



**BENCHMARKING PUBLIC RELATIONS PRACTICE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR  
AGAINST THE PRINCIPLES OF THE EXCELLENCE THEORY: A STUDY OF  
SELECTED GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS**

**BY**

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**JANUARY, 2025**

## **DECLARATION**

I hereby declare that this research is a result of my own original study, and that no part of it has been presented for another degree in this university or any other higher education institute.

I further declare that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

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**January 14, 2025**

## **CERTIFICATION BY SUPERVISOR**

This dissertation has been prepared and presented under my supervision according to the guidelines for supervising and formatting dissertations as laid down by the University of Media, Art and Communication (UniMAC).

**Albert Anani-Bossman (PhD)**

**(Supervisor)**

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a vertical line extending downwards.

**January 15, 2024**

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to all public relations practitioners and academics whose tireless efforts, groundbreaking research, and innovative practices have driven the evolution of public relations as a discipline and profession. Your contributions are a sturdy foundation on which public relations burgeon.

May this work serve as a testament to your legacy and as a source of inspiration for future scholars and practitioners committed to excellence in public relations.

## **ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Public relations in the government sector contributes significantly to maintaining transparency, trust, and accountability between governments and citizens. In Ghana, the effectiveness of public relations practice in public institutions has often raised brows of doubt. This study evaluates the effectiveness of PR praxis in Ghana's public sector, employing Grunig and Hunt's Excellence Theory as a benchmark. Using a qualitative approach, it draws insights from semi-structured interviews with 15 practitioners across various state institutions. Findings reveal a discrepancy between the strategic value of PR and its actual implementation within institutional frameworks. Practitioners are largely relegated to technical roles, with minimal involvement in policy formulation or organisational goal-setting. Consequently, they are rarely considered for a seat with the dominant coalition. The study also identifies a disparity between the theoretical knowledge of practitioners and their practical strategic management skills. Misconceptions about PR's role further exacerbate this gap. Additionally, PR practice frequently defaults to one-way or two-way asymmetric communication, with limited application of two-way symmetrical models. The study concludes that achieving PR excellence requires addressing systemic challenges, including inter alia, institutional support for strategic public relations, adherence to two-way symmetrical communication and investment in research and development.

**KEYWORDS:** Public Relations, Strategic Management, Public Sector Communication, Excellence Theory, Knowledge Potential, Two-Way Symmetrical Communication, Professional Development

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **1.0 Chapter Overview**

This chapter discusses the background of the study, thereby providing a context, rationale, and direction for the entire investigation. The chapter then discusses the problem statement that puts the study in context to other studies within the literature to drum up the rationale for the study, while recognising the contributions made by other researchers within the area. The chapter articulates the research aims and narrows in on the research objectives that will undergird the study. Gleaning from the research objectives, the chapter also discusses the research questions that will be answered at the end of the study while arguing the justification for the study as well as the significance of the study. The delimitations are also discussed, as well as the chapter disposition of the study.

### **1.1 Background of the study**

Communication is a basic managerial function that aids in achieving organizational effectiveness (Kapur, 2018; Adjei, 2015). The Public Relations role, specifically, primarily concerns itself with identifying, establishing, and maintaining a mutually beneficial relationship between an organisation and its publics (Cutlip et al, 2013). Considering the interconnected nature of the world today, this function has become increasingly crucial to the operations of large organisations and government agencies. The phenomenon can be attributed largely to globalisation and the proliferation of new media technology, inter alia, that has significantly affected the dynamics of operations within the profession, resulting in the need for a more competent and strategic approach

within the industry; Okudo (2014) argues that as population increases, so does the need of Public Relations.

Mehta & Xavier (2009) highlight effective communication between an organization and its publics, monitoring and responding to issues, and maintaining and productive work environment as the duties of a Public Relations practitioner. Within the context of government communication, Public Relations practitioners are entrusted with advocating, interpreting, and facilitating the undertakings of government with the people (Shikalepo, 2021). The mandates of the role comprise but are not limited to government policies, global trade, and social justice, and should therefore be considered a cardinal management function in communication (Kriyantono, 2019). This area of scholarship is known as Government Public Relations (GPR), and it focuses on the value, function, and influence of public relations and communication in the public sector (Lee et al., 2021).

The foregoing is suggestive of a focus on nation-building, typically in developing countries, prompting central governments to employ Public Relations practitioners to spearhead their communication efforts (Sriramesh, 2009). In Ghana, Public Relations has seen notable growth, particularly in recent years (Asante, 2016). Increasing recognition of its importance in shaping public perception, building trust, and a good reputation as an imperative of good governance substantially informs the prominence given to the role in all public sector institutions. Lee (2008) supports this realisation, admonishing that Public Relations helps to execute government's strategic plans for the betterment of the larger society to which it is accountable.

This development notwithstanding, practitioners have long battled with establishing the position, functions, and contribution of Public Relations to institutional growth (Adjei, 2015). Anani-Bossman (2021) reiterates this conundrum, that Public Relations in Ghana is less often considered a managerial function, and is more so practised at the technician level. Anani-Bossman (ibid)

argues that this is partly because many managerial heads do not understand or value the role of public relations in their management. These findings are evidenced by rising tensions between the Ghanaian populace and the government, in the expression of their disaffection with the way public services are rendered (and/or communicated), corroborating Waeraas & Byrkjeflot's (2012) postulation that government institutions are challenged by public trust in the form of negative stereotypes, viz: excessive bureaucracy, inflexibility, transparency, and inefficiency. To this end, a critical re-evaluation of the role of Public Relations within Ghana's public sector is beyond contention, seeing as it remains the only way by which practitioners may be acknowledged as crucial to decision-making and supported within the grand scheme of national governance.

The Excellence Theory, propounded by Grunig et al (2002), forms the foundation of this study, providing a theoretical framework and benchmark for government Public Relations departments and units to compare their undertakings against world-class standards, ultimately leading to improvements in performance (Grunig, 1993; Grunig & Dozier, 2013). The theory explains the value of Public Relations to an organisation's bottom line and proposes a set of principles that define how Public Relations should be managed and practised in order to augment its contribution to individual organizations.

The findings of this study have been extended into a global theory, where its elements are proposed as "generic principles" for practising Public Relations on an international scale. They are as follows:

1. Involvement of Public Relations in the strategic management process
2. Empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition or a direct reporting relationship to senior management

3. Integrated public relations function
4. Public relations as a management function separate from other functions
5. Public relations unit headed by a manager rather than a technician
6. Two-way symmetrical model of public relations
7. A symmetrical system of internal communication
8. Knowledge potential and professional training for managerial role
9. Diversity embodied in all roles.

These benchmark principles, albeit contributing prominently to the furtherance of Public Relations pedagogy, have come under serious academic scrutiny, with many scholars arguing that the theory is rather abstract than applicable, especially in contexts outside of the Americas, Europe, and Canada. Falconi (2010) for instance, avers that these principles are ineffective if not profoundly integrated into ‘the public relations structure of a given territory’. On the other hand, Wakefield (2007) raises evidence in support of the validity and applicability of the generic principles across international and multinational contexts (Khamis & Toth, 2009).

However, investigating how the applicability of these principles varies across various nations is beyond the scope of this paper. The purpose of the study is to determine the applicability of the principles of Excellence Theory in selected Ghanaian public sector organisations by focusing attention on four: Involvement of public relations in strategic management, Empowerment of Public Relations in the dominant coalition/direct reporting relationship, Knowledge potential and professional training for managerial role and the use of the two-way symmetrical model of Public Relations.

The importance of public relations management cannot be overemphasised, having been thoroughly investigated by several scholars and concluded to be crucial to attaining organizational goals. Cornelissen (2020), for instance, holds that Public Relations is indispensable to the effective management of every organization, as recommended by the Excellence study. Similarly, researchers like Dozier et al (2013) recount that one of the strongest indicators of excellent organizations is strategic Public Relations, fortifying the observation that Public Relations has evolved over the years, with responsibilities expanding to include, amongst others, internal communication, maintaining organisational culture and image, employee engagement and advocacy, leadership communication, and conflict management. These stress the role of a practitioner as an ‘enabler’ of employee performance instead of the much more traditional ‘messenger’ or ‘communicator’ approach. Within the context of governance, Relations is believed to influence public opinion (Gelders & Ihlen, 2010).

The plethora of resources notwithstanding, extant literature concerning the subject matter is predominantly authored by European and American scholars, who have based their findings on studies conducted in their home regions, inadvertently yet evidently institutionalizing an Anglo-Saxon perspective into global/international Public Relations.

By examining the extent to which these principles are embraced and implemented across different sectors and regions, therefore, this study contributes to the ongoing academic dialogue about the universality of the principles for effective Public Relations. Within the Ghanaian public sector context, understanding the political landscapes and resource constraints that may influence the implementation of these principles will facilitate the provision of pragmatic recommendations for adapting and tailoring them to local needs.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The remit of Public Relations practice and pedagogy have witnessed significant expansion since the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. But, the evolution of the profession is unending; scholars like Wilcox (2006) surmise that the field has yet to fully develop into an established discipline. However, despite the growing importance of Public Relations within local, national, and international government organizations, including a multidisciplinary interest in Public Relations as a whole, scholarship within the government sector is underdeveloped compared to its corporate and non-profit counterparts, and has been heavily critiqued for lagging in theoretical advancement (Liu & Horsley, 2007).

Almutairi & Sriramesh (2021) contend that the phenomenon is due to the concentration of theorisation in Western and European countries, resulting in a severe paucity of literature on Public Relations practice especially within the public sector in other parts of the world. A realistic consequence is that a vital contribution towards a global body of theory of Public Relations in Government Communication is missing. Case in point, notable domestic Public Relations studies that have been conducted in emerging economies like Ghana (Adjin-Tettey et al, 2020; Anani-Bossman, 2021; Best-Gavi, 2022) have been limited to corporate and non-profit organisations. This gives credence to the need for an examination into the effectiveness of Public Relations praxis in Ghana through the lenses of government institutions.

Similarly, extant literature (Liu & Horsely, 2007) describes Public Relations in Government communication as typically following the public information model, characterized by a one-way flow of information – from government to the citizenry, as opposed to the two-way symmetrical model (Dozier et al, 2013), which Gelders & Ihlen (2010) argue to be ideal because citizen dialogue is integral to the effectiveness of Public Relations in government. The result is a socio-

political environment that is marred by scepticism and mistrust of the government (Omondi, 2012). The case is no different for Ghana.

In view of the ongoing academic discourse surrounding the diverse theoretical frameworks that influence Public Relations practices, therefore, a significant topic of interest is “What influences the Public Relations practices in Ghanaian public sector institutions?”. It is against this backdrop that this study proposes to examine the effectiveness, strategic focus, and alignment with global standards of these practices using the Excellence Study as a benchmark. The researcher believes that this will provide insight into the role of Public Relations in Government communication and the entire governance process. This will also enable professionals to explore avenues for proactive and strategic approaches to Public Relations in Ghanaian public sector institutions.

The study will identify areas for improvement and inform the development of more effective communication approaches that foster mutual understanding between the government and the people. Essentially, it will aid in drawing conclusions on how relationships between the government and the Ghanaian people can best be managed (Heath, 2001) through enhanced communication between state institutions and respective stakeholders.

### **1.3 Aim and objectives of the study**

This study examines the application of the tenets of Excellence Theory in the Public Relations practices of selected communication departments in Ghana's public sector institutions.

The following objectives will undergird the research:

1. To investigate the level of involvement of Public Relations practitioners in the strategic management process of Ghanaian public organizations.

2. To examine the nature of the relationship between Public Relations practitioners and the dominant coalition in selected public sector institutions in Ghana
3. To evaluate the level of knowledge and skills of Public Relations practitioners in selected public sector institutions in Ghana.
4. To investigate the extent to which Public Relations practice in the public sector is premised on two-way symmetrical communication.

#### **1.4 Research Questions**

Following the research objectives discussed above, the following questions will be answered at the end of the study.

1. To what extent are Public Relations practitioners in Ghana's public sector institutions involved in strategic management, and do they manage their public relations programs strategically?
2. What kind of reporting relationships do Public Relations departments in public sector institutions in Ghana have with the dominant coalition or senior management?
3. What is the extent of Public Relations knowledge among practitioners in Ghana's public sector institutions?
4. To what extent is Public Relations practice in the public sector based on two-way symmetrical communication?

### **1.5 Significance of the study**

By benchmarking Public Relations practice in Ghana's public sector institutions against the generic principles of the Excellence study, this study modestly enriches current Public Relationships scholarship by contributing valuable insights to the development of a framework that appropriately reflects contextual variables within Ghana and Africa at large. This is particularly critical for the development of a global body of theory that shapes the practice of Public Relations, in response to the call by Sriramesh (2008) for evidence from jurisdictions outside of the Western world.

Similarly, this study is significant to incumbent and potential governments in the development of domestic campaigns. It will analyse current practices, identify areas where efforts have fallen short, and recommend solutions to facilitate a shift towards a more strategic approach to Public Relations practice in Ghana's public sector.

### **1.6 Scope of the study**

This dissertation examines practice in public sector institutions domiciled in Accra. To be economically and chronologically feasible, the study is limited to practitioners who double as members of professional Public Relations associations.

### **1.7 Organisation of the study**

This part discusses the chapter disposition of the study. Chapter One, the introductory chapter, discusses the background of the study, outlines the research objectives and questions and justifies the significance of the study.

The second chapter is the literature review; it assesses, examines and evaluates literature concerning the Excellence Study and Public Relations praxis in Ghana. It discusses the conceptual review as well as the review of other related empirical studies.

The third chapter, methodology, expounds on the research design that was employed, data collection method and tools, population, sample and sampling technique as well as methods that were employed for the analysis of data.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the presentation and discussion of findings, while the fifth chapter provides a summary, conclusion and recommendations for further studies.

### **1.8 Chapter Summary**

This chapter focused on the background, the problem statement and the objectives of how the study will be treated and dealt with for academic purposes. It also paid attention to the research objectives, research questions, and importance of the study as well as its scope. It also narrowed in on the organization of the study.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### 2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews literature on the research topic by first examining the theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of the Excellence study in different contexts. Particular attention is given to the relevance and adaptation of these principles in public sector organizations, with a focus on the unique challenges and opportunities presented by this domain. Its remit then narrows to exploring and analysing literature on the subject of Public Relations in Ghana, as well as in public sector organisations, providing a contextual background that highlights the socio-political and organizational climate within which Public Relations functions. What the review seeks to achieve is to contextualize the Excellence Theory within Ghana's public sector by exploring the factors that facilitate or hinder the adoption of these principles and offering a critical assessment of their impact on Public Relations practice in this region.

#### 2.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study

The discussions above give credence to the suitable theory that will undergird this study; the Excellence Theory will guide the navigation of this research.

The excellence theory conceptualizes the effectiveness of Public Relations beyond contribution to 'programs', and spells out prerequisites for the attainment of same. According to Butterick (2011), the Excellence Theory is "focused on organisational relations and the attainment of managerial power and influence for the Public Relations role" in support of the idea that the Public Relations sphere has witnessed a significant evolution in recent years to include, amongst others,

responsibilities such as internal communication, maintaining organisational culture and image, employee engagement and advocacy, leadership communication and conflict management. These stress the role of a practitioner as an ‘enabler’ of employee performance instead of the much more traditional ‘messenger’ approach, necessitating a paradigm shift in how the practice is approached.

The Excellence Theory by Grunig et al (1992) is of the tenet that effective organisations take into consideration all ‘strategic constituencies’ – comprising external and internal stakeholders – in their management process, ensured by the enablement of the Public Relations department. In essence, effective Public Relations aid companies in generating and preserving profits by establishing favourable, enduring connections with their publics (Kehinde et al, 2016). Kehinde et al (2016) agree with Grunig et al (1992) that the evaluation of public relations is not solely based on whether or not Public Relations programs fulfil communication goals, but on the extent to which public relations contributes to the bottom line.

The Excellence Theory, therefore, aims to identify the conditions that espouse effective public relations. It proposes a set of theoretical benchmarks to aid in addressing these practical challenges (Toth, 2009). Toth (ibid) maintains that the Excellent Theory comprehensively tackles the question; “How, why and to what extent does communication affect the achievement of organisational objectives?”. When taken into consideration, all Public Relations efforts should be geared towards maintaining a balance between the organisation and all of its stakeholders (Shikalepo, 2021).

The Excellence Theory introduces a comprehensive set of fundamental principles for effective Public Relations practice that Grunig et al (1992) argue are universally applicable. Inter alia, these principles include the “involvement of Public Relations in Strategic Management, and knowledge and professionalism by the public relations unit”. They also required “understanding of and support

for public relations by senior management” (Grunig and Grunig, 2008), and such conditions for excellence as a participative culture and support for diversity in the workplace. Wakefield (2007) describes these results as the most comprehensive attempt to guide public relations practice by gathering and testing theories from both inside and outside the field.

Regardless of the thoroughness and ground-breaking value of the Excellence Theory, it has not been without criticism. Browning (2010), for instance, suggests the Excellence Study, which primarily focused on large American corporations, may not fully address the unique challenges of public sector organizations, particularly in developing countries. Other critics (L'Etang & Pieczka, 2012) have argued that the Excellence Theory presents an idealized model that may not be readily achievable in real-world organizational settings.

On the other hand, Botan & Hazleton (2009) acknowledge that the Excellence Theory is not absolute, but instead is meant to unify contemporary and competing theories to provide a simplified framework for addressing practical problems that Public Relations practitioners face. In support of this assertion, several researchers have tested the international applicability of the Excellence Theory in cross-cultural contexts and among various multinational organizations. Case in point, Heath & Coombs (2006) share that organisations worldwide can apply the Excellence Theory in establishing procedures that bolster the contribution of Public Relations to its overall performance. This is supported by Davis (2007) who argues that despite its grounding in the Western world, organisations around the world have adopted the Theory to determine effective Public Relations practice. Similarly, a 2007 study by Wakefield, as cited by Toth (2009) obtained adequate evidence to back up the validity of the Excellence Theory on a worldwide scale and its relevance in the international, multinational context, since they “offered confirmation of the

excellence variables from senior public relations people who were orchestrating the strategic activities around the world” (Wakefield, 2007).

These findings influence the choice of this theory for exploring how its core principles can be adapted to the specific cultural and resource constraints of Ghana's public sector.

### **2.1.1 Involvement of Public Relations in Strategic Management**

Grunig et al (1992) believe that for Public Relations to be strategically managed, practitioners must be involved in the strategic management process of the organization. This is to enable them to develop plans that communicate with both internal and external strategic publics who represent risks or opportunities for the organization. Toth (2007) makes a consistent observation in his assertion that Public Relations may assist the organisation in adapting to its stakeholders' environment by understanding the stakeholders' concerns and expectations. Similarly, Verčič et al. (1996) aver that organizations strive to develop a positive relationship with the strategic publics that support them, thus enabling the organization to save money that might have had to be spent on litigation, regulation, legislation, pressure campaigns, or boycotts resulting from poor relationships with their publics.

### **2.1.2 Empowerment of public relations in the dominant coalition**

The dominant coalition of an organisation refers to “the power-elite group of managers that makes strategic decisions for the organization” (Verčič et al., 1996). Grunig et al (1992) found that decisions of the dominant coalition influenced the practice of public relations in the organization. However, having identified the dominant coalition as a locus of organizational power, the researchers also disclosed that practitioners were seldom members of the inner circle. Consequently, Grunig et al. (1992) propose that for the Public Relations department to be managed strategically, practitioners must be capable of coordinating with management in the execution of

their duties. They intimate that this includes being a significant part of or having access to the dominant coalition.

Botan & Hazleton (2009, p. 33) echo the same sentiment, that the Public Relations function must be empowered as a distinctive and strategic managerial function. The Public Relations department should have the autonomy to operate according to professional standards rather than conforming to the directives of senior management, regardless of their good intentions. Zerfass et al (2008) argue that a strong financial and developmental influence can result from a positive relationship between top management and Public Relations professionals in any organization. This is evidenced by a significant decrease in decision-making risk that affects various stakeholders, a reduction in negative publicity, and the establishment of positive relationships with stakeholders. When involved in decision-making or reporting directly to senior management, therefore, Public Relations' standing within the organization is elevated, allowing it to significantly influence the organization's operations (Anani-Bossman, 2021).

### **2.1.3 Knowledge potential for managerial role**

Public Relations managers maximize their effectiveness when they possess technical expertise within the field (Botan & Hazleton, 2009). Interestingly, Valentini (2013) notes that Public Relations officers require pragmatic knowledge of the field, and not simply one earned through education or the academic process. This is corroborated by Mutambo (2014), who portends that the duties of Public Relations practitioners include demonstrating professionalism, being knowledgeable in the field of communication and ultimately contributing to the strategic management of the organisation. However, Anani-Bossman (2021) argues that professionals with essential theoretical knowledge are capable of engaging in the organization's strategic management.

#### **2.1.4 Two-way Symmetrical Model of Public Relations**

Propounders of the Excellence theory contend that that a two-way flow of information – from an organisation to its publics, and vice versa – is the most ethical and effective approach to Public Relations. It emphasises open dialogue, mutual understanding, and collaboration as being of great significance to the burgeoning of the organisation, based on an understanding of the need to satiate the interests of both the publics and the organisation (Botan & Hazleton (2009).

Toth (2007) affirms this position, stating that excellent organisations disclose relevant information to their publics and pay attention to the needs and expectations of stakeholders through ongoing research. Dozier et al. (2013) ratify the observation with the conclusion that two-way symmetrical communication is integral to attaining organisational goals, as it involves informed decision-making. Butterick (2011) interprets this as engaging with stakeholders to listen, learn and adapt organisational behaviour to suit the conditions of the society within which they operate, while attaining strategic positioning for the organisation concurrently. This nurtures mutual understanding and respect from both parties (Butterick, 2011), and remains the most efficient approach to building and maintaining a lasting relationship between the organisation and its publics.

#### **2.2 Defining Public Relations**

Public Relations primarily refers to the relationship that exists between an organisation and its publics, both internal and external. Within the context of public administration, effective Public Relations practices are essential for building public support for government initiatives, ensuring transparency, and engaging citizens in democratic processes.

Traditionally, Public Relations has been viewed through a lens of image management and positive press coverage (Cutlip et al, 2006), emphasising the need to portray an organisation in a favourable light, often employing media relations and communication strategies to shape public opinion. However, this view has been challenged by scholars who advocate for a more strategic and integrated approach to the practice of Public Relations (Grunig, 2006). Lee (2008), amongst others, evaluates the Public Relations efforts based on its ability to serve all strategic constituencies of an organisation.

In that regard, Grunig (2006) defines public relations as the strategic management of communication between an organization and its publics. Similarly, Baines et al. (2004) define Public Relations practice as the art and social science that is designed to analyse trends and implement the planned action programmes in an organisation.

The above definitions and discussion lend support to the exigency for excellent practice within public sector institutions as well.

### **2.2.1 Public Relations Practice in the Public Sector**

Public affairs remain one of the key aspects of government accountability. However, practitioners have, for aeons, been unable to distinguish between communication practices in the public and private sectors, despite studies establishing more differences than similarities between both (Liu et al, 2010).

Government is responsible for providing essential services that may not be feasible for individuals or private organizations to provide. These include law enforcement, fire protection, security, wildlife preservation, national defence, public transportation systems, justice systems, social programs, and national museums (Omondi, 2012). From a critical perspective, the objective of

governments aligns closely with the objective of Public Relations. As reasoned by Cutlip et al (2006), effective governments are those that have historically upheld responsive, mutual understanding through two-way communication with their citizens. However, the problems and pressures of society increasingly strain the machinery of government (Cutlip et al, 2006), rendering it ineffective in several areas. The onus, therefore, falls on Public Relations practitioners within the sector to communicate government policies, initiatives and activities to reaffirm trust within democracies.

Findings by Omondi (2012) reiterate the importance of Public Relations practitioners in government ministries and departments to strengthening the relationship between the government and its citizens. This reasserts the belief that when kept informed, citizens can make reasoned choices and participate in policy discussions and public decisions (Michels & De Gaaf, 2010), and indicates that Public Relations in the public sector gives more credence to representation at the local level (Shikalepo, 2021). It also reiterates the practitioner's role as a boundary spanner between the government and the citizenry. Within the context of excellent practice, Grunig & Grunig (2008) posit that practitioners are optimally positioned to play a boundary-spanning role between the organisation – or government – and the people by providing regular updates on activities that may sever ties between both parties.

Along a similar tangent, Lee et al. (2021) illustrate that one way to demonstrate excellent communication is to make sure that legislators are receptive to the public's requests, enabling communities to hold government departments responsible for carrying out initiatives and strategies that improve their living standards.

Interestingly, extant literature concerning Public Relations in the public sector (Laursen & Valentini, 2010; Lee, 2021, Édés, 2000) is limited to institution-based practices, with results

indicating that the role of the practitioners is often limited to media relations, internal communication, formulating communication strategies and campaigns and public information (Lee, 2012; 2021). Several areas in government Public Relations have yet to be tackled; for instance, the extent of involvement by public communication officers in the strategic management of public sector organizations, and the level of Public Relations knowledge among practitioners within the public sector. Their participation in the strategic management of public sector organizations is quite relevant, considering its perks to an organisation's bottom line. This opinion is also shared by Grunig & Jaatinen (1999), who admonish that communication principles that were primarily conceptualized in the private sector, are also valid for the public sector.

### **2.2.2 Public Relations in Ghana**

Amoakohene (2015) avers that the introduction and development of Public Relations in Ghana goes as far back as before the country gained independence; under British colonial administration. Colonial leadership harnessed Public Relations as an effective tool to disseminate information to locals, as well as to build and strengthen relationships with key community and opinion leaders who bore enough influence to sway support in their favour (Blankson, 2009). In 1949, the Department of Information Services (now the Information Services Department) was established to facilitate this process (Amoakohene, 2015).

Upon the attainment of independence in 1957, however, the practice of Public Relations witnessed a significant revolution, which directly changed its purpose from public information to public diplomacy. The then President-elect of the country, Osagyefo Dr Kwame Nkrumah instituted Ghanaians as head of Ministries, as part of his efforts to reshape and refashion the country's leadership. In addition, he established the Ghana Institute of Journalism (GIJ) in 1959, to provide training in journalism toward the development of a patriotic cadre of journalists to play an active

role in the emancipation of Africa as a whole. Similarly, in 1971, the Public Relations Association of Ghana (later changed to the Institute of Public Relations in 1972) was set up to promote professionalism within the industry, as well as set standards for its practice in the country (Blankson, 2009).

### **2.3 Empirical Review**

Recently, studies suggest a lack of strategic planning and evaluation within Public Relations functions in Ghana's public sector (Anani-Bossman, 2021). In Mba-Bekoe's evaluation of Public Relations in a developing country, he argued that limited resources, coupled with a focus on short-term communication needs, could hinder the development of long-term Public Relations strategies (Mba-Bekoe, 2018). He points out one of the causal factors for this phenomenon to be cultural nuances such as respect for hierarchical structures which, he notes, creates communication barriers between Public Relations professionals and senior decision-makers. His findings ring true and are substantiated by conclusions drawn by scholars like Anani-Bossman (2021) who intimates that Public Relations in Ghana is seldom approached strategically and that practitioners rely on experience and personal whim, rather than established frameworks within the discipline, in the execution of their duties. Wu and Baah-Boakye (2006, 2009), also disclosed that culture plays an essential part in Public Relations practice in the country. This suggests that the cultural interpreter and personal influence models hold a significant edge over the Grunigian models in the Ghanaian context (Anani-Bossman, 2021).

The personal influence model focuses on building relationships with external stakeholders, encompassing communities, government, media, and activist groups. Conversely, the cultural interpreter model is employed by multinational corporations (MNCs) in foreign countries,

necessitating an understanding of the host country's language, culture, customs, and political system. The pervasive impact of these two models on Public Relations practice in Ghana is unsurprising, given the emphasis placed on interpersonal relationships within its cultural fabric. The cultural system is rooted in stakeholder and community participation, fostering collectivism (Wu & Baah-Boakye, 2009). This principle empowers Public Relations practitioners to effectively interpret stakeholder attitudes and behaviours, promoting robust organization-stakeholder relationships through interactive communication.

#### **2.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on Public Relations practices in Ghana's public sector, with a particular focus on the applicability of Grunig's principles of excellent public relations. In it, the historical context of Public Relations in Ghana was explored while discussing the current state of practices within her public sector, and the potential benefits and challenges of adopting Grunig's model.

## CHAPTER THREE

# METHODOLOGY

### 3.0 Introduction

Research methodology is used to describe all the methods involved in the collection of all information for the study (Berg, 2009). This chapter details the strategies used to gather and analyse empirical data; it elucidates the research design, participant selection, data collection instruments, and data analysis procedures to ensure the study's rigour and trustworthiness. By explicating these methodological choices, this chapter aims to provide transparency and enable replicability of the research.

### 3.1 Research Approach

There are three main research methods in scientific research, viz qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods (Creswell et al, 2016). Qualitative research seeks to explore a social phenomenon, reveal feelings associated with the problem and understand the subjective experiences of people associated with a research problem. In simpler terms, the approach focuses on understanding how people make meaning of their social realities. It draws upon the use of non-numerical data (e.g., words, pictures, observations) to explore, discover, and describe the experiences, meanings, processes, and purposes of the phenomenon under consideration from the perspective of those who are experiencing it and typically adds value to the uniqueness, natural variation, diversity, and ambiguity of the findings (Brodsky et al, 2016).

In contrast, quantitative research refers to the numerical representation and manipulation of observation which are described and explained in numeric terms (Ahmad et al, 2019). It assumes

that figures provide a factual presentation of issues. It deals, therefore, in numbers, logic, and an objective stance. It is original research into a phenomenon in which the researcher determines the focus of the study, formulates precise and specific research questions, gathers quantifiable data from participants, analyses the data using statistical methods, and approaches the investigation neutrally and objectively (Creswell, 2011). This study did not employ the quantitative method because, albeit suitable for unbiased analysis and generalization due to larger sample sizes, the flexibility that characterises qualitative research offers pivotal merit that the quantitative approach does not, i.e allowing the research to adapt its approach as insights emerge that were not considered during the initial stages of the research process (Mwita, 2022).

Given the aim of this study to examine the application of the principles of Excellence Theory in Public Relations practices of selected public sector institutions in Ghana, the qualitative method was deemed more appropriate, particularly because it is suitable for evaluating the issues in an in-depth and detailed manner for inductive (generating new knowledge or theory) or deductive (confirming the validity of existing knowledge or theory) purposes (Makombe, 2017).

The method used a series of interviews, with a semi-structured interview guide to elicit rich, detailed insights into participants' perspectives and experiences. It offered a deeper understanding of the data; in this case, the approach to Public Relations in Ghana's state agencies, and the reasoning behind same.

### **3.2 Research Design**

In simple terms, the research design is a systematic plan to study a scientific problem. According to Khan (2023), the research design is an overall plan or structure for a research project. Similarly, Wagner et al (2012) define the research design as a plan to be followed when building up a research

study, and explaining how the research should be conducted. At that, the design is the framework that is created to seek answers to research questions. The design of a study defines the study type - descriptive, explanatory, exploratory, predictive et cetera, outlined by Cleland et al (2021) as regularly recommended by academics as workable alternatives in addressing problems that are observed in studies within the social sciences.

The design for the current research is exploratory. This stems from the limited nature of existing research on the research topic, such that it is necessary to gain initial insights and identify potential areas for further investigation.

### **3.3 Research Paradigm**

Research paradigms are a set of beliefs, values and (philosophical) assumptions that (will) guide the researcher in their inquiry, encompassing ontological, epistemological, axiological and methodological dimensions. According to Creswell (2014), the paradigm guides the methodology of how the research proceeds.

This study is grounded in an interpretivist research paradigm. Interpretivism, as explained by Denzin & Lincoln (2005), emphasizes the subjective nature of human experience and the importance of understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of those involved. This paradigm aligns with the study's aim to explore the lived experiences of Public Relations practitioners in Ghana's public sector and understand how they perceive and apply Grunig's principles.

The interpretivist stance facilitates substantive insight into the nuances of public communication within the Ghanaian context, going beyond quantitative measurement to include meaning and

interpretation (Creswell, 2014). This approach is particularly suitable for exploring the applicability of a theoretical model, such as Grunig's Excellence Theory, in a specific cultural and organizational context.

Whereas Belk (2007) asserts that interpretivism is commonly associated with the qualitative research method, it must be said that this study is not purely qualitative however, as it contained a questionnaire that included semi-structured questions for elaboration.

### **3.4 Research Population, Sampling Technique, and Sample Size**

Population refers to the collection of elements about which the researcher wishes to make inferences. Donny (2021) refers to the population of a study as any practicable elements, people, or observations related to a certain occurrence of interest to the researcher. In light of the above definitions, the study considered all Public Relations practitioners in public sector institutions in Ghana.

A researcher cannot study an entire population, especially considering the approach for this study. It is imperative, therefore, to select a sample of the population for the study. The sample, according to Taherdoost (2016), is a subset of individuals selected from a larger population to be studied, enabling researchers to make inferences about the broader group. Sampling is the technique used to select these individuals from the population to form the sample (Taherdoost, 2016). Sampling techniques and sample size determination are crucial in applied statistics research across various fields (Singh, 2014; Ajay, 2014).

There are two approaches to sampling - Probability and Non-probability sampling. Probability sampling methods including simple random, systematic, stratified, cluster, and multistage

sampling give all elements in the population a greater than zero chance of being selected in the sample, with a calculable mathematical probability of selection (Wimmer & Dominick, 2011) and are preferred for generalizable results (Omair, 2014). Conversely, non-probability sampling techniques typically rely on the personal judgement of the researcher and are useful for obtaining quick and targeted insights (Alvi, 2016). The choice of sampling method depends on the specific research problem, as no single technique suits all situations (Singh, 2014; Ajay, 2014).

For this study, the researcher employed convenience and snowball or chain-referral sampling under non-probability sampling techniques. This choice of method was driven by availability and the propensity to reach networks within public relations practice in Ghana's public sector that are often difficult to access, or even concealed to researchers. This made up for Ghana's lack of a repository that outlines state agencies with Public Relations or Communication departments.

After a study population and sampling technique were chosen, a sample size was determined. Sample size represents part of the larger population from whom information will be elicited. A proper sample size estimation is essential to avoid erroneous conclusions and depends on factors such as population size, confidence level, expected proportion of the outcome variable, and required precision (Omair, 2014). Understanding these concepts is vital for conducting reliable survey-based research and ensuring representative samples in quantitative studies (Alvi, 2016; Omair, 2014). A sample of 15 participants was selected across government ministries and state agencies for this study. This choice was informed by the admonishing of Malterud et al (2015) who conceptualise 'information power' as a pragmatic guiding principle for selecting a sample, suggesting that the more information power the sample provides, the smaller the sample size needs to be, and vice versa. The researcher drew parallels between the concept of information power and the observation of researchers including Francis et al. (2010), Latham (2013) and Daymon and

Holloway (2011) that any sample between 12 and 40 is adequate for reaching data saturation – the point at which enough data has been collected to draw necessary conclusions.

### **3.5 Data Collection Method**

A series of qualitative interviews were conducted to gather data for this study. The justification for giving this method a central position in the study is both methodological and objective-driven. According to Seidman (2012), interviews in research are “a basic mode of inquiry” with “an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth”. Essentially, interviews are an interactive form of data collection as compared to a survey (Adler & Clark, 2014), and are highly recommended as a suitable tool for initiating new research projects.

Additionally, within the context of this study, little to no literature exists concerning Public Relations practices in governance. To address the challenge, Döringer (2020) avers that exploratory expert interviews make it easier to gain knowledge and orientation in unknown or hardly known fields. Similarly, Miller and Crabtree (1999, cited in Dörnyei, 2007) describe interviewing as involving shared cultural knowledge for drawing consolidated conclusions. This offers the possibility of explaining the intent of the research to participants personally, as well as ensures flexibility in adding explanatory comments and asking additional questions for increased clarification.

The foregoing is well reflected in the study, which made the qualitative method suitable for the research.

### **3.6 Data Collection Instrument**

The study employed a semi-structured interview guide as the main instrument in the data collection process. The interview guide was adapted from Anani-Bossman's work (2021) and allowed the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives on the applicability of Grunig's principles in the execution of their mandates as government communicators. Magaldi and Berler (2020) describe the semi-structured interview as an exploratory interview, coinciding with the [aforementioned] research design for this study. They proffer that this type of interview is usually guided by a set of questions and is focused on a specific topic, but still allows the interviewer to explore discoveries. Thus, the instrument provided more flexibility, range and the capacity to elicit more detailed information from participants.

### **3.7 Data Collection Procedure**

The data collection process for this study involved a meticulous approach to ensure reliable information was gathered from the research participants. The first step required recruiting participants using the snowball sampling technique, as previously discussed. Interviews were then scheduled at the participants' convenience and preference, some in-person and at their respective offices, others via electronic means. Throughout the interviews, audio recordings were captured to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. The interviews lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes.

### **3.8 Treatment, Presentation and Analysis of Data**

Data gathered from the strings of interviews was analysed thematically. Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a systematic approach to identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns or themes within qualitative data using six interrelated steps - familiarisation, coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and writing up themes, where findings are presented in a narrative form, incorporating illustrative quotes and examples to provide context and depth to the analysis. The presentation is organised logically and coherently, allowing for easy understanding and interpretation.

### **3.9 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical concerns and dilemmas form a major part of every research undertaking involving participants. To understand and elicit appropriate responses from participants concerning the study topic, it is crucial to foreground and anticipate potential risks and appropriate responses to support safe and ethical practices.

Khan (2023) defines ethics as moral ideas that guide a person's actions, particularly when they are a part of a professional organization. Saunders et al. (2009) further explicate the concept to include the researcher's relationship with the rights of participants. That is, participation in any research should be at the discretion of the participants, and their rights protected.

To ensure this, therefore, respect for all research participants remained an utmost priority to the researcher. It was done within the context of respect for participants' privacy, confidentiality, and sensitivity around cultural matters. At that, participants were exposed to the research objectives, after which their consent was sought to be part of the study. Consequently, all respondents participated in this survey at their own free will, with the right to withdraw from the study at any

point without penalty. Data provided was equally ensured to be bereft of the identity of any participant.

In addition, the interview guide was subjected to scrutiny by the ethics committee of the Research Department of the University of Media, Arts and Communication - Institute of Journalism, upon whose permission the researcher set out to collect data for the study.

### **3.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter outlined the research design and methodological approach employed to investigate the research topic. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

Of prominence is the matter of ethical considerations, which were strictly adhered to throughout the data collection process. The data collected was analysed using thematic analysis for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for quantitative data. The next chapter discusses data analysis in detail.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data analysis and the findings while simultaneously discussing the implications of the findings for the study. Key themes related to understanding and implementing Grunig's principles, perceived challenges, and opportunities for improvement are explored in detail. The analysis is done in tune with the research objectives, questions, and theoretical framework to form the basis for the conclusions that will be drawn.

#### 4.1 Demographic Profile

Participants for this study comprised 15 public relations practitioners working in various state institutions across Ghana. The job title and description varied with each organisation, the commonest designations being Corporate Affairs Officer, Communications Manager, and Public Relations Officer. Participants were predominantly male (9), while the remaining six (6) comprised females. The age range for the participants was between 32 and 50 years, with an average age of 38. This was well reflected in their experience or time spent within the public relations field, half a decade being the least.

In terms of educational background, results showed a high level of qualification, with six (6) participants holding master's degrees in public relations, whereas three (3) had a bachelor's degree only. Three (3) held one of the two qualifications in broad communications, while two (2) were trained in media studies. One (1) participant had a background in Development Communication.

## 4.2 Purpose of Public Relations

Before addressing the guiding objectives of the study, the researcher sought to understand participants' fundamental perceptions of the chief purpose of Public Relations within the government sector. As such, a question that sought to unearth their beliefs concerning the role of Public Relations in government communication was asked – *“How would you describe the main purpose of Public Relations?”*. Most of the responses, as presented below, were notably heavily influenced by the disciplines within which they have been trained, yet loosely alluded to Omondi's (2006) reasoning about public relations in governance being responsible for strengthening the relationship between the government and its citizens, as discussed in the review of existing literature.

In the words of P1, *“Public Relations [in government], in my opinion, is crucial for maintaining transparency and accountability. It's about keeping the public informed about government policies and actions”*.

P2 noted *“From my perspective, PR plays a crucial role in enhancing the legitimacy of government actions. It's not just about communication; it's about building relationships with citizens to promote a sense of inclusion and participation in governance. Without this, public trust can erode quickly.”*

P3 offered a slightly different insight into the topic *“What we do here is about managing government's reputation and creating a good image for government. That is not to claim that we do so at the detriment of the people, because at the end of the day, an equally important part of the job is to promote good governance by making sure the needs of all Ghanaians are met.”*

Their view was supported by P6, who submitted that *“It’s about shaping public perceptions by highlighting the positive aspects of governance while addressing concerns concurrently, as transparently as possible.”*

The primary theme that ran throughout all the definitions, however, was their conceptualization of the Public Relations function in governance as necessary for maintaining trust in the government by all citizens. This is consistent with the findings of Michels & De Gaaf (2010) who indicate that when kept informed, citizens are able to make reasoned choices and participate in policy discussions and public decisions. Similarly, Grunig (2008) admonishes that public relations practitioners must assume the role of boundary-spanning by providing regular updates to and between all involved parties in order to maintain the very ties that bind them together.

Their understanding of the role of public relations further fortifies the assumptions of the Excellence Theory, which recommends that Public Relations is elevated to management level, where it can be considered a part of the dominant coalition. This way, practitioners are better positioned to inform and influence decisions that are crucial to the reputation of the organization (Grunig 1992; Dozier et al. 1995; Grunig et al. 2002).

#### **4.3 RQ1 Involvement of Public Relations in Strategic Management**

Grunig et al (2002) observed that organisational heads, including CEOs and Managers generally look out for media relations expertise, which is by itself a technical role, during the hiring process for the Public Relations position. “But then they learn that technical expertise is insufficient when a crisis or major internal upheaval requires more strategic communication skills. When top

communicators have managerial as well as technical knowledge, ... they can meet such a challenge. When they have only technical expertise, they cannot” (Grunig et al., 2002).

Another objective of the study, therefore, required an exploration of the extent to which Public Relations practitioners in Ghana's public sector are involved in the strategic management processes of government institutions. This was done to underscore the role of Public Relations in shaping organizational direction and achieving strategic objectives. To achieve this, participants were asked a series of questions concerning their participation in strategic planning, decision-making, and goal-setting.

#### **4.3.1 Limited integration into strategic management**

The findings indicate that public relations practitioners in Ghanaian government or state agencies and institutions largely play a peripheral role in strategic management, and their contributions are therefore limited to technical responsibilities including drafting press releases and speeches, managing media relations, and coordinating public events. Strategic roles, such as policy formulation and setting organisational goals, were significantly under-represented in their portfolios.

According to the Excellence Theory, PR functions achieve their highest impact when empowered to operate within the dominant coalition of an organisation—defined as the group of senior decision-makers who shape institutional policies and goals (Grunig et al., 1992). However, this study found that most practitioners act as subordinates, relegated to technical roles such as media relations, event management, and drafting communication materials. This structural exclusion undermines their ability to contribute to broader organisational strategies and goals. P1 noted, *"Our primary tasks, as a Corporate Affairs Unit, revolve around managing media engagements and*

*drafting communication materials. I'm not saying these are any less important, but we are rarely consulted on policy decisions or broader organisational strategies unless there's a crisis."*

P3 corroborated the claim - *"The involvement of PR is limited. I am consulted on communication aspects, especially for campaigns, but we're not embedded in the Ministry's overall strategic planning. That is left to management. We have a director in charge of research, statistics, and information, but we are to communicate, and that is where my problem has always been. The fact that we are the end users of the outcomes of all their work in the sense that we have to communicate the decisions that they make means that we have to be part of the process."*

Seven (7) out of the 15 participants iterated that although their presence is required at management meetings, it is less often about their contribution to the decision-making or policy-formulation process. In fact, about half of the public institutions sampled for this study had separate policy-formulation departments whose undertakings are independent of the contributions of the Public Relations Officer. However, the paradox lies in the Public Relations department's responsibility for communicating and interpreting these policies. This finding corroborates the enduring misconception about public relations being a mere tactical function rather than a strategic management tool (Anani-Bossman, 2021). It also creates a disconnect between the intentions of the policy-formulation team and the public's reception of said policies, as public relations practitioners are excluded from providing insight that could ensure policies are better aligned with institutional goals and the expectations of citizens.

#### **4.3.2 Partial Participation into strategic management**

The operational roles of the practitioners notwithstanding, eight (8) participants maintained that they contribute to the development of the goals and objectives of their policies through technical advisory, identifying strategic publics like opinion leaders who can affect the institution's dealings,

as well as anticipating and managing crises. Particularly, it was keenly observed that participants above the age of 40 or with more than ten years of experience in their role insisted that they are involved in strategic management to a higher degree than their peers. The nexus between age, experience, and involvement in the strategic management of an organisation was succinctly iterated by P12 who said *“My opinions are highly valued by the heads of the institution because the longer you stay in this job, the more you understand the dynamics of the sector; you would learn in no time that it is you who brings value to the role, and not vice versa.”*

P8 also added that – *“A lot depends on how much you’ve seen and done over the years. Sometimes, we propose ideas or strategies, and management listens politely, but it’s really their call on what to use or discard. Over time, you learn which battles to pick and how to position your ideas so they align with what they’re already thinking.”*

This effort at the strategic management of their Public Relations activities notwithstanding, further probing into the value that management placed on the decision-making abilities of practitioners revealed that the Public Relations function, particularly within government agencies, is subordinate to the judgement of the dominant coalition. This is well articulated by P2 who echoed the connection between experience and inclusion in strategic management - *“I am a part of the management of this institution, but as we have said multiple times, not to the level that we wish we were. I always make the argument that strategic planning must be a collaborative process, so that the thoughts of everyone and every department feed into the overarching decisions for a certain period, but you’ll come to find that in whatever we do, ultimately, the decision on how to proceed rests with senior management, all the time; they may incorporate some of our suggestions and advice, they may not. Whatever be the case, your job ends where theirs start.”*

### 4.3.3 Underutilisation of Research

The foregoing antinomy concerning age, strategic management and managements' valuation of public relations is well reflected in the fact that participants reported that albeit crucial to their activities, research was often underutilised in their undertakings. This reality corroborates existing literature, especially Grunig (2008), who contends that Public Relations practitioners can display competence by acting as boundary spanners and environmental scanners between an organization and its stakeholders. What this means is that the ability to conduct research, and the frequency with which it is done is a prerequisite for contributing to strategic management (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). Along a similar tangent, Supa (2014) argues that the role of Public Relations involves ensuring that the interests of all internal and external publics are well represented in the decisions made by the organisation. On the contrary, participants divulged that their Public Relations campaigns often lack empirical backing, especially in terms of evaluative research, which they attributed to resource constraints and lack of institutional support. This included financial, technological, time factors, and the perception of Public Relations within the institution. Furthermore, there is often a lack of strategic intent behind the research that is conducted. Instead of research being seen as a tool for long-term strategic planning, it is often reactive, aimed only at immediate needs such as addressing public complaints or preparing for specific events.

According to P11 – *“We often conduct research, but honestly, our approach isn't as extensive as we'd like. Pre-campaign studies might include stakeholder consultations and public sentiment analysis. Post-campaign evaluations are less formal but include feedback from the public and media coverage reviews.”*

P1 also had this to say – *“Most of the research is done by the Programmes Department. They bring us the concept notes, and then we use that to do what we’ve been asked to do. So yeah, our people think it’s redundant for PR to conduct research and Programmes to also conduct.”*

P6 also commented – *“We don’t research as often as we should. Most of our research is informal, like gathering feedback during public forums. That said, we did conduct a stakeholder perception survey before revising our service charter. The insights were invaluable but highlighted the need for a more consistent approach to research.”*

P9 summed it up by saying *“We rarely conduct formal research. While we understand its importance, constraints such as limited budgets and lack of trained personnel have made it difficult. Informally, we gather feedback during events or from social media.”*

It can be concluded, therefore, that the majority of Public Relations in Ghana’s public sector is significantly less strategic than it is operational; and that against the first principle of the Excellence Theory, there is a partial integration of the Public Relations function into the strategic management of sampled institutions, deferring by each institution. What this means is that, whereas the leadership of these institutions recognise Public Relations as a perquisite of the democratic process, especially in their attempt to communicate their views in the public forum, the contributions of Public Relations experts are rudimentary at best. This finding echoes Smith (2017), who noted that Public Relations is often regarded as an information dissemination tool, rather than as a strategic management function. Similarly, it is reflective of the supposition that a focus on short-term communication, compounded by limited resources, could hinder the development of long-term Public Relations strategies (Mba-Bekoe, 2018), and essentially restrict the practitioner to the employment of personal whim rather than established frameworks within

the discipline, as argued by Anani-Bossman (2021). This short-term focus undermines the potential for PR to contribute meaningfully to strategic decision-making.

#### **4.4 RQ2 Reporting Relationship in Ghana’s public sector and level of empowerment**

The study also sought to examine the nature of the relationship between Public Relations practitioners and the dominant coalition in selected public sector institutions in Ghana. Grunig and Hunt (2011) prescribe that the effectiveness of Public Relations is contingent on practitioners’ access to and influence within the dominant coalition. The ensuing findings provide insights into the challenges of elevating PR from an operational function to a more empowered, strategic entity.

##### **4.4.1 Direct reporting relationships, yet marginal influence**

Findings showed that while the majority of participants are considered to be part of management, they still tend to report to the Heads of the institution, who in the Ghanaian political context is the Minister, Executive Director or Chief Executive Officer, as seen in the following quotations.

From P1, – *“I report directly to the CEO, which is why it’s easier to sometimes do some of the things that Accounts will tell us there is no budget for.”*

P3 said – *“I report to the Chief Director, but I work closely with the Minister on specific projects.”*

According to P2, *“I report directly to the Minister. We have a cordial relationship, all three of us – the Minister, myself, and his Deputy. This is necessary because I need to keep them constantly updated on all matters affecting the sector.”*

This indicates a direct reporting relationship with senior management and essentially suggests some knowledge potential to be included in the dominant coalition. However, while managers

wield more influence than technicians, occupying a managerial position in public relations does not necessarily translate into influence within the organisation (Reber & Berger, 2006). This is evident in the present study because while a cordial relationship reportedly exists between the dominant coalition and the public relations practitioners or department for the majority of the participants, it was not enough to empower them by including them in the dominant coalition. A significantly smaller number of participants reported only partial integration into the dominant coalitions. These coalitions were notably considered to operate in high-stake contexts. This was P3's meaningful insight into the subject matter – *“While we're not fully embedded in senior management decision-making, there's strong support for PR. I report directly to the Director General, and our inputs are highly valued, especially for stakeholder engagement and policy communication.”*

Similarly, P1 admitted that – *“No, not at all. [I don't belong to the dominant coalition]. The CEOs and some of the Directors are in charge here. Key decisions rarely seek our opinions, indicating a lack of understanding or mistrust in our ability to contribute to the long-term vision.”*

This observation is not particularly surprising since the dominant coalition of public institutions in Ghana are typically appointed by the President of the country, with approval from the Parliament. At that, decision-making is ordinarily vested in the hands of a select group of people, with the functions of the Public Relations departments primarily limited to communicating said decisions—in the form of policies—to the citizens and achieving media coverage for the enterprise of the dominant coalition. This function is by nature very operational, and in line with the findings of other international studies on government communication (Mancini, 2006; Lee, 2007, Laursen and Valentini, 2010).

When age, experience and unique titles of the job positions are considered, however, significant differences emerge in the value placed on public relations; practitioners over 40 years or who had spent over a decade in government communication tended to lean towards the assertion that they played a role, albeit minor, in the activities of the dominant coalition. According to them, management values and supports their strategies, general communication activities and advice concerning building consensual relationships with their stakeholders. From this knowledge, a deduction that older practitioners are often perceived as more experienced and knowledgeable, which can lead to greater trust is drawn. Whereas this buttresses findings by Valentini (2013), who suggests that perceived expertise plays a critical role in how PR professionals are viewed within organisations and Wu & Baah-Boakye (2009) who highlight that in contexts like Ghana, deference to older individuals often shapes workplace dynamics, evidence to prove that a direct reporting relationship gives practitioners a say in decision-making was lacking, reinforcing literature (Yue, 2016) that the presence of a direct reporting relationship does not equate to a seat within the dominant coalition.

#### **4.4.2 Misconception about public relations**

The foregoing was also echoed in participants' responses concerning managements' understanding of the strategic value of public relations, which the majority argued was a misperception of the value of the profession. The findings also suggest partial validation of the theory's universal principles. There is evidence that strategic contributions can be made to crisis management and stakeholder engagement in high-stakes situations or institutions where experienced practitioners work. Yet, these instances are exceptions rather than the norm, emphasising the need for localised adaptations of the theory to suit the cultural and institutional realities of developing countries like Ghana. Anani-Bossman (2021) has argued that public relations has yet to be fully appreciated in

Ghana, despite the numerous advancements the field has witnessed in both practice and academia. Anani-Bossman (ibid.) clarifies that public relations is still considered a publicity or media relations role and that practitioners are most needed when crises arise. The views of the participants in this study substantiate this stance.

P13 divulged that - *“PR is recognised in this institution, and we report directly to the Chairperson. However, a deeper involvement in the dominant coalition will truly align our communication strategies with the goals of the Ministry.”*

P1 had this to add: *“Management sees PR as functional rather than strategic. Key decisions rarely seek our opinions, indicating a lack of understanding or mistrust in our ability to contribute to the long-term vision.”*

#### **4.4.3 Support, without strategic involvement**

The study also investigated the level of empowerment Public Relations departments from the sampled institutions received from the dominant coalition. This is attuned to the recommendation of the Excellence Theory—that the Public Relations department receives significant support from management in the execution of its mandates. To achieve this, participants were asked ‘How much support do you receive from the dominant coalition?’ to which an overwhelming majority responded that they receive substantial support from institutional heads. This demonstrates a belief in the role of communication in the practice of democracy by heads of government institutions.

This was confirmed by P4 – *“Oh, absolutely, we get a lot of support from the top. Our management understands that effective communication is crucial for building public trust. For instance, whenever we propose campaigns to address some concerns, they’re quick to provide the necessary resources.”*

P6 submitted that – *“Management values our efforts, especially in crisis situations. They appreciate the work we do to maintain public trust and ensure smooth communication during critical times.”*

In the words of P3, *“Management is supportive, but it depends on the context. When there’s a crisis or a major event, they’re quick to provide resources and involve us in the process. Outside of those situations, though, the support can feel more procedural—like approving press releases or signing off on campaigns. It’s not that they don’t value PR; I think it’s just that they see it as something that’s handled as needed, rather than as a constant strategic priority.”*

This perceived support, according to the findings of the study, is however insufficient to earn them a place in the decision-making body of the institution, as stated prior. The prevailing circumstance, as it is, was largely attributed to hierarchical barriers that exist in government institutions. The researcher believes this is deep-rooted in the lack of understanding of the [strategic role] of public relations, corroborating the observations of Wu & Baah-Boakye (2009). This lends support to the case that a lack of organisational support and inaccessibility to resources undermines the practitioner’s ability to demonstrate their value as strategic partners (Anani-Bossman, 2021; Mba-Bekoe, 2018).

Such anecdotal data suggests that government institutions' reluctance to incorporate public relations into their strategic management, despite its perceived importance, stems primarily from the intangible nature of the profession's end-results. This reinforces the misconception that public relations is a tactical function rather than a strategic role. It corroborates Mba-Bekoe (2018), who points out that the exclusion of public relations from the decision-making mechanism of organisations is exacerbated in environments such as the Ghanaian socio-political climate, where communication is undervalued due to cultural and institutional norms.

This is contextually accurate, with reference to the research behaviour of practitioners in the government sector, as discovered vis-à-vis Objective 1. Where evaluative research is lacking, demonstrating the value of the function to the organisational bottom line is virtually inexistent, or is an arduous task when the need arises. Existing data supports this contention that public relations practitioners may, as a consequence, face pressure to demonstrate immediate, tangible and often monetary benefits of their work rather than focusing on long-term strategic goals and intangible outcomes like building brand reputation and enhancing stakeholder relationships (Anani-Bossman, 2021).

#### **4.5 RQ3: Knowledge potential among practitioners in Ghana's public sector institutions**

This section of the study evaluated the level of knowledge and skills possessed by public relations practitioners in the selected public sector institutions in Ghana. This is necessary for understanding the participants' capacity to apply the principles of the Excellence Theory in their communication efforts, as well as effectively execute Public Relations campaigns strategically.

Botan and Hazleton (2009) aver that the effectiveness of Public Relations is augmented when the practitioner possesses a strong technical foundation within the field. Such expertise allows them to conduct meaningful research, interpret stakeholder data, and employ modern tools such as digital media analytics, to engage effectively with diverse audiences (Valentini, 2013; Toth, 2007). Additionally, technically skilled PR managers can adapt to evolving communication technologies and stakeholder expectations, making them invaluable in navigating complex organizational and public challenges (Grunig et al., 1992).

#### **4.5.1 Greater technical proficiency than managerial expertise**

For this study, the researcher observed that participants had a high theoretical knowledge of both the technical and managerial roles of Public Relations, with a relatively higher insight into the former. However, participants alluded to a lower pragmatic skillset for the managerial role, as opposed to their proficiency with operational functions including writing communication materials, moderating events and serving as liaison officers between the institution and the media.

P1 commented – *"Our primary tasks, as a Corporate Affairs Unit, revolve around managing media engagements and drafting communication materials. I'm not saying these are any less important, but we are rarely consulted on policy decisions or broader organisational strategies unless there's a crisis."*

This was concurred by P9, who noted that – *"Our activities include stakeholder forums, public education campaigns, and media relations. A significant portion of my work involves responding to inquiries and concerns from both the public and telecom operators."*

In terms of knowledge for managerial roles, competency differed significantly across institutions. Some participants demonstrated high levels of expertise in modern communication strategies, including the use of research and digital tools in the development of communication strategies, as well as an understanding of the boundary-spanning and environmental scanning roles of a practitioner. They were, however, less skilled in negotiating with activist groups, a phenomenon which was largely attributed to the domineering role of management in government institutions, where the institutional Heads would rather spearhead advocacy, except in crisis scenarios.

For instance, P9 mentioned *"We use surveys and focus groups to gauge public sentiment and inform our campaigns. Additionally, social media analytics help us understand which messages resonate most with our audience."*

P3 also had this to say – *"We try to anticipate public concerns by monitoring trends and scanning the environment. This helps us position the institution better, even if we're not directly involved in policymaking."*

On the other hand, some participants demonstrated a lack of advanced skills and therefore relied on traditional public relations responsibilities like media relations and press releases. P1's submission well reflected this matter – *"Our primary tasks, as a Corporate Affairs Unit, revolve around managing media engagements and drafting communication materials. We mostly do stories, press releases, and media coordination."*

This limits their ability to engage in strategic management. The converging point, though, is that all participants were proficient in the rudiments of mass communication, including but not limited to good verbal and writing skills.

#### **4.5.2 Qualification as a necessity**

While Valentini (2013) and Mutambo (2014) emphasise that technical expertise and a pragmatic understanding of communication are critical for PR practitioners to function as strategic managers, Anani-Bossman (2021) reiterates that academic standing is equally pivotal in the matter of strategic management. To this end, observations were made that confirmed that academic qualifications can indeed significantly influence the knowledge and skills of practitioners, impacting their potential to assume managerial roles. During the study, participants with advanced degrees in the field of public relations knew more about and implemented strategic campaigns for

their respective institutions. These were closely subordinated by persons who had spent a decade or more in the field or who had commensurate degrees in related fields such as communication or journalism. It was also unsurprising to find that participants with a bachelor's degree in public relations possessed more managerial acumen than persons with advanced degrees in unrelated fields.

### **4.5.3 Gaps in training and professional development**

To keep up a high level of effectiveness, practitioners need recurring training and chances to build their skills, even if they already have a strong background in public relations. This is because, without targeted training, public relations will struggle to move beyond operational roles (Grunig et al, 1992). At that, practitioners must possess skills in research methods, digital communication, campaign planning and evaluation. All of the institutions that took part in the study had the same problem: they couldn't afford strategic training and opportunities to build people's skills were nonexistent. These gaps were most evident in institutions where the Public Relations function leaned towards supporting the dominant coalition rather than having access to or influence within.

The challenge was succinctly put by P15: *“We often struggle with budgetary constraints, limited training opportunities, and a lack of exposure to the decision-making processes of management. At least when these things are in place we can know the do’s and don’ts of the present climate because these things change with each passing day.”*

P14 affirmed this stance – *“the world is changing, and so are all means of communication. You have the likes of social media metrics now, and even lingo that is unique to each channel you choose to work with. I am of the opinion that Public Relations should be given as much eminence as other departments like the Legal and Financial departments in order to build upon the skills we already have.”*

Out of the 15 participants that were sampled for this study, only one participant reported an affiliation with a professional body for Public Relations. This denotes an apparent divorce between Public Relations practice in the public sector and the trends and current practices within the industry. Professional bodies including the Chartered Institute for Public Relations (CIPR) – United Kingdom, the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA) play an important role in upholding ethical standards, promoting professional development, and advancing the practice of Public Relations. In Ghana, the Institute of Public Relations exists to provide a platform for knowledge sharing, networking, and continuing education amongst practitioners, ensuring that they are adequately equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to meet the evolving needs of the industry.

Extant literature directs that excellent Public Relations Departments should comprise practitioners who belong to these professional bodies and are well-read in the field. However, the finding substantiates Valin's (2005) observation, that an insignificant sum of practitioners apply to be members of professional Public Relations bodies, and that an even less significant number are accredited. What this proves is that Public Relations in the Ghanaian public sector does not meet the standards of excellence, as prescribed by Grunig et al (1996).

#### **4.6 RQ4 Two-way symmetrical communication in Ghana's public sector**

Finally, this study investigated the extent to which Public Relations practitioners in Ghana's public sector engaged in two-way symmetrical communication with their varying stakeholders. It involved inquiring into whether practitioners actively seek to understand the needs and concerns of their stakeholders, engage in bidirectional dialogue, and collaborate to achieve mutually

beneficial outcomes. To achieve this, therefore, a series of questions were asked concerning the participants' efforts in stakeholder engagement, relationship building and crisis management.

#### **4.6.1 Context-driven practices**

The findings show that whereas the sampled public sector practitioners consider two-way communication the ideal model for excellent Public Relations, its practice remains inconsistent. Participants delineated their Public Relations efforts as typically informed by the purpose of the communication or by specific initiatives. Specifically, information and communication activities in Ghanaian public administration do not exclusively adhere to any single model of Public Relations. Instead, their practices incorporate elements from all four models of Public Relations, often resulting in a hybrid approach; while some participants expressed a commitment to open dialogue and stakeholder engagement, others acknowledged the context that informs the need for communication, as well as challenges posed by bureaucratic structures and resource constraints. This disproves the assertion that the public information model is customary in public sector organisations (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999; Lim et al., 2005).

*According to P11 – “When we held community outreach programs about water conservation, the questions and concerns raised gave us direction for our next steps. It’s not just about informing; it’s about knowing what matters most to them.”*

*P3 supported the submission with – “Before we launched the electronic land registration system, we held public forums in pilot areas to gather reactions. These insights helped us address potential misunderstandings before scaling up.”*

*P8 provided a slightly different perspective. In their words – “During the recent dam spillage, we engaged directly with affected communities to understand their immediate needs. The feedback we*

*received guided not just our communication but also the kind of relief interventions we prioritized.”*

The above quotes represent a consensus amongst all the participants. They identified that crises and regulatory reforms often present them with the opportunity to demonstrate two-way symmetrical communication. Specifically, practitioners who reported some form of managerial responsibilities as part of their mandates tended to conduct formative research that determined public attitude and perception before discourse concerning policy reforms or crisis management was set afoot. Their campaigns often incorporated loops for dialoguing, especially via stakeholder consultative meetings and surveys, such that reforms adequately address the public’s specific needs and expectations.

The observation implies that practitioners meet the two-way symmetric communication requirements of the Excellence Theory, regarding a deliberate effort to ensure that both government institutions and their publics operate within a place of mutual understanding and respect for each other. It also is indicative of an alignment with existing literature regarding the practitioners' duty to explain the organisation to the public and vice versa (Seitel, 2007), and the definition of Public Relations as responsible for building a mutually beneficial relationship between both (Wilcox et al, 2015; Broom & Sha, 2012). It is instructive to note, however, that this compliance was – per the collected data - exclusive to circumstances including crises and activities pertaining to public policy (as aforementioned).

#### **4.6.2 Prevalence of one-way Communication**

Participants for this study reported an overreliance on media relations, coordinating public events, and writing press releases and public announcements, with minimal mechanisms for stakeholder input or representation. P1 remarked - *“the publics’ perception of the institution is important to*

*us. And so far as management is concerned, managing what is being said about us at a particular point in time is the responsibility of this department”*

P4 explained why this remains the case – *“There’s a lack of appreciation for two-way communication. And this is because PR often gets tied to the agendas of leadership rather than focusing on long-term stakeholder engagement. We’ll be told budget is tight, which means we have to work with fewer resources while still delivering results.”*

This is indicative of the predominance of one-way communication models in government Public Relations, and a nod to the misconception about the function as being merely for publicity. The finding supports Mba-Bekoe’s (2018) observation that operational priorities limit the adoption of dialogic models in Public Relations practice in Ghana.

In the same manner, evaluation played a significantly lesser role in the activities of the sampled population, although the importance of two-way communication reverberated in their collective responses. At that, there they reported little to no effort in verifying the clarity of their messages or coherence between institutional goals and stakeholder expectations. The findings indicated that apart from Advertising Value Equivalency (AVE), press clippings and tangible products or services that result from their communication efforts, Public Relations efforts in public sector institutions rarely end in evaluation and measurement.

P10 succinctly expressed the issue as being *“usually concerned with how far-reaching the message gets.”* In their words: *“Once the message is out there, we want to know how many media houses have picked it up [or reported it]. When people are talking about it, then you know it actually means something to them.”*

P5 also said – *“We measure outcomes mainly through stakeholder feedback and media coverage. For example, if a policy rollout generates fewer complaints or disputes, we see it as a success. That said, formal evaluations are rare due to resource limitations. We’re working on improving this.”*

This is what P4 had to say about the matter – *“Our evaluation is very limited. Success is often measured by how much media coverage we get or how many people attend our events. For example, if a new estate launch draws a large crowd and positive feedback, we consider that a win. However, we rarely assess whether our communication achieved deeper goals, like shifting perceptions or influencing behaviour.”*

The insufficient employment of evaluative research compounds an age-long conundrum in public relations, considering the matter of measurement and evaluation has been the subject of intense academic debate over the years. It is also quite interesting that participants perceive public Relations as necessary for promoting the legitimacy of government interventions and helping to maintain social bonds (as previously discussed), but also admit to engaging in little to no two-way communication. This has come to be known as social desirability response bias in academia (Yue, 2016; Liam et al 2005), where participants are likely to protect their reputation rather than offer a realistic insight into prevailing circumstances. For this study, participants clearly know the tenets of the function but struggle to align their practice with them.

Interestingly, this hybrid approach appears, in fact, to best characterise the work of public communication officers in Ghana's public sector, whose responsibilities simultaneously involve activities geared towards stakeholder engagement, media relations, reputation management and publicity, as evidenced by the participants' own conceptualisation of [the role of] public relations in the government sector (as discussed at the beginning of this chapter).

## **4.7 Chapter Summary**

The chapter discussed the findings of one-on-one interviews held with 15 Public Relations practitioners in Ghanaian public sector institutions. The results of the study indicated that Public Relations practice in the government sector is often more operational than it is approached strategically. Similarly, practitioners rarely contribute to the decision-making mechanisms of these institutions, but instead are relegated to fringe roles which are in themselves technical. In terms of their knowledge potential for practicing excellent Public Relations, the results revealed that participants had a higher knowledge of the technician role than they did of the managerial role, a finding that clearly reflects that of their involvement in the strategic management of their respective institutions. Finally, the results also showed that the Public Relations efforts of practitioners in public sector institutions follow a hybrid approach that combined all four models proposed by Grunig & Hunt (1984). It suggested that prevailing circumstances, as well as certain barriers, play a crucial role in the way public relations activities are undertaken in the government sector.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 5.0 Introduction

This study sought to benchmark public relations efforts in Ghanaian state institutions against four of the tenets of Public Relations Excellence as presented by Grunig et al (1992). Based on its objectives, the researcher employed the qualitative research approach to collect data through semi-structured interviews with Public Relations professionals in selected state institutions. The interviews were recorded electronically, with permission from participants, in order to ensure that all responses were adequately captured.

This chapter concludes the study by summarising its findings. The chapter also explores the limitations of the study and makes recommendations that will influence and inform further studies into excellent public relations practice in Ghana's public sector.

#### 5.1 Summary of Key Findings

##### 5.1.1 Purpose of Public Relations

Public relations in the public sector is unanimously perceived by all participants as a vital function for maintaining transparency, accountability, and trust between the government and the citizens. To achieve these, practitioners highlighted roles such as stakeholder relations and reputation management as public relations imperatives for contributing to the management of government institutions.

### **5.1.2 Involvement of public relations in strategic management**

The first objective of the study was to explore the extent to which public relations practitioners in Ghana's public sector are involved in the strategic management processes of government institutions. The findings revealed a discrepancy between the perceived importance of public relations and its actual integration into strategic management; a systemic relegation of public relations to technical roles, such as media relations and event coordination, with minimal involvement in strategic management or policy formulation. Practitioners often lack involvement in policy formulation and organizational goal-setting, despite being responsible for communicating these policies to the public. Regardless, more experienced practitioners reported a semblance of strategic participation, which they attributed to personal credibility rather than institutionalised roles. This disconnect reflects enduring misconceptions about PR as merely an information dissemination tool, undermining its potential as a strategic partner in organizational goals.

### **5.1.3 Empowerment of public relations and direct reporting relationship**

The study also sought to examine the nature of the relationship between public relations practitioners and the dominant coalition in selected public sector institutions in Ghana. The study found that while public relations practitioners typically reported directly to institutional heads, this access did not guarantee membership in the dominant coalition. Primarily, a lack of understanding of the strategic value of public relations, as well as hierarchical barriers curtailed their empowerment. This exclusion limits their ability to contribute strategically and ensure alignment between institutional goals and public expectations. The study also found that older and more

experienced practitioners are more likely to be involved in strategic management, suggesting that expertise and tenure influence perceptions of value within these institutions.

#### **5.1.4 Knowledge potential for managerial role**

The study also assessed the knowledge and practical skills of the participants and found a disparity between their theoretical knowledge and practical skills. While participants demonstrated a strong understanding of public relations principles – including the tenets of the Excellence Theory – their expertise was primarily concentrated in technical areas. As such, practitioners were proficient in operational functions including but not limited to writing and media relations, but lacked advanced skills in strategic management, such as conducting summative research.

The study also noted the impact of academic qualifications and professional development on practitioners' knowledge and skills. Practitioners with advanced degrees in PR or related fields were more likely to implement strategic campaigns. However, access to professional development opportunities was limited, hindering the advancement of skills and the profession's ability to move beyond operational roles. Additionally, low affiliation with professional PR bodies suggested a disconnect between public sector practice and industry trends and standards.

#### **5.1.5 Two-way symmetrical communication**

The last objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which public relations practice in the public sector is premised on two-way symmetrical communication. The results indicated that while participants in the study recognize the two-way symmetrical model as the ideal for public relations excellence, its implementation remains inconsistent. Consequently, public relations practice in Ghanaian public institutions incorporates elements from all four models of public

relations, resulting in a hybrid approach where practitioners adapt their communication strategies based on the context. The findings implied that crises and social policy reforms presented an opportunity for participants to enforce two-way symmetrical communication, outside of which they reported a heavier reliance on one-way and two-way asymmetric communication models. This reliance on one-way communication indicates the prevalence of a misconception of public relations as primarily a publicity function.

Furthermore, evaluation plays a limited role despite the participants' stated belief in two-way communication. They reported minimal efforts in assessing message clarity or ensuring coherence between institutional goals and stakeholder expectations, acknowledging the potential for social desirability response bias, where participants may provide responses that reflect their understanding of ideal practices rather than accurately representing the reality of their day-to-day undertakings. This was evident in the discrepancy between participants' knowledge of two-way symmetrical communication and their inconsistent application of it.

## **5.2 Practical Recommendations of the Study**

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher believes that excellence in public relations praxis in Ghana's public sector is contingent on immediate attention to and resolution of the challenges and barriers impeding the practitioners' ability to contribute their maximum value to the strategic management of government institutions. The researcher, therefore, proffers the following recommendations to the government, and public relations practitioners within the public sector.

1. Due to the complexity that characterises communicating with multiple stakeholders and the resource and personnel constraints that hinder the effective management of same, communication functions should be acknowledged as an integral part of public

management, and should therefore permeate all aspects of institutional operations, from planning and development to implementation and evaluation.

2. State structures must institutionalise frequent training and development programs to enhance the level of knowledge and technological savviness among their public relations personnel to augment their ability to approach communications efforts strategically, and stay up to speed with developing trends in the industry, respectively.
3. Outside of crises and regulatory reforms, all forms of communication must adhere to the two-way symmetrical model irrespective of the context, to maintain transparency, accountability and ultimately, trust with the publics.
4. Government must allocate budgetary resources for regular and formal research before, during, and after campaigns.
5. Practitioners must ensure to register with and actively participate in the activities of professional bodies, both domestic and international.
6. Practitioners must adopt targeted approaches to communication to ensure messages reach and resonate with all stakeholders effectively.

### **5.3 Recommendations for Future Research**

The researcher makes the following recommendations for future studies, in consideration of some limitations that the present study suffered. The succinct discussion below itemises each recommendation in tune with the respective limitation.

1. To situate the Excellence Theory in the Ghanaian context in its entirety, future research should employ the other five principles as a criterion for testing public relations practices in the public sector.

2. Future investigations should link the public relations activities of Ghana's public sector institutions to variables such as culture, economic system, political structure, level of development, media system and the extent of activism to better understand the particular dynamics of public relations in public sector organisations, especially in terms of the ever-changing socio-political structure.
3. This study did not consider levels of governance, but gathered participants from all state institutions. Therefore, future research can focus on public relations practice in select levels of governance in Ghana.
4. Quantitative methodologies should be incorporated into similar studies to provide broader, statistically significant insights into public relations practices within Ghanaian government institutions.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

This study highlights undesirable conditions inherent in public relations practice within Ghana's public sector. At its core, public relations is positioned as a vital mechanism for transparency, accountability, and stakeholder engagement. However, the realities of its implementation are a struggle between its aspirational strategic value and systemic barriers that have stifled the evolution of public relations from its traditional, operational roots to a dynamic, strategic function capable of influencing governance and public trust.

The findings suggest that while public relations in Ghana's government sector has demonstrated its potential, attaining its true effectiveness requires a recalibration of purpose, practice, and institutional alignment.

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## APPENDIX

### Informed Consent Form

#### Project Title

Testing the applicability of Grunig's principles of excellent public relations practice: a study of Ghana's public sector.

#### Study Supervisor

Albert Anani-Bossman (PhD)

Phone: 0244767223

Email: [albert.anani-bossman@gij.edu.gh](mailto:albert.anani-bossman@gij.edu.gh)

#### Invitation to participate

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Amedegbe-Doe Kingsley, graduate researcher at the University of Media, Arts and Communication – Institute of Journalism (UniMAC-IJ). Choosing whether or not to participate is entirely your choice. If you decide not to participate, there will be no negative impacts on your relationship with the researcher. The information provided in this form tells you about what is involved in the research, what you will be asked to do, and any potential risks or benefits. Please read this form carefully, take all the time you need, and ask any questions you may have. Consent is an ongoing process. During the research study, we will tell you about any significant finding that could affect your willingness to continue to participate in this study.

#### Purpose of the Study

The goal of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of how Public Relations practitioners in Ghana's public sector perceive and implement Grunig's principles of Excellence in the discipline. This research will contribute to the development of more effective Public Relations strategies in Ghana.

#### What you will be asked to do

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview. The interview will last approximately 30 minutes and will be conducted in person or via video

conference. During the interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences, knowledge, and practices in public relations. Your responses will be recorded to facilitate accurate transcription and analysis.

### **Who can take part in this study?**

You are eligible to participate if you are a public relations professional working in a public sector organization in Ghana.

### **Possible Risks and Benefits**

**Risks:** There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study. However, you may experience some discomfort or inconvenience with certain questions during the interview process.

**Benefits:** In such instances, if any, you do not have to provide answers to those questions.

There is no guarantee that you will benefit directly from participating in this study. However, the focus group will provide you with the opportunity to voice your opinion on your experiences and hopefully contribute to the advancement of public relations knowledge and practice in Ghana.

### **Privacy and Confidentiality**

All information collected during the study will be kept strictly confidential. Your identity will not be revealed in any publications or presentations arising from this research.

### **Withdrawal from the Study**

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate. If you decide to participate but change your mind later on, you are free to withdraw at any time without consequence. Your decision to withdraw will not influence your relationship with the researcher in any way.

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about the study, please contact the researcher at [elikemdoe40@gmail.com](mailto:elikemdoe40@gmail.com) or 0556356636.

## Signature Page

**Project Title:** Testing The Applicability of Grunig's Principles of Excellent Public Relations Practice: A Study Of Ghana's Public Sector

**Researcher:** Amedegbe-Doe Kingsley

By signing this form, I agree that:

- The study has been explained to me
- All my questions have been answered
- Possible harm and discomforts and possible benefits (if any) of this study have been explained to me
- I have been told that my personal information will be kept confidential

In addition, I understand that:

- I have the right not to participate and the right to stop at any time
- I may refuse to participate without consequence
- I have a choice of not answering specific questions
- I am free now, and in the future, to ask any questions about the study
- No information that would identify me will be released or printed without asking me first
- I will receive a signed copy of this consent form

**You can still participate in the research if you select no:**

I agree that I may be quoted directly and anonymously  Yes  No

I agree that the interview may be audio recorded  Yes  No

Please provide an email address below if you would like to be sent a summary of the study results.

Email address: \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of the Researcher**

By signing this form, I attest that:

- I have explained the study to the prospective participant
- I answered all of their questions
- I provided a copy of this consent form to the participant
- The participant seemed to understand the consent form and agreed to participate

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**Name**

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**Signature**

---

**Date**

## **Interview Guide**

1. Please share with us a brief background about yourself.
  - Can you tell me your full designation?
  - How long you have been working in public relations?
  - Tell me about your formal education background
  - What age group do you fall within? (e.g. 30s, 40s, 50s etc)
2. What do you think is the chief purpose of public relations [in government]?
3. Briefly describe how your institution would usually conduct a public relations program or campaign.
4. Can you describe what kind of public relations activities you conduct for your Organisation/institution? (e.g. media relations, events, CSR/community relations, etc.).
5. Do you perform any form of extensive/formal research? If yes, what kind of research does the unit/directorate perform (attitudinal, perception etc.)
6. If you do perform extensive research prior and/or after a campaign, please indicate which kinds of research tools (e.g., surveys, focus groups, interviews) you use. If you don't conduct research, perhaps explain which are the constraints (e.g., time, budget, etc.) you face.
7. How do you measure/evaluate the outcome of PR/communication programs? Is measurement & evaluative research a core part of what you do?
8. How do you project the activities of the institution (e.g. article writing)
9. Are you involved in the strategic planning process of the institution?
10. Do you consider yourself part of the senior management/dominant coalition? Who do you report to? How much support do you receive from the top management?

11. How does senior management rate the value of your PR work? Does management seek your opinion in decision-making?
12. What in your view, are some of the factors (cultural, political, economic etc.) that affect the way PR is practiced in government or state institutions?
13. What suggestions, if any, can you give to improve the way PR is practised in state institutions?