ability to place PR at the senior management decision making level.
- ii. Managerial roles which involve the external and internal perspectives. This encompasses addressing issues and taking-on initiatives that help to overcome situations that aid in

strengthening the organization's business positioning through boundary spanning² and communication facilitating³ roles which also involve managing of marketing tasks.

- iii. Technical roles which involve the tactical functions from a journalistic perspective much biased to the writing, drafting, composing or the creating of communication texts and material.

6.2. Standard Job Requirement

Findings from the analysis which is based on the data obtained from the organization representatives and advertisements found 5 prevailing roles as follows:

i. Communication Officer

Communication maintenance:

- Develop, write, edit and publish press releases, newsletters, blog posts and social media content.
- Promote organization through appropriate social media channels.
- Maintain blogs and social media.
- Maintain digital media archives including photos and videos

Indicator:

- Track analytics and create reports detailing successes and failures of communications campaigns

Level detected: Technical / tactical dominant

ii. Product / service marketing communications (MarCom) officer

Marketing and indicator:

- Develop marketing and communications materials for product / service for campaign use.
- Lead communications team members to develop communications strategies and campaigns.
- Perform media outreach to achieve brand placement in publications.
- Align communication/marketing initiatives with brand standards.
- Track analytics and perform detail monitoring on the successes and failures of communications campaigns.

Level detected: Meso / managerial dominant

iii. Communication Manager

- Marketing and indicator:

² Representing the business organization by placing oneself between the organization and the stakeholders in the bid towards comprehending stakeholder needs better that serves to help organization cater better for stakeholders while strategizing its move.

³ A go-between the entities to facilitate communication for the purpose of opening the channels of communication with the relevant target groups.

- Develop and implement marketing and communications (MarCom) strategies.
- Monitor the success marketing and communications campaigns and strategies.
- Define key performance indicators for marketing communications (MarCom) effort and channel effectiveness to indicate campaign's success.
- Oversee the creation of marketing and communications initiatives to ensure consistency with the organization's brand.
- Determine strategic communications campaigns that will help further organizational goals
- Reach out to influencers, media and beyond in order to arrange story placement on a national and global level

Internal communication:

- Create internal communications protocols and initiatives that will foster employee moral
- Oversee the internal newsletter publication.

Organization representative:

- Represent the organization at events and press conferences

Level detected:

Meso / managerial dominant

Macro / strategic lesser scale

iv. Public Relations Officer

Event:

- Develop PR campaigns and media relations strategies
- Organize PR events (e.g. open days, press conferences)
- Planning publicity strategies and campaigns

Promotional materials and organization report:

- Edit and update promotional material and publications (brochures, videos, social media posts etc.)
- Writing and producing presentations and press releases
- Prepare and distribute press releases
- Prepare and submit organization communication / PR reports

Organization frontline/representative:

- Serve as the company's spokesperson
- Attending promotional events such as press conferences, open days, exhibitions, tours and visits
- Speaking publicly at interviews, press conferences and presentations
- Providing clients with information about new promotional opportunities and current PR campaigns progress

Project management:

- Liaising with clients, managerial and journalistic staff about budgets, timescales and objectives

Outreach:

- Seek opportunities for partnerships, sponsorships and advertising

- Collaborate with internal teams (e.g. marketing) and maintain open communication with senior management

Media liaison:

- Address inquiries from the media and other parties
- Track media coverage and follow industry trends
- Dealing with enquiries from the public, the press, and related organizations
- Analysing media coverage

Research:

- Commissioning or undertaking relevant market research

Crisis protocol:

- Develop escalation protocols for managing communication crises, should they arise

Level detected:

Meso / managerial dominant

Macro / strategic lesser scale

Technical / tactical on a lesser degree

v. Public Relations Senior Manager

Image, identity and reputation development:

- Develop their organization's or client's corporate image and identity
- Devise advertising and promotion programs

Media liaison:

- Prepare information for the media
- Designate an appropriate spokesperson or information source for media inquiries

Managerial:

- Assign, supervise, and review the activities of staff
- Inform an organization's executives and spokespeople of communication initiatives.

Marketing:

- Identify audiences and determine the best way to reach them
- Help clients/organizations communicate effectively with the public

Level detected:

Meso / managerial dominant

Macro / strategic lesser scale

Further observation reveals the presence of managerial tasks in most of the communication roles assumed while technical and strategic roles are of lesser degree which explains as to why most of the job scopes comprise managerial traits as in comparison to the technical and followed by the strategic roles/levels which is the least prevalent.

6.2.1. Survey

Sample size and gender:

250 samples participated in the survey comprising 147 females and 103 males which revealed 18 percent more of females (see Table 1).

Table 1. Sample Size

Gender	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Female	147	58.8	58.8
Male	103	41.2	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Age:

Three age groups were identified namely 21-30 identified as entry level, 31-37 as the middle and 38-45 as senior staff. The frequency of practitioners reduced as the age increased (see Table 2).

Table 2. Age Group

Age	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
21-30	132	52.8	52.8
31-37	79	31.6	84.4
38-45	39	15.6	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

Job level:

The findings reveal a near-equal proportion between the support (non-executive) and the managerial (supervisory) at 46 and 52 percentages respectively while the senior management staff accounted for 2% of the total sample (see Table 3).

Table 3. Job Level

Job Level	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Support staff	115	46.0	46.0
Middle management /supervisory	130	52.0	98.0
Senior management	5	2.0	100.0
Total	250	100.0	

The inference deduced are as follows:

- i. PR accounts for a very low percentage at the higher levels (hierarchy) of the organization however at the middle and lower strata of the organization,
- ii. PR personnel are not part of the organization's senior management, and
- iii. PR is not in the decision-making position.

Descriptive statistics:

All three categories fare high for the strategic communication (see Table 4). However, the mean values for the support staff ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 0.50$) and the middle management ($M = 3.58$, $SD = 0.49$) are

at the lower end of the high mean scale against the senior management ($M = 3.94$, $SD = 0.54$) which is at the higher end. A significant mean value which distinguishes the senior management employee as being inclined to strategical communication did not prevail. There were no statistically significant differences between group means as determined by one-way ANOVA [$F(17, 232) = 0.76$, $p = 0.137$].

Table 4. Mean Strategic Communication

Job Level	M	SD	n
Support staff	3.475	.503	115
Middle management /supervisory	3.580	.492	130
Senior management	3.940	.541	5
			250

Scale: 1.00-1.80-Very Low, 1.81-2.60-Low, 2.61-3.40-Moderate, 3.41-4.20-High, 4.21-5.00- Very high

Support staff and the middle management categories fare moderate while senior management fare high for managerial communication (see Table 5). However, the mean values for the support staff ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 1.09$) and the middle management ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.49$) are at the high end of the mean scale against the senior management ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.87$) which is at the lower end of the high scale. A significant mean value which distinguishes the senior management employee as being inclined to managerial communication did not prevail. There were no statistically significant differences between group means as determined by one-way ANOVA [$F(25, 224) = 1.17$, $p = 0.27$].

Table 5. Mean Managerial Communication

Job Level	M	SD	n
Support staff	3.210	1.089	115
Middle management /supervisory	3.210	.490	130
Senior management	3.420	.867	5
			250

Scale: 1.00-1.80-Very Low, 1.81-2.60-Low, 2.61-3.40-Moderate, 3.41-4.20-High, 4.21-5.00- Very high

All three categories fare moderate for technical communication with mean values for the support staff ($M = 2.85$, $SD = 1.14$), middle management ($M = 2.90$, $SD = 1.06$) and senior management ($M = 2.80$, $SD = 1.09$) (see Table 6). Observed carefully, all mean values are at the lower end of the moderate scale towards the low scale. A significant mean value which distinguishes the senior management employee as being inclined to strategical communication did not prevail. There were no statistically significant differences between group means as determined by one-way ANOVA [$F(22, 227) = 0.67$, $p = 0.87$].

Table 6. Mean Technical Communication

Job Level	M	SD	n
Support staff	2.850	1.140	115
Middle management /supervisory	2.900	1.060	130
Senior management	2.800	1.090	5
			250

Scale: 1.00-1.80-Very Low, 1.81-2.60-Low, 2.61-3.40 Moderate, 3.41-4.20-High, 4.21-5.00- Very high

Based on the result, the inference from the mean values reveal several observations as follows:

- i. All three levels show high involvement in strategic communication with the exception of the senior staff showing a higher inclination.
- ii. Support and middle management staff show moderate involvement in managerial communication with the exception of the senior staff showing a higher inclination. These two findings facts could point to the fact that senior communication practitioners are involved both at the strategic and managerial tasks.
- iii. All three levels show lower-moderate involvement in technical communication which could conclude that the scope of roles and responsibilities of communication practitioners are biased towards strategic and managerial communication regardless of the level.

6.2.2. In-depth Interview

Interpretation of interview among practitioners found that (see Figure 01):

- i. Managerial respondents point towards planning, implementation, managing resources, stakeholder communication, decision making and meeting organizational goals. This reveals the roles and responsibilities above the tactical / technical roles or, one which is operational.
- ii. Not all respondents are aware of the strategic roles and even if they are aware, only vague. This also reveals that the communication personnel are not able to conceptualize beyond the managerial position. This may be pointing to a glass ceiling phenomena of which these personnel are limited by their own perception that the managerial role is the ultimate communication position. This is supported by the fact that respondents show interest to remain in the managerial position while those in the technical positions are keen to take-up managerial roles.
- iii. The finding does not point to the respondents working alongside the senior management level. This could connote the insignificance of the PR role as it is not positioned at a vital position within the senior management or within the organization structure.

Communications personnel 1

- Female senior manager assumes strategic level involvement helps in becoming effective communicator.
- Assumes that non-technical (managerial) traits serve to enhance competitiveness.
- Willing to take on strategic roles but has reservation in making decisions with the senior management. Displays the lack of confidence in terms of working with the senior management.
- Describes strategic role similar to managerial role. Unable to distinguish strategic role however is aware of it being at the higher level of PR / communications.

Communications personnel 2

- Male manager assumes that strategic level involvement helps in becoming effective communicator.
- Is willing to take on strategic roles but has reservation in making decisions with the senior management. Displays the lack of confidence in terms of working with the senior management.
- Describes strategic role slightly beyond the managerial role however with high similarity to the managerial. Aware of the strategic role however vague understanding.

Communications personnel 3

- Female communication officer at the technical (micro) level is willing and confident to take up managerial roles while having no issues with her own performance.
- She is hoping to take managerial position to be involved in decision making process in the future.
- Aware of managerial role as planning, implementation, managing and making decision at the higher levels.

Communications personnel 4

- Male marketing communication officer is willing to take-up managerial positions while hoping for continuous internal training to develop knowledge
- Aware of managerial role as planning, implementation, managing resources, communicating with stakeholders and making decision at the higher levels.

Communications personnel 5

- Female public relation officer at the managerial level develops branding campaign.
- Describes managerial role as planning, implementation, managing resources, communicating with stakeholders and making decision at the higher levels.
- Aware and is able to describe managerial and strategic roles with a clear line of distinguishing.

Communications personnel 6

- Male communication executive is willing to pursue managerial position to improve his performance.
- Understands the technical role as the role of production and not managing people.
- Aware of managerial role as planning, managing resources, communicating with stakeholders, making decision and meeting organization goals / objectives.

Communications personnel 7

- Female PR Officer in managerial position as a fundraiser and campaign planner.
- Is able to describe managerial and strategic roles with a clear line of distinguishing.
- Is facing difficulties to communicate at the higher level
- Aware of managerial role as planning, managing resources, meeting organization goals / objectives.
- Aware of strategic roles however with high similarity to the managerial.

Communications personnel 8

- Male taking up liaison communication and settles arising issues.
 - Looking forward for more managerial positions (enhanced roles and responsibilities).
 - Willing to meet the expectation of the communication field.
 - Aware of managerial role as planning, managing resources, making decision and meeting organization goals / objectives.
 - Unaware of strategic roles.
-

Figure 1. Qualitative In-depth Interview Interpretation

6.3. In-depth Interview (role expectation)

Data transcription of interview among senior manager reveals the following (see Figure 2).

Senior manager 1- Role underutilized, limited schema

- More could be done by PR/communication practitioners as the role is underutilized.
- The comprehensiveness that PR could undertake and not a limited schema.
- Due to the fact that the senior manager is focusing on years of work experience, he/she may be missing out on the potential communication practitioners.

Senior manager 2- Education, limited understanding on the schema of PR

- Autonomy may enable decision making among practitioners.
- The senior manager realizes the importance of education for communication related posts.
- Senior manager has limited understanding on the scope of PR.

Senior manager 3- Decision making autonomy, degree of freedom

- Autonomy when carrying out responsibilities is vital.
- Degree of freedom that PR/communication practitioners enjoy may be little.
- The most that PR/communication role can assume is the managerial role.

Senior manager 4- Decision making autonomy, strategic role unrealized

- Autonomy when carrying out responsibilities is vital for decision making.
- Despite the seniority, the most that PR/communication role can assume is the managerial role. Strategic role is not realized although there is a voice for it.

Senior manager 5- Strategic role unrealized

- Senior manager is satisfied with the managerial role. This points to the fact that the senior manager may be unaware of the macro / strategic potentials.

Senior manager 6- Autonomy, authority, commitment, strategic role unrealized

- Senior manager is satisfied with the managerial role. This points to the fact that the senior manager may be unaware of the macro / strategic potentials.
- Senior manager and the CEO may be interfering with the communication officer roles and responsibilities. This reveals authority.

Senior manager 7- Autonomy, strategic role unrealized

- Senior manager is satisfied with the managerial role. This points to the fact that the senior manager may be unaware of the macro / strategic potentials.
 - Autonomy when carrying out responsibilities is vital.
-

Figure 2. Senior Manager Expectation

Objective 1: To explore the scope of public relations practices

The scope of PR practices obtained from the interviews are:

- i. Senior communication planner, providing clients with media planning solutions which serves as holistic concept in media planning.
- ii. Marketing executive planning marketing strategies, planning offline campaigns and heads the social media communication platform.
- iii. Content developer for the management of social media and campaign planning.
- iv. Digital marketing communication officer.
- v. Public relations officer developing brand campaigns.
- vi. Marketing communication executive
- vii. Fundraiser and campaign organizer
- viii. Corporate communication officer

The findings above were mapped to the standard job designation to evaluate whether the findings match the standard PR practices within the industry. This serves to ensure that the findings are within the scope of PR practices as defined by the industry (see Figure 3). The job designation in the data obtained is within the scope of PR practices as defined by the needs of the industry.

Dominant/focus area of communication practitioner job requirement	Findings mapped
Communication Officer Communication maintenance and Indicator tracking	Content developer Senior communication planner
Marketing communications (MarCom) officer- Marketing and indicator tracking	Marketing communication executive Digital marketing communication officer
Communication Manager Marketing and indicator Internal communication Organization representative	Marketing executive
Public Relation Officer Event/campaign planning and management Promotional materials and organization report Organization frontline/representative Project management Outreach Media liaison Research Crisis protocol	Fundraiser and campaign organizer Corporate communication officer
Public Relation Senior Manager Image, identity and reputation development Media liaison, Managerial and Marketing	Public relations officer developing brand campaigns

Figure 3. Job requirement mapped to research results

Objective 2: To map the scope of public relations practices to strategic and less-strategic concepts

Figure 4 summarizes the following. Whilst the literature review serves as the standard reference for the findings, the discussion looks into the uniformity and the difference of results obtained as follows:

- i. The *macro/strategic concept of PR is the least popular within the industry, least practiced by the practitioners and least realized by the senior managers.
- ii. The **micro/technical concept is lesser required by the industry as in comparison to the managerial role, practised dominantly by the practitioners but is less popular among the senior managers.
- iii. The ***meso/managerial concept of PR is the most required by the industry, practised dominantly by the practitioners and has been mentioned among the senior managers.

However, one exceptional result is the survey where strategic roles have been found at the high scale as in comparison to the managerial and technical at the moderate scale. Nevertheless, the reference to the standard job designation, practitioner interview and senior manager interview affirms the otherwise of

which this may give a clearer picture. Hence, the fact that strategic roles are least taken-up by practitioners is accepted.

	*Macro / Strategic	***Meso/ Managerial	**Micro / Technical
Standard job requirement	Lesser	Dominant	Lesser
Survey	High	Moderate	Moderate
Practitioner interview	Low	Dominant	Dominant
Senior manager interview	Low- unrealized	Dominant	Lesser than managerial

Figure 4. PR practices mapped to the level of practices

Standard job requirement versus practitioner current practices

Mapping revealed the match between standard job requirements with reference to the three methods of findings. Standard job requirement and roles by the practitioner are found to be similar (see Figure 5).

	*Macro / Strategic	***Meso/ Managerial	**Micro / Technical
Standard job requirement	Lesser	Dominant	Lesser
Practitioner interview	Low	Dominant	Dominant

Figure 5. Standard job requirement mapped to practices

Standard job requirement versus senior manager response

Likewise, standard job requirement and response from the senior manager are found to be similar (see Figure 6).

	*Macro / Strategic	***Meso/ Managerial	**Micro / Technical
Standard job requirement	Lesser	Dominant	Lesser
Senior manager interview	Low- unrealized	Dominant	Lesser than managerial

Figure 6. Standard job requirement mapped to senior manager response

Standard job requirement versus survey

However, standard job requirement and the survey results revealed opposite results (see Figure 7). The results of the interview with the practitioners and the senior managers match the description by the standard job requirement. Hence, the interviews could be regarded as more reliable as in comparison to the survey.

	*Macro / Strategic	***Meso/ Managerial	**Micro / Technical
Standard job requirement	Lesser	Dominant	Lesser
Survey	High	Moderate	Moderate

Figure 7. Standard job requirement mapped to survey findings

Objective 3: To assess the scope of public relations practice to meet strategic and managerial public relations / communication practices.

Based on the findings:

- Technical level staff are willing to take-up managerial roles,
- Managerial staff are aware of their roles and responsibilities,
- The tendency of practitioners to take-up managerial roles prevails in comparison to taking-up strategic roles, which points to the fact that these practitioners are either unaware, ignorant or have a vague understanding of strategic PR.

Such could be due to the demand of the job role itself which does not necessitate the need for PR practitioners to assume roles beyond the managerial, technical or the technical/managerial combination which is in accordance to the standard job requirement. The presumption of PR assuming the managerial role being the highest level of practice may be a contributing factor that has not enabled such a strategic role to be realized or explored, which points to the fact that the senior managers or the employers are in the dark of strategic communication practices. This relates to the senior managers pointing towards the similar direction of which the contribution of PR which could be enhanced to connote a comprehensive managerial role or, the inclusion of strategic practices which relates to the schema discussed earlier. This is an indication of the communication practitioner’s limited roles and responsibility which contributes to the lack of credibility within the organization.

The response on the limited schema from senior managers provides an insight as to why there is a need to empower the PR practitioners with significant roles in order to be considered as credible communicators by the senior management (Department of Trade & Industry and the Institute of Public Relations, 2003; Steyn, 2003; Steyn & Niemann, 2008; Thurlow et al., 2018; Wilcox, 2006). To further concretize this, the findings also reveal communication practitioners not wanting to be involved with the senior management when making decisions. Such reveal the lack of certain traits which does not allow these individuals to work alongside vital decision makers in the organization which eventually doesn’t place PR in a positive light among the senior management or commonly reckoned as the dominant coalition (Steyn, 2003; Steyn & Niemann, 2008). This goes further to the next variable; namely autonomy.

Autonomy, freedom or the allowance granted to conduct one’s duty at his/her discretion is another aspect that senior managers have raised. As senior managers opined that there is a need for more autonomy which would enable the communication managers to make decisions, the present state reflects a non-autonomous stance of the communication practitioner. To address such shortcoming, a comprehensive portfolio may influence the decision making and autonomous positioning. In view of such a position, it could be deduced that communication practitioners may require a comprehensive portfolio of which such a position may grant the position and authority to make decisions.

Another factor that should be included to enhance the position of the communication practitioner is the education component. The researcher had been given an impression of the importance that should be placed in ensuring the credibility of the field. Hence, it is either the communication practitioners who are required to be schooled in a formal setting, or graduates of this field who should be given consideration to serve as communication practitioners as formally trained staff may be able to tap into broader perspectives of PR. As a final word, the findings of the research reflect predominantly technical and managerial roles and responsibilities while strategic PR is insignificant (see Figure 8).

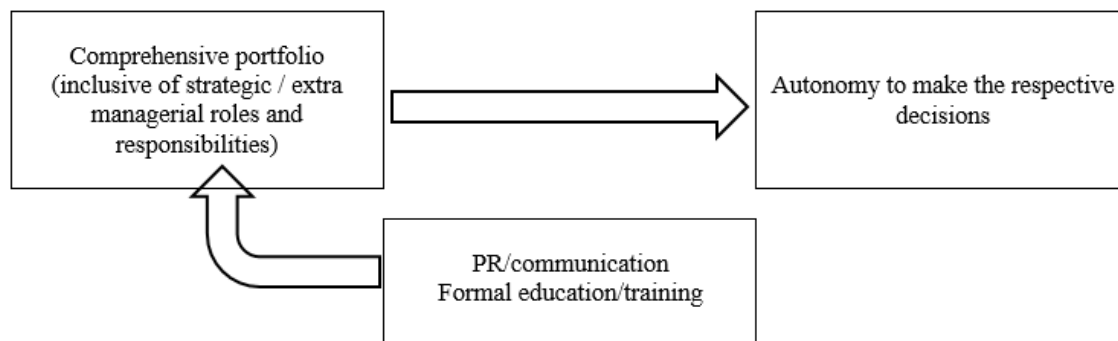


Figure 8. Influence of education on a comprehensive portfolio and towards decision-making

7. Conclusion

This research points to the fact that the opportunity to optimize the communication portfolio is undeniable. In the endeavor to elevate the communication aspect of an organization to credible heights, there is a need to consider the alignment between strategic aspects of PR practices, present industrial practices and the formal PR education. While it is realized that the disruptive era comes with challenges and uncertainties but also great opportunities, it is undeniably a fact that the PR role should adapt to the needs and demands in order to remain relevant.

While measures were taken towards optimizing response for the purpose of enhancing the communication fraternity, obstacles were unavoidable. Privacy of the respondents took prime precedence for most of them took all necessary steps to conceal their identities of which this adhered to the ethical guidelines. Such conditions limited the information revealed. Being caution of the probing factor is another as respondents were wary of what was being said. Finally, while organizations have different understanding, scope of roles and responsibilities and expectation of their communication practitioners, the researcher had to deal with a diverse array of data to decipher meaning out of it.

Acknowledgments

This study has been financed by Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang, Malaysia carrying the title Exploring the Public Relations Portfolio towards Proposing a Strategic Communication Framework: A Study Among Business Organizations in Malaysia. Grant reference no: 304/PCOMM/6315082. CrossRef's Open Funder Registry.

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