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UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION

INSTITUTE OF JOURNALISM

**POWER AND INFLUENCE IN THE BOARDROOM: AN EXAMINATION OF PUBLIC  
RELATIONS INFLUENCE WITHIN THE C-SUITE**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

### STUDENT'S DECLARATION

I, Augustina Yawa Dansu, affirm that the dissertation presented herein represents my independent research conducted under the guidance of Dr. Albert Adjei Anani-Bossman and Dr. Priscilla Teika Odoom. All citations and sources referenced in published materials have been properly acknowledged, and no portion of this work has been previously submitted for any other academic qualification.

SIGNATURE: 

DATE: 5<sup>th</sup> September, 2024

### SUPERVISOR(S) DECLARATION

We hereby declare that the preparation and presentation of this work were conducted under the supervision in compliance with the prescribed guidelines of the Institute of Journalism.


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## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this work to my cherished family, with profound gratitude to my beloved husband, Mr. Dickson Nuku Dansu, and our four wonderful children, Deborah Dinam Dansu, Collins Amenuveve Dansu, Emmanuel Edem Dansu, and Peniel Melike Dansu. I also extend heartfelt appreciation to my dear mother, Madam Mary Sitsofe Gablibo, my younger sister, Albertina Emefa Sape, my amazing sister-in-law, Mrs. Olivia Kafui Yamoah, my niece, Esther Etornam Adzimah, and my mother-in-law, Mrs. Paulina Agbavor. Their unwavering support has been a source of strength and inspiration. May the Almighty God bless and protect us all for His glory.

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## ABSTRACT

Public relations is essential for building and maintaining relationships between organizations and stakeholders, shaping perceptions, and influencing behaviours. Despite its strategic importance, PR often struggles to exert influence during decision-making processes, particularly in the Ghanaian context, where it is not consistently integrated into strategic initiatives. This study investigated the role of PR in strategic decision-making within organizations, focusing on the challenges practitioners face and strategies to enhance the profession's influence. The study employed a qualitative methodology, engaging 15 senior practitioners from private and state-owned organizations, along with 5 decision-makers, making a total of 20 participants. Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide, providing a comprehensive understanding of PR's current state, barriers to its strategic integration, and actionable recommendations for improving its effectiveness. Key findings revealed that while practitioners emphasized the need for PR's strategic integration, decision-makers had varied perceptions – ranging from viewing PR as a mere communication tool to recognizing its strategic value. There was a consensus on PR's crucial role in reputation management and stakeholder engagement. The findings underscored PR's influence within the boardroom, highlighting its potential to shape corporate policy and guide organizational narratives. The study recommends a more integrated role for PR in organizational strategy and governance.

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.0 Background to the Study

Public relations (PR) is an effective means of building and maintaining relationships between an organization and its publics by branding its (public relations) communication to influence and affect behaviours of stakeholders. Public relations is thus defined as a strategic communication discipline and a management function that focuses on building and maintaining positive relationships between organizations and their various stakeholders, including the public, media, customers, employees, investors, and government bodies (Public Relations Society of America, 2012). It involves the creation and dissemination of information to shape public perception and influence opinions about an organization, individual, or entity (Cole, 2023). Following its strategic nature, public relations scholars concur, that public relations is a significant function that is multifaceted within an organization following its role to various stakeholders including the C-Suite. For instance, public relations is crucial for the C-Suite because it helps in managing and enhancing the organization's reputation, provides strategic insights, manages communication during crises, and ensures that the company's messages and actions are consistently aligned with its goals and values (Leonard, 2019). The C-Suite also relies on public relations to effectively engage with stakeholders, advocate for the organization, and maintain a positive public image (Kaleel, 2020).

Deducing from the above, public relations can be said to be an essential component to the success of achieving organizational objectives when strategic decisions are made and guided by the dominant coalition (Tam et al., 2020). Reber and Berger (2006) and Badi et al. (2020) agree that once a communications practitioner becomes an important member of the dominant coalition, they can influence well-developed strategies and tactics to shape organizational decisions,

actions and ideologies. As a C-suite employee, the practitioner brings his expertise in communication, relationship management, and strategic thinking to help organizations effectively engage with different stakeholders, manage reputations, and navigate complex communication challenges (Macnamara, 2019). This defines the important role that public relations plays in an organization and contributes to the bottom line.

Despite the importance of public relations to organizational success, studies over the years show that, that practitioners often lack power and influence during strategic decision-making processes within organizations (Aang Koswara et al., 2023; Oksiutycz, 2022; Anani-Bossman, 2021; Reber & Berger, 2006). Although a considerable number of work has been done to contribute to the body of knowledge concerning public relations in Ghana, results largely show public relations is rarely practiced at the strategic level (Anani-Bossman, 2021b). Anani-Bossman (2021b) assert that, the profession still needs considerable improvement to achieve excellence, as marketing is given more importance than public relations. In addition, public relations practices focus more on technical aspects, in which practitioners receive instructions from the dominant coalition rather than assuming management roles in policy-making.

In an organizational context, the concept of the dominant coalition refers to a group of influential factions that hold significant power and authority within specific settings, such as government entities or corporations (Zhang & Greve, 2019). The autonomy attributed to this coalition allows them to significantly shape decision-making processes and policy outcomes within the organization by virtue of controlling critical resources and exercising collective influence. Corroborating this viewpoint,

Mithani and O'Brien (2020) assert, that the dominant coalition signifies a collective of individuals at the helm, endowed with the authority to define and steer the organization's missions and goals. This group are composed of top managers who exercise decision-making control to maintain the organization's existing state of affairs. A nuanced understanding of power, as expounded by Ohlsson et al. (2021), reveals that within this context, power extends beyond the conventional notion of imposing authority. It evolves into a strategic ability to positively influence subordinate behaviour, rallying them toward achieving the organization's shared objectives (van Baarle et al., 2022; Hornung & Höge, 2021). This perspective aligns with Tanner's (2022) contention that power often gravitates toward individuals who adeptly address the organization's needs and demands. However, it remains confined to a select few within the organization (Wang et al., 2021). Consequently, how well an organization performs is highly dependent on the decisions and actions of the top management group stakeholders (Kraus & Ferrell, 2016). Kraus and Ferrell (2016) further accentuate the crucial role of top management with an emphasis on effectively communicating strategies to stakeholders.

Rimkutė (2022), emphasize that an organization's public reputation is essentially moulded by the interpretation and communication of top management's behaviour by public relations practitioners. This symbiotic relationship between the dominant coalition and public relations extends further, with the latter serving as an advisory entity, deeply intertwined with the coalition's essence (Blotnicky & Thurlow, 2021; Rimkutė, 2022). Building on this foundation, it is evident that most organizations depend on public relations for their internal and external communication needs (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2019). However, a notable discrepancy emerges as public relations practitioners often find themselves lacking influence in high-level decision-making processes, despite their presence within the C-suite (Ihlen & Raknes, 2020). The mere presence of public

relations practitioners in the dominant coalition, without wielding substantial influence, diminishes their importance (Falasca & Helgesson, 2020). Moreover, the existence of public relations practitioners at the top executive table can be characterized as a “revolving door” (Neill, 2012, p. 1). In addition, gaining access or a seat in the dominant coalition does not necessarily ensure that the input from public relations managers will be valued and considered in crucial organizational policy or decision making (Yue, 2019). Following this, McGahan (2019) strongly submit that it is important to have experts in an organization who can tactfully and professionally manage issues and relationships with the organization’s stakeholders, as these stakeholder demands require it.

The narrative takes a pragmatic turn as Knight and Sweetser (2021) concur with McGahan’s (2019) stance, advocating for an empowered presence of public relations within the dominant coalition to exert significant influence. Furst (2011) augments this argument, attributing the ability to wield power and influence to the provision of persuasive support and beneficial resources. Influence, according to Furst (2011), becomes the cornerstone of success. Tam et al. (2020) extend this discourse by emphasizing the necessity of empowering public relations practitioners, and considering them as pivotal components for effective strategic management. This approach implies an inclusive strategic management process, drawing perspectives from different units, including public relations, and thereby fostering diverse solutions and decision-making contributions.

Tandoh et al. (2022) emphasized the criticality of positioning public relations practitioners at the apex of organizational hierarchy. However, a series of obstacles hinder the effective participation of these practitioners in strategic decisions. Challenges include the lack of recognition by top management, resistance from line managers, insufficient resource allocation, unfavourable structural placement, negative perceptions about information leakage, and organizational cultural dynamics (Tandoh et al., 2022). Anani-Bossmann (2021) aligns with the perspectives of the

excellence theory, advocating for the strategic involvement of public relations practitioners in the planning process. Austin and Pinkleton (2015) further accentuate the value of robust public relations in strategic management, noting its potential to enhance decision-making and consequently benefiting both the organization and its stakeholders. Similarly, Bajalia (2020), amplifies the significance of empowering public relations practitioners and their role in strategic management, highlighting the pivotal role of relationship cultivation in enhancing organizational effectiveness. As contemporary organizations rely on public relations as a vital and valuable department, the way it is conceptualized has been impacted by the differing backgrounds of the heads of communication departments in many organizations (Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani, 2018). This has led to a superficial understanding of public relations practice and has limited the influence and power of many public relations practitioners at the strategic level.

Stemming from the above, the purpose of this study is to investigate the dynamics of public relations inclusion in the dominant coalition of organizations, with a focus on its role in strategic decision-making, challenges practitioners face, and potential strategies for improving the evolving role of public relations' influence and impact in contemporary business environment.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

Public relations is fundamentally about nurturing beneficial relationships and understanding between organizations and their stakeholders (Skinner et al., 2016). To succeed, public relations needs an integrated approach where practitioners are part of the dominant coalition, comprehending stakeholder needs and environmental influences (Skinner et al., 2016). This approach, scholars argue, ensures operational continuity and is vital for an organization's reputation. Strategic communication executed by public relations practitioners is pivotal not only

for shaping stakeholder perceptions but also for enhancing the credibility and strategic role of practitioners (Juliane & Ansgar, 2015). Despite these assertions, numerous organizations fail to recognize the strategic role of public relations (Gitau & Chebii, 2020). For instance, research shows that in China, public relations is not considered a significant contributor to organizational value creation, leaving practitioners relegated to lower-level tasks and limiting their influence (Yue, 2019). In South Africa, though senior public relations practitioners offer insights into stakeholders and facilitate conversations with the dominant coalition, their feedback often goes unimplemented (Ferreira & Engelbrecht, 2022). This discrepancy hampers the potential contribution to strategic decisions by practitioners.

A similar scenario unfolds in Ghana, where public relations is predominantly practiced at a tactical level, hindering the influence of practitioners within the C-suite (Tandoh et al., 2022; Anani-Bossman, 2021). Moreover, existing research in the African context focuses on dialogic communication, crisis management, and public engagement, with little attention to public relation's strategic dimension (Nutsugah & Anani-Bossman, 2023). This study aims to address these gaps by exploring factors that either enable or hinder public relations practitioners' capacity to exert influence within the C-suite and investigate perceptions of the public relations profession from the vantage points of both practitioners and decision-makers. By delving into these areas, the study seeks to contribute to the African and global public relations scholarship and offer insight into public relations practices within the regional context.

## **1.2 Research Objectives and Questions**

### **1.2.1 Objectives of the Study**

The following objectives define the study:

- i. To explore how public relations practitioners and decision-makers perceive public relations and its influence in strategic decisions.
- ii. To analyse how public relations practitioners achieve strategic influence within their organizations.
- iii. To explore the factors that either facilitate or hinder the ability of public relations practitioners to achieve influence and power within the C-suite.

### **1.2.2 Research Questions**

To achieve the above set objectives, the study aims to find answers to the following questions;

- i. How do public relations practitioners and decision-makers perceive public relations and its influence/power?
- ii. How do practitioners achieve strategic influence with their organizations?
- iii. What are the factors that facilitate or hinder practitioner's ability to achieve influence?

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

Research plays a critical role by providing valuable and pertinent information to stakeholders to help them make informed decisions (Solanki, 2022). Therefore, this inquiry aims to provide a contemporary understanding of public relations practices in the African context, specifically in Ghana. The study will offer unique insights and perspectives on public relations practice in this part of the world by addressing the specific challenges and opportunities that will ultimately enhance the practice of public relations in the country and contribute to the broader African landscape.

The findings of this study will serve as invaluable resources that can empower public relations practitioners, facilitators, and students with a comprehensive understanding of the role and impact

of contemporary public relations practices. By delving into the intricacies and nuances of the profession, these findings offer a wealth of knowledge that can greatly benefit individuals involved in public relations. The findings of this study will also shed light on the current landscape of public relations, providing insights into the evolving dynamics, challenges, and opportunities that practitioners face in their daily work. By understanding the contemporary context of the profession, practitioners can adapt their strategies and tactics accordingly, ensuring that they remain effective and relevant to their organizations.

Additionally, the findings of this study will provide important insights into improving the perception of the public relations profession, which is undervalued in many organizations, especially Ghana. The findings significantly hopes to offer an opportunity to address misconceptions and elevate the profession's reputation. Armed with this knowledge, practitioners can advocate for the importance of public relations within organizations, highlighting their role in building and maintaining relationships, managing reputation, and driving positive outcomes as key members of the C-suite. The findings of this study will serve as a useful resource for public relations students, equipping them with a solid foundation of knowledge and understanding, as they embark on their careers. Thus, insights from this research can help students develop a well-rounded understanding of the profession, its best practices, and their potential impact. This knowledge positions them to enter the field with confidence, equipped with tools to excel in their future roles, and contribute to the advancement of the profession.

Finally, this study will present an opportunity for authorities, regulatory bodies, and policymakers to develop effective policies and strategies to address the challenges faced by public relations practitioners. Specifically, it focuses on public relations practitioners' limited power and its influence on management's strategic decisions. This opportunity will enable the development of

initiatives that will empower public relations practitioners and recognize the value of public relations within organizations in Ghana. Thus, by implementing targeted policies, public relations practitioners can play a more significant role in shaping organizational direction and communication strategies, which will ultimately improve organizational outcomes.

#### **1.4 Scope of the Study**

The study's scope is the parameters in which it will operate (Simon & Goes, 2013). The issue at hand is the phenomenon where many public relations practitioners struggle to wield influence and power, even when they are present during crucial managerial decisions at executive meetings. This issue is juxtaposed against the critical role of public relations, as described by Morehouse (2021), in fostering symbiotic relationships between organizations and stakeholders. Anani-Bossman's (2021) study underscored that despite the progress of public relations in Ghana, strategic-level practice remains uncommon in many organizations. This study's domains will thus be constrained to the following criteria:

- i. Examine the extent of public relations influence within the C-Suite.
- ii. Comprehend the strategies deployed by top practitioners to exert influence within the C-Suite.
- iii. Analyse the impact of public relations influence on strategic management and decision-making processes from the Ghanaian perspective.
- iv. Identify the barriers and constraints hindering numerous practitioners from influencing the C-Suite.

Two theoretical perspectives, namely dominant coalition theory and role theory, will underpin this study. Role theory will illuminate the dynamics of expectations, behaviours, and influence between public relations professionals and C-suite executives. Concurrently, dominant coalition theory will

elucidate power dynamics and decision-making processes in the C-suite, shedding light on how public relations practitioners establish their presence within this influential cohort.

The study will encompass public relations practitioners and decision-makers from both public and private sectors in the Greater-Accra region. A purposive and expert sampling method will facilitate the selection of participants with first-hand experience and expert knowledge in strategic management and decision-making. Qualitative data will be collected through semi-structured interviews, delving into participants' perceptions of public relations' influence within the C-suite, their employed strategies, encountered challenges, and influence on decision-making. The ensuing qualitative data will be subjected to thematic analysis to unveil key themes and patterns.

### **1.5 Organization of the Study**

This study will be organized into five chapters to provide a comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon. Chapter One establishes the foundation by offering contextual information, introducing the research problem, outlining research objectives and questions, and highlighting the study's significance and potential contributions. The scope of the study will be defined to set boundaries, and the chapter will present an overview of subsequent chapters' content and organization.

In Chapter Two, a thorough review of pertinent literature will be conducted to foster a deeper comprehension of the subject. Relevant theories, concepts, and prior studies connected to the phenomenon will be examined, potentially leading to the development or adaptation of a conceptual framework and analytical lens for interpreting findings.

Chapter Three will delineate the chosen research approach and design. It will detail aspects such as the study's target population, the proposed sampling method, the determined sample size, and the instruments for data collection. Additionally, the techniques and procedures to ensure the validity of research findings will be outlined.

Chapter Four will be dedicated to the collection, examination, and analysis of data, culminating in the presentation of results. This chapter will effectively link the research objectives with the study's findings, providing a cohesive narrative.

Chapter Five will encompass several components. It will summarize the research findings, drawing meaningful conclusions from the analysis. The implications of these findings will be discussed, offering insights into their broader significance. Moreover, the chapter will present suggestions or recommendations for further studies that can build upon this research's insights, paving the way for continued exploration of the topic.

## **1.6 Operational Definition of Concepts**

**C-suite (Dominant Coalition):** Refers to the highest-ranking executives within a company or an organization. It is an abbreviation for C-level suite or C-level executives, where the 'C' stands for Chief. These individuals typically occupy the most crucial and influential positions within the company. They bear the responsibility of making significant strategic decisions that have a profound impact on the overall direction and success of the organization (Cassidy, 2018). For example; Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) among many others, form the C-suite.

**Strategic Public Relations:** A strategic communication practice that focuses on managing and maintaining a positive image, reputation, and relationship between an organization or individual and its publics (Anani-Bossman, 2021). Public relations thus involves creating and disseminating information to various target audience of an organization, with an objective to influence the perception and attitudes of the publics towards the organization.

**Practitioner:** A public relations specialist who works in the aforementioned field and responsible for planning, executing, and managing strategic communication initiatives to build and foster positive relationships between their clients or an organization and its publics.

**Excellence:** According to Tam et al. (2020), excellence in the practice of public relations is the highest standard of performance and effectiveness of public relations communication strategies, which involves consistently achieving outstanding results by managing communication, building relationships, and maintaining a positive reputation for an organization or an individual. The scholars attributed advisory influence, executive influence, success of programmes and strategies, and competence, as key factors that contribute to public relations excellence.

**Influence/Power:** Refers to the ability of public relations practitioners to shape opinions, attitudes, and behaviours of target audiences, as well as the capacity of practitioners to be an integral part of the C-suite to make strategic decisions and affect outcomes within an organization (Whiting, 2022).

**Strategic Decision:** As opined by Emanuele and Stefania (2011), strategic decision in public relations and communication involves the processes of identifying, evaluating, and selecting the most effective courses of action to achieve set objectives and address communication challenges

faced in organizations. It thus requires a comprehensive understanding of the organization, its publics and the communication landscape (Gregory & Willis, 2022).

**Return On Investment (ROI) in Public Relations:** This refers to the measurement of the value generated from public relations efforts in relation to the resources invested. It quantifies the effectiveness and impact of public relations activities by assessing the financial outcomes or benefits achieved compared to the costs incurred (putu viola kanno, 2020).

## **1.7 Literature Review**

### **1.7.1 Public Relations and the Dominant Coalition**

Public relations is the strategic communication process that organizations use to establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with various stakeholders, including the public, media, customers, employees, investors, and more (Roberts-Bowman, 2016), with the primary goal to shape and manage the perception of an organization, its products or services, and its activities in the eyes of these stakeholders (Tam et al., 2020). The concept of the “dominant coalition” is often used in organizational and management theory and refers to the group of individuals within an organization who hold the most power, influence, and decision-making authority (Mithani & O’Brien, 2020). This coalition typically includes top executives, key managers, and other influential figures who have a significant impact on the organization’s strategic direction, policies, and decisions.

The relationship between public relations and the dominant coalition holds significant importance due to various factors. For instance, public relations practitioners closely collaborate with the dominant coalition to ensure that communication strategies of the organization align harmoniously

with its overarching goals and objectives (Wu, 2023), such that, this coalition's input becomes pivotal in shaping messaging and communication approaches to mirror the organization's mission, values, and strategic priorities. In terms of decision-making, public relations practitioners offer insights and suggestions to the dominant coalition regarding the potential perceptions of various stakeholders toward specific decisions and actions (Thurlow et al., 2018). As a result of this input from practitioners, the coalition can make well-informed decisions that consider possible reputational consequences. Wherein the dominant coalition assumes a central role in the management of the organization's reputation (Ilán Bizberg, 2019), working in tandem with public relations practitioners, enable the decision-makers to actively oversee the organization's public image and effectively address any challenges that might arise, including crises or bad publicity (Alaby, 2018). Public relations efforts often revolve around nurturing positive relationships with stakeholders (Fithri & Drajat, 2020). Here, the dominant coalition's grasp of stakeholder concerns and priorities serves as the foundation for public relations strategies designed to genuinely engage and communicate with these diverse groups (Tregidga & Milne, 2020).

Finally, effective internal communication is a critical aspect that cannot be undermined, and public relation practitioners play a role in helping the dominant coalition communicate their directives, vision, and strategic plans to employees (Tao et al., 2022; Carter et al., 2019). Altogether, the relationship between public relations and the dominant coalition is multi-faceted, such that working synergistically to shape perceptions and make informed decisions help to manage the organization's overall standing efficiently in the eyes of stakeholders and the public.

### **1.7.2 Factors that Impact Public Relations Influence within the C-Suite**

In today's business environment, effective communication and reputation management are pivotal for an organization's success (Erlangga et al., 2020). Public Relations practitioners play a crucial

role in maintaining positive stakeholder relationships, bolstering brand image, and managing potential crises. While CEOs and C-level executives might not always realize it, public relation's significance extends to them (Posey, 2023), emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of their contributions. Yet, various challenges hinder public relations practitioners' progress in this globalized era. Technological deficiencies, particularly in communication infrastructure in places like Ghana, impede the efforts of practitioners (Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2022). Amid these complexities, several factors emerge as determinants of public relation's influence within the C-Suite as follows:

**Organizational Culture and Structure:** The cultural and structural fabric of an organization significantly impacts the weight of public relation's influence. Studies underline that workplaces valuing openness, transparency, and collaboration tend to prioritize public relation's strategic counsel (Lee & Queenie Li, 2020). Organizational culture intertwines with communication initiatives, affecting how public relations strategies are executed (Sebastião et al., 2017). This imply that public relations practitioners must align with the organizational culture to effectively contribute at the C-Suite level.

**Skills and Competencies:** The skill set and competencies of public relations practitioners directly shape their influence. Proficiency in strategic communication aligns communication goals with the organization's larger objectives (Argenti, 2017). Argenti (2017) indicate that expertise in reputation management, skill in media relations, effective stakeholder engagement, business acumen, and data analysis capabilities further enhance public relation's value within the organization.

**Building Relationships and Trust:** The ability of public relations practitioners to cultivate strong relationships and engender trust with C-Suite executives is crucial (Meng & Berger, 2019). Thus

by demonstrating credibility through expertise, offering strategic guidance, and providing prompt and reliable advice can establish influence in high-level decision-making (Tam et al., 2020).

Demonstrating Value and ROI: To elevate their influence within the C-Suite, PR practitioners must substantiate their value. This involves presenting measurable outcomes such as ROI, brand equity, and reputation metrics (Bechan, 2022). Aligning PR efforts with business objectives and showcasing tangible results contribute to building credibility and influence with senior management (Almansa-Martínez & Fernández-Souto, 2020; Anani-Bossman, 2021a; Koch et al., 2017).

### **1.7.3 Public Relations Integration into Decision-Making Processes**

The integration of public relations into decision-making processes is emphasized as a crucial strategy for organizations to align choices with their communication objectives, manage reputation, and cultivate positive stakeholder relationships (Theaker, 2020). In this regard, early involvement of practitioners is highlighted as beneficial, as their comprehensive understanding of an organization's goals and stakeholders allows them to provide valuable insights that align with communication strategies (Marsen, 2019). Pidgeon (2020) concurs with the importance of integrating public relations into decision-making, underscoring its role in effective reputation management, stakeholder communication, and the alignment of decisions with an organization's core values and objectives, and other key aspects. Thus, successful integration of public relations into the C-Suite enables practitioners to assess the impact of decisions on reputation, conduct stakeholder analysis, develop communication plans, and ensure readiness for potential crises (Marsen, 2019).

It is imperative to note that public relations practitioners play a multifaceted role, which encompasses evaluating potential decisions' consequences on an organization's reputation, conducting risk

assessments, and advising on strategies to mitigate negative outcomes (Marsen, 2019). Furthermore, practitioners' expertise in ethical practices ensures that decision-making adheres to industry standards, promoting trust and credibility (Marsen, 2019). In crisis situations as well, practitioners contribute by assessing potential risks and creating contingency plans, enabling organizations to make decisions that are resilient in the face of challenges (Marsen, 2019). In addition, evaluating outcomes and establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) assists organizations in assessing decision-making effectiveness and making necessary adjustments (Marsen, 2019).

### **1.8 The Excellence Theory and The Role Theory**

Excellence Theory is a vital concept in the realm of organizational and strategic management studies (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021). Excellence Theory, propounded by James E. Grunig, posits that organizational success is reliant upon achieving a high level of symmetrical communication – where communication practices align with organizational goals and stakeholder expectations (Grunig, 2022). In the context of the C-suite, the excellence theory suggests that public relations practitioners, as communication experts, play a crucial role in facilitating effective communication between the organization and its key stakeholders, thereby influencing decision-making processes (McCollough, 2019).

Complementing Excellence Theory is Role Theory, a sociological concept that probes into the intricacies of how individuals function within social systems or organizations (Apriyanto & Yuliana, 2019). The theory provides a framework for analysing how individuals in different positions within an organization enact their roles and contribute to the overall functioning of the institution. In the context of public relations practitioners within the C-suite, Role Theory helps

elucidate the expectations placed on these individuals and how they navigate their roles to influence organizational outcomes, and enables a deeper exploration of the specific functions, responsibilities, and power dynamics associated with public relations role within the executive leadership team (Anglin et al., 2022).

Transposing Role Theory into an organizational context, allows for an in-depth examination of how public relations practitioners enact their roles to contribute to the overall success of the organization (Şeşen, 2015). It enables an exploration of the specific responsibilities, functions, and expectations associated with public relations role within the executive leadership team, with a focus on how these activities align with the pursuit of organizational excellence (Meng, 2014). The above approach considers the dynamic interplay between the roles of public relations practitioners and the broader organizational context.

## **1.9 Research Methodology and Design**

Research methodology and design encompass the overall strategy for conducting a research study, including methods, data collection, analysis approaches, and the structure of the study (Ganesha & Aithal, 2022). A well-planned design ensures reliability, validity, and a systematic approach to research inquiry (Leavy, 2017). The choice of methodology depends on research questions, objectives, and available resources (Sileyew, 2019). In lieu of that, this study will adopt the qualitative research approach to conduct this inquiry which according to Dzogovic and Bajrami (2023), is an approach used to seek, gather and analyse non-numerical data to gain in-depth understanding of a research phenomenon. Key components of the above as posited by the scholars include:

**Methods:** This study will utilize in-depth interviews to explore subjective experiences and social contexts (Hoover, 2021). Structured and semi-structured open-ended conversations will be employed to gather rich data, and will help to explore nuances about the phenomenon (Hemphill et al., n.d.-b).

**Sampling Design and Technique:** Cash et al. (2022), define sampling design as the overall plan or strategy that researchers use to select a subset of individuals or elements from a larger population for inclusion in a study. They added, that sampling design involves making decisions about the target population, the sample size, and the method of sampling. This thus imply, that sampling design guides in the selection process. Sampling technique on the other hand as purported by McCombes (2019), refers to the specific method or procedure used to select individuals or elements from the population to form the sample, which involves the practical implementation of the sampling design. Sampling technique can be categorized into two; (a) probability sampling – involves random selection of participants, allowing them an equal chance of being selected, and (b) non-probability sampling – involves selection of the study participants based on convenience, availability, and specific characteristics that will fit the criterion of the study (McCombes, 2019). Thus, in qualitative research, experts submit, that the focus is on exploration and understanding of real experiences, meanings, and perspectives of a social contexts of participants rather than generalizing findings to a larger group. Hence, an appropriate technique to utilize for qualitative study according to Omona (2013), is non-probability sampling. Out of the many sampling techniques such as snowball sampling, purposive sampling, convenience sampling, theoretical sampling, among many others used by explorative researchers, this study will employ purposive and expert sampling technique. This is because, purposive sampling involves selecting participants who possess a particular knowledge and experiences relevant to the phenomenon under study

(Stratton, 2023), and allows for individual who can provide in-depth insights and diverse range of perspectives, to be targeted for the study. Following the context of this study, the purposive sampling design will be adopted due to its ability to focus and target C-level executives or decision-makers and public relations experts, specifically the heads of the public relations units in both state and private sector organizations,. It is believed these individual experts will possess specialized knowledge and expertise in the field of public relations, making them valuable sources of in-depth information for this study.

**Study Participants:** The study aims to actively involve approximately fifteen (15) heads of the public relations departments in ten (10) private sector organizations, five (5) from state organizations, and five (5) decision makers or C-level executives from both sectors. Thus, total number of the study's participants are twenty (20).

**Study Area:** The Greater Accra region is selected as the study area due to its accessibility, prominence, and concentration of relevant organizations, which directly influence the research phenomenon

### **1.10 Data Collection Method and Technique**

Data collection is the systematic gathering of relevant and reliable information from various sources including participants, to address research objectives and questions, using specific methods and instruments (Taherdoost, 2021). Thus, to enhance validity and reliability, scholars recommend using multiple methods based on research goals, context, and resources available.

In line with the inquiry's paradigm which is interpretivist, qualitative data collection techniques will be employed. These methods aim to gather insights into individuals' lived experiences,

opinions, and perspectives within a social context, yielding a nuanced understanding of phenomena (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Among the available techniques, this study will opt for interviews to obtain in-depth information from individuals with in-depth knowledge. Interviews are chosen based on Alamri's (2019) assertion that they facilitate direct and detailed conversations. Thus, for this study, a semi-structured approach will be employed, combining aspects of structured and unstructured interviews. This approach to interviews utilize planned open-ended questions to guide conversations, allowing flexibility for follow-up queries and participant insights (Eppich et al., 2019).

### **1.11 Data Analysis Techniques**

Data analysis, as articulated by Creswell and Creswell (2018), represents the crucial process of extracting meaningful insights, drawing conclusions, and addressing research questions or hypotheses from collected data. This entails organizing, refining, transforming, and summarizing raw data into discernible patterns, trends, and relationships to yield valuable information aligned with research objectives. Moreover, Newman and Gough (2019) underline the necessity for adapting data analysis methods to suit the nature of the data (i.e. quantitative or qualitative), research design, and questions at hand.

Considering the phenomenological nature of this study, a qualitative data analysis approach will be aptly employed to meticulously examine and elucidate the primary data collected. This chosen methodology resonates with Lester et al.'s (2020) assertion that qualitative data analysis involves methodical scrutiny and interpretation of qualitative data to unveil patterns, themes, and insights that illuminate underlying meanings, contributing to a broader comprehension of the research subject. Thus, from the array of techniques available to qualitative researchers for data analysis,

this study will leverage thematic analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to dissect and interpret primary data. In agreement with Morgan and Nica (2020), thematic analysis empowers researchers to discern, analyse, and construe patterns or themes inherent in the collected data. Furthermore, the capacity to holistically probe data for fresh insights, adeptly coding recurring concepts and ideas into categorical themes will be highlighted (Peel, 2020).

Complementing the IPA, stems from the fact that it emerges as a participant-centred technique that strives to unveil a profound and nuanced comprehension of participants' viewpoints and anchored in grasping their lived experiences, enabling them to articulate their encounters accurately and free from distortion or judgment (Alase, 2017).

### **1.12 Ethical Consideration**

The ethical considerations that underpin research encompass a set of principles and guidelines aimed at safeguarding the rights, well-being, and dignity of participants throughout the research process (Graham et al., 2014; Maldonado-Castellanos & Barrios, 2023). This facet of research holds significant importance in upholding the integrity and validity of the research endeavour, acting as a safeguard against potential harm to individuals and communities involved (Petrova et al., 2014). The cautious adherence to these ethical guidelines is imperative and non-negotiable within the framework of this study. Numerous scholars have underscored the pivotal elements of ethical considerations in research. The concept of Informed Consent, as advocated by Eaton (2020), demands that researchers obtain explicit permission from participants prior to their engagement in the study. This involves transparently conveying the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, potential risks and benefits, participants' voluntary participation, withdrawal rights, and the freedom to seek clarifications. This fundamental principle will be stringently

followed in the study. Furthermore, participants' esteem for confidentiality as a means of controlling personal information is highly recommended (Jamal et al., 2014, p. 964). Thus, this study will ensure to accurately uphold confidentiality and privacy, protecting the identities of participants by assigning anonymous codes and ensuring that access to data about public relations practitioners is restricted to the study's supervisors.

Moreover, Pietilä et al. (2019) assert that participants must be assured that the information they provide will solely be employed for academic purposes. In light of that, this study is committed to honouring this aspect of confidentiality, where every effort will be exerted to divulge the necessary details for obtaining participants' consent while eliminating potential conflicts of interest that could jeopardize the study's impartiality, outcomes, or the well-being of the participants.

Similarly, Lincoln and Guba's "Naturalistic Inquiry" (1985) offers comprehensive guidance on ethical considerations in qualitative research. This study will focus on the key aspects of trustworthiness. Therefore the study will focus on transferability by offering adequate details for readers to apply findings in similar situations, and enhance credibility through thorough data collection, triangulation, member checking, peer debriefing, detailed documentation, and reflexivity. The study will also prioritize dependability by maintaining stability, consistency, reliability, and transparency throughout data collection and analysis and also ensure the study's confirmability by establishing objectivity and neutrality, which will be free from biases. Lastly, the study will emphasize authenticity by truthfully representing the lived experiences of participants, perspectives, and voices.

### **1.13 Chapter Summary**

Public relations holds a vital role in fostering relationships between organizations and their audiences. It influences audience behaviour and branding, contributing significantly to achieving organizational goals. Strategic decisions led by the C-suite are essential for public relations success, as highlighted by researchers. However, recent studies indicate that public relations practitioners often lack power and influence during strategic decision-making processes. This issue is observed globally, including in Africa, like Ghana. Despite the growth of public relations, it is not often practiced at the strategic level in Ghana. This study aims to investigate strategic public relations implementation in Ghana using Role theory and Dominant Coalition theory. It seeks to understand power dynamics, effectiveness of practitioners' influence, and their capacity to affect decision-making. By exploring these factors, the study aims to grasp a comprehensive understanding of power dynamics in organizations.

The study will outline specific goals and intentions, guide research questions, emphasize significance, and shed light on the role of public relations practitioners in decision-making. Employing an interpretivist paradigm, it will use qualitative research methods like in-depth interviews, observations, and document analysis. Sampling techniques will be purposive and expert, targeting C-level or decision makers and public relations unit heads in private and public sector organizations in the Greater Accra region. The study aims to contribute to recognizing public relations' role, improving its strategic implementation, and enhancing the understanding of its practitioners.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

Power and influence are pivotal elements in the field of public relations, as they play a significant role in shaping public perception, building relationships, and achieving organizational goals. This literature review aims to thoroughly explore the multifaceted relationship between power, influence, and public relations, while also delving into the inhibitors and challenges that public relations practitioners encounter in wielding influence. Additionally, the study will examine how public relations practitioners enact power and influence, and their connection with the C-Suite, the top executive level within an organization.

Consequently, the interplay between public relations and the boardroom has become a subject of growing significance, particularly in understanding the dynamics of power and influence within organizations. Thus, this literature draws insights from the Excellence theory and Role theory to understand and thoroughly assess the situation described above. Neill (2015) highlights that when corporate communications executives are involved in strategic issues beyond the C-Suite, they often compete with marketing for influence. Meanwhile, the structural integration in the C-Suite has positive benefits for firm reputation and profitability, particularly in service-oriented firms (Ibrahim et al., 2021). Smith (2013) examines perceptions of public relations practitioners in an integrated communication structure and suggests that public relations may gain influence through social media acumen and the interconnected structure of communications can influence public relations. By synthesizing theoretical foundations, empirical research, and real-world illustrations, this review aims to provide an insightful exploration of public relations role in shaping corporate decision-making and strategic governance.

## **2.1 Theoretical Framework**

A theoretical framework is a conceptual structure that provides a foundation for understanding and analysing a particular phenomenon, problem, or subject of study, and consists of a set of interrelated concepts, theories, and models that help to organize the research and guide with analysis (Nhan, 2020). Following the phenomenological nature of this study, the Excellence Theory and the Role Theory are deemed the appropriate theories to help figure out the power dynamics within the C-Suite and how public relations practitioners can enact influence in the boardroom.

### **2.1.1 Excellence Theory**

In 1984, the “Excellence Team” responded to the International Association of Business Communicators (IABC) call for a research project to investigate how communication can impact organizational goals (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). In 1985, a comprehensive study spanning literature review, surveys, and qualitative analyses was conducted with inquiries entailing how public relations contributes to an organizations success and what characteristics define an effective public relations function (Grunig & Grunig, 2000). 327 organizations were surveyed and 25 qualitative studies were conducted across the US, Canada, and the UK. Findings of the study highlighted public relations role in integrating stakeholders’ goals with an organizations and emphasized the value of public relations in nurturing quality relationships with key groups. The findings led to the development of ten principles, shaping global public relations theory, which emphasized strategic management involvement, integrated communication practices, managerial leadership, symmetrical communication, and diversity as key elements for excellent public relations practice (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021).

The ten key principles of the theory is a comprehensive framework that outlines how public relations can contribute to organizational effectiveness:

1. Public relations is involved in an organizations strategic management which involves setting specific organizational goals, objectives and tasks to achieve such goals
2. Public relations is empowered by the dominant coalition or by a direct reporting relationship to senior management
3. The public relations function is an integrated one that combines all the communication-related practices into one major umbrella function
4. Public relations is a management function separate from other functions
5. The public relations unit is headed by a manager rather than a technician
6. The two-way symmetrical model of public relations is used
7. A symmetrical system of internal communication is used
8. Knowledge potential for managerial role and symmetrical public relations
9. Diversity is embodied in all roles
10. An organizational context exists for excellence (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021).

Arguably from the principles above, the excellence theory thus is a vital concept in the realm of organizational and strategic management studies (Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021). The theory posits that organizational success is reliant upon achieving a high level of symmetrical communication – where communication practices align with organizational goals and stakeholder expectations (Grunig, 2022), and focuses on achieving organizational excellence through effective communication and relationship management (Razak et al., 2019). Which in turn suggests that, organizations can enhance their performance, reputation, and success by adopting and implementing strategic communication practices that prioritize transparency, honesty, and stakeholder engagement (Malyadri et al., 2021). The excellence theory underscores the idea that public relations and communication are not just tools for persuasion but serve as vehicles for

building and sustaining positive relationships that contribute to organizational excellence (Ofori, 2019). The theory also presents a comprehensive perspective on the value of communication, which can be assessed across four distinct levels: (a) Successful organizations must elevate public relations to a pivotal management function - Programme Level, (b) while seamlessly integrating it as a distinct communication function - Functional Level, separate from areas like marketing. (c) Organizations should underpin both internal and external communication with a two-way symmetrical model - Organizational Level, and (d) embrace social responsibility, acknowledging their broader societal impact - Societal Level (Waddington, 2012).

In the context of the C-suite, the excellence theory suggests that public relations practitioners, as communication experts, play a crucial role in facilitating effective communication between the organization and its key stakeholders, thereby influencing decision-making processes (McCollough, 2019). Thus, the essence of public relations is rooted in its ability to foster relationships between an organization and its key publics (Tam et al., 2022). By cultivating these relationships, an organization can align its goals with those of its stakeholders, mitigate the impact of negative publicity, and enhance revenue generation through the provision of stakeholder-needed products and services (Grunig & Grunig, 2008). Therefore, maximizing the value of public relations hinges on pinpointing strategic publics and fostering enduring relationships via symmetrical communication initiatives (Grunig, 2022).

Stemming from the above, the theory emphasizes the empowerment of public relations practitioners as a critical aspect of effective public relations (Grunig et al., 2006). It posits that for an organization to be effective, it must grant public relations the power to act as a crucial management function (Tam et al., 2022). This implies that public relations practitioners should possess the authority to make pivotal decisions and contribute to the strategic direction of the

organization (Grunig, 1992). In addition, the theory emphasizes that public relations executives should play both managerial and administrative roles by being involved in the planning and decision-making processes (Grunig et al., 2006). Concretely, the theory also advocates for the organization of the communication function in a way “that public relations is an integrated communication function, separate from marketing or other management functions”, as this ensures that public relations has its own distinct role and is not overshadowed by other functions (Grunig, 1992).

From the above, empowering public relations with autonomy that essentially drives public relations value is premised on valuable insights into the structure of strategic management (Tam et al., 2022) in organizations from four key approaches: goal attainment, systems, strategic constituencies, and competing values. Among these, the competing values approach serves as a bridge between an organizations goals and the values of its strategic constituencies (Kim et al., 2013). It asserts that for an organization to succeed, it must harmonize the values of these constituencies with its own objectives, ensuring alignment between what matters most to these groups and the organizations pursuits (Grunig et al., 2006). A core element within the excellence theory revolves around the role of public relations in strategic management (Tam et al., 2022). This pivotal component underscores the significance of behavioural and strategic management approaches adopted by public relations, emphasizing their substantial contribution to organizational strategies, and defining effective public relations across four primary categories: empowerment of the public relations function, communicator roles, organization of the communication function, and public relations models (Grunig et al., 2006). These characteristics serve as a structured framework guiding strategic management within organizations (Grunig & Grunig, 2008).

The Excellence theory is essential for this study because it highlights the significance of symmetrical communication, which enhances mutual understanding and cooperation between corporate executives and stakeholders. This framework promotes both proactive and reactive public relations strategies that align with an organization's long-term goals and ethical standards. Moreover, the theory positions public relations as a key player in decision-making processes, vital for analysing influence within the C-suite. By utilizing the theory, the study aims to delve into how public relations practices shape organizational outcomes and leadership behaviours, providing a thorough understanding of public relation's impact on corporate governance and strategic success. This method not only deepens the analytical aspects of the research but also meets the contemporary demands for accountability and strategic integration in organizational communication. Ultimately, the Excellence theory serves as a guide for organizations to enhance their communication practices, focusing on transparency, honesty, and stakeholder engagement. Adopting these principles can boost performance, reputation, and success, achieving excellence in the dynamic field of public relations and communication. The theory is suitable as it offers a comprehensive view of public relation's role in shaping decision-making and power dynamics. By adhering to its principles like two-way communication, ethical practices, and long-term relationship building, organizations can better understand public relation's influence in the C-suite. This approach provides a solid framework for exploring the dynamics of public relations within organizations.

### **2.1.1 Role Theory**

Role theory in public relations offers a framework for understanding how public relations practitioners assume various roles within organizations and their influence on media and public perceptions (Anglin et al., 2022). This theory helps decode the complex behaviour and

expectations placed on these practitioners in their day-to-day operations. Initially developed in the mid-20th century, role theory has roots in sociology and organizational psychology. It examines the functions individuals perform within group dynamics. Anglin et al. (2022) opines that the adaptation to public relations occurred as scholars observed distinct patterns in the activities of public relations practitioners, which align with broader social roles.

Central to role theory are key principles. First, roles are seen as scripted parts individuals play in the organizational setting. Each role comes with specific responsibilities and expectations that guide behaviour and decision-making (Sriramesh & Verčič, 2019). Second, these roles are fluid and can evolve based on situational demands and organizational changes. Third, the interaction between different roles within a company can lead to role conflict or role enhancement, affecting overall communication effectiveness. Public relations practitioners often juggle multiple roles. These include the technician, who executes communication strategies, and the manager, who strategizes and oversees public relations programs. Each role demands distinct skills and contributes differently to the organization's objectives and public image (Ngondo & Klyueva, 2020). Understanding these roles aids in the strategic training and deployment of public relations personnel, ensuring that each member's strengths are best utilized to meet organizational goals. Moreover, by analysing role performance, organizations can refine their communication strategies to better align with their mission and the expectations of their stakeholders.

Applying Role Theory to public relations in the C-suite highlights the strategic roles public relations practitioners play in guiding corporate decisions. This approach illuminates the impact of public relations skills on boardroom dynamics, enriching our understanding of their role in enhancing stakeholder relations and shaping governance strategies. The Role theory is particularly relevant for this study. It delineates the various functions, expectations, and potential conflicts

faced by public relations practitioners at the executive level. The theory also offers significant insight into examining how these roles are perceived within the corporate hierarchy. It provides insights into role ambiguities and how these roles may shift in response to evolving corporate landscapes. By analysing the distinct roles public relations practitioners assume, the study aims to uncover the extent of their influence in the C-suite. It explores how these practitioners navigate their responsibilities to influence policy and strategic decisions. Additionally, the study will assess how effectively public relations roles are integrated into the overall corporate strategy. The application of role theory in this context promises to reveal significant aspects of corporate communication and decision-making processes. It sheds light on the mechanisms through which public relations practitioners contribute to a company's strategic direction and resilience. This is crucial for understanding how public relations can extend beyond traditional boundaries to shape high-level corporate strategies and outcomes.

### **2.1.2 How the Excellence Theory and Role Theory Complement Each Other**

The Excellence Theory and Role Theory complement each other effectively in studying public relations within the C-suite. While the Excellence theory focuses on principles and models that exemplify effective public relations practice, emphasizing strategic management roles and symmetric communication for organizational effectiveness, the Role theory, on the other hand, clarifies the specific roles and behavioural expectations of public relations practitioners within these frameworks. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive view. Excellence theory outlines what optimal public relations functions should look like, advocating for public relations roles that contribute to strategic decision-making and foster mutually beneficial stakeholder relationships. Role Theory then identifies how these ideal roles are enacted in practice, detailing the specific responsibilities and potential role conflicts experienced by public relations

practitioners. By integrating both theories, the study can evaluate not only the ideal state of public relations practices as prescribed by the Excellence Theory but also the actual roles inhabited by public relations practitioners as described by Role theory. This dual perspective allows for a deeper analysis of how closely current practices align with ideal models and what factors influence this alignment. This synergy enhances the understanding of public relation's impact on organizational success and governance, providing a richer, more detailed exploration of the dynamics at play within the highest levels of corporate management.

## **2.2 Conceptualizing Public Relations**

Public relations is a strategic communication and management discipline that focuses on building and maintaining positive relationships between organizations, individuals, or entities and their various stakeholders, including the public, media, customers, employees, investors, and government bodies (Frandsen, 2019). In other words, public relations is a management function that aims to earn public understanding and acceptance through two-way communication and foster mutually beneficial relationships (Rizzo, 2018). Ahafonova (2018) defines public relations from another perspective as a management discipline that focuses on strategic and sustained engagement to drive behavioural change while building mutual understanding and trust. Therefore, the primary goal of public relations is to shape and manage perceptions, reputation, and the overall image of an entity in order to achieve specific objectives and foster goodwill (Tam et al., 2020). From the above definitions, key concepts of public relations that can be deduced include: (a) Relationship Building: This means public relations practitioners strive to establish and maintain relationships with various stakeholders, and essentially build strong relationships because that forms the foundation for trust and cooperation (Labarca & Mujica, 2022; Okereke, 2020). (b)

Communication: Effective communication, unequivocally is at the heart of public relations (Ratna, 2019), and encompasses both internal and external communication. Internally and externally, public relations ensures that employees understand and align with the organizations mission and values (Leijerholt, 2021), and craft messages to reach specific target audiences, adapting content and tone as needed for each group of publics (Singh, 2018). (c) Reputation Management: Reputation is a valuable, yet intangible asset for any entity (Bechan, 2022), and public relations is tasked to monitor and manage an organizations reputation by assessing public opinion, conducting surveys, and analysing media coverage (Okereke, 2020). Thus, when negative events occur, public relations develop strategies to minimize harm and rebuild trust (Kaleel, 2020). (d) Two-Way Communication: Public relations is not just about broadcasting messages (Tandoh, 2020); the profession involves active listening and engagement that organizations can leverage to gather feedback from stakeholders and use it to improve products, services, and communication strategies (Macnamara, 2016). Hence, fostering two-way communication – a sense of inclusion and responsiveness. (e) Media Relations: Public relations practitioners endeavour to maintain relationships with journalists and media outlets, by pitching story ideas, providing press releases, arranging interviews, and responding to media inquiries (Iturregui-Mardaras et al., 2020). Zhang et al. (2019) concur that these positive media coverages can enhance an organizations credibility and reach a broader audience. (f) Crisis Management: In the event of a crisis, such as a product recall, data breach, or scandal, public relations practitioners are expected to react swiftly and effectively (Jong, 2020), by developing crisis communication plans, address the issue transparently, and work to rebuild public's trust and confidence (Kaleel, 2020). Done timely with appropriate responses, crisis damages are minimized effectively (Eldridge et al., 2020). (g) Public Engagement: Public relations extends beyond traditional media

to encompass digital platforms and social media (Casero-Ripollés, 2020). When organizations engage with their publics through social media channels, blogs, podcasts, and online forums, it fosters a sense of community and allows for real-time interaction with stakeholders (Ihm, 2019).

**Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR):** Many organizations use CSR initiatives, such as sustainability efforts, charitable donations, and community involvement to demonstrate a sense of purpose and values beyond profit through public relations to highlight their commitment to social and environmental causes (Abubakar et al., 2022). **(h) Strategic Planning:** Public relations practitioners engage in strategic planning to ensure that their efforts align with the organizations overall goals by setting measurable objectives, develop communication plans, allocate resources, and continuously evaluate the effectiveness of their strategies (Bryson, 2021), and **(i) Legal and Ethical Considerations:** Adherence to ethical standards and legal regulations including transparency, honesty, and respecting the privacy and rights of individuals and organizations, are crucial in the practice of public relations (Jakopović, 2020; White & Boatwright, 2020). In lieu of that, Whitaker (2020) opine that violations of trust or ethical lapses can result in reputational damage.

### **2.2 1 Public Relations and the Dominant Coalition**

The concept of the “dominant coalition” is often used in organizational and management theory and refers to the group of individuals within an organization who hold the most power, influence, and decision-making authority (Mithani & OBrien, 2020). This coalition typically includes top executives, key managers, and other influential figures who have a substantial impact on the organizations tactical direction, policies, and decisions.

The relationship between public relations and the dominant coalition holds significant importance due to various factors. For instance, public relations practitioners closely collaborate with the dominant coalition to ensure that communication strategies of the organization align harmoniously with its overarching goals and objectives (Wu, 2023), such that, this coalitions input becomes pivotal in shaping messaging and communication approaches to mirror the organizations mission, values, and strategic priorities. In terms of decision-making, public relations practitioners offer insights and suggestions to the dominant coalition regarding the potential perceptions of various stakeholders toward specific decisions and actions (Thurlow et al., 2018). As a result of this input from practitioners, the coalition can make well-informed decisions that consider possible reputational consequences. Wherein the dominant coalition assumes a central role in the management of the organizations reputation (Ilán Bizberg, 2019), working in tandem with public relations practitioners, enable the decision-makers to actively oversee the organizations public image and effectively address any challenges that might arise, including crises or bad publicity (Alaby, 2018). Public relations efforts often revolve around nurturing positive relationships with stakeholders (Fithri & Drajat, 2020). Here, the dominant coalition's grasp of stakeholder concerns and priorities serves as the foundation for public relations strategies designed to genuinely engage and communicate with these diverse groups (Tregidga & Milne, 2020).

Finally, effective internal communication is a critical aspect that cannot be undermined, and public relation practitioners play a role in helping the dominant coalition communicate their directives, vision, and strategic plans to employees (Tao et al., 2022; Carter et al., 2019). Altogether, the relationship between public relations and the dominant coalition is multi-faceted,

such that working synergistically to shape perceptions and make informed decisions help to manage the organizations overall standing efficiently in the eyes of stakeholders and the public.

### **2.2.2 Factors that Impact Public Relations Influence within the C-Suite**

In today's business environment, effective communication and reputation management are pivotal for an organizations success (Erlangga et al., 2020). Public Relations practitioners play a crucial role in maintaining positive stakeholder relationships, bolstering brand image, and managing potential crises. While CEOs and C-level executives might not always realize it, public relations significance extends to them (Posey, 2023), emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of their contributions. Yet, various challenges hinder public relations practitioners' progress in this globalized era. Technological deficiencies, particularly in communication infrastructure in places like Ghana, impede the efforts of practitioners (Anani-Bossman & Bruce, 2022). Amid these complexities, several factors emerge as determinants of public relations influence within the C-Suite as follows:

- i. **Organizational Culture and Structure:** The cultural and structural fabric of an organization significantly impacts the weight of public relations influence. Studies underline that workplaces valuing openness, transparency, and collaboration tend to prioritize public relations strategic counsel (Lee & Queenie Li, 2020). Organizational culture intertwines with communication initiatives, affecting how public relations strategies are executed (Sebastião et al., 2017). This imply that public relations practitioners must align with the organizational culture to effectively contribute at the C-Suite level.
- ii. **Skills and Competencies:** The skill set and competencies of public relations practitioners directly shape their influence. Proficiency in strategic communication aligns communication

goals with the organizations larger objectives (Argenti, 2017). Argenti (2017) indicate that expertise in reputation management, skill in media relations, effective stakeholder engagement, business acumen, and data analysis capabilities further enhance public relations value within the organization.

- iii. **Building Relationships and Trust:** The ability of public relations practitioners to cultivate strong relationships and engender trust with C-Suite executives is crucial (Meng & Berger, 2019). Thus by demonstrating credibility through expertise, offering strategic guidance, and providing prompt and reliable advice can establish influence in high-level decision-making (Tam et al., 2020).
- iv. **Demonstrating Value and ROI:** To elevate their influence within the C-Suite, public relations practitioners must substantiate their value. This involves presenting measurable outcomes such as ROI, brand equity, and reputation metrics (Bechan, 2022). Aligning public relations efforts with business objectives and showcasing tangible results contribute to building credibility and influence with senior management (Almansa-Martínez & Fernández-Souto, 2020; Anani-Bossman, 2021a; Koch et al., 2017).

### **2.2.3 Public Relations Integration into Decision-Making Processes**

The integration of public relations into decision-making processes is emphasized as a crucial strategy for organizations to align choices with their communication objectives, manage reputation, and cultivate positive stakeholder relationships (Theaker, 2020). In this regard, early involvement of practitioners is highlighted as beneficial, as their comprehensive understanding of an organizations goals and stakeholders allows them to provide valuable insights that align with communication strategies (Marsen, 2019). Pidgeon (2020) concurs with the importance of

integrating public relations into decision-making, underscoring its role in effective reputation management, stakeholder communication, and the alignment of decisions with an organizations core values and objectives, and other key aspects. Thus, successful integration of public relations into the C-Suite enables practitioners to assess the impact of decisions on reputation, conduct stakeholder analysis, develop communication plans, and ensure readiness for potential crises (Marsen, 2019).

It is imperative to note that public relations practitioners play a multifaceted role, which encompass evaluating potential decisions consequences on an organizations reputation, conducting risk assessments, and advising on strategies to mitigate negative outcomes (Marsen, 2019). Furthermore, practitioners' expertise in ethical practices ensures that decision-making adheres to industry standards, promoting trust and credibility (Marsen, 2019). In crisis situations as well, practitioners contribute by assessing potential risks and creating contingency plans, enabling organizations to make decisions that are resilient in the face of challenges (Marsen, 2019). In addition, evaluating outcomes and establishing key performance indicators (KPIs) assists organizations in assessing decision-making effectiveness and making necessary adjustments (Marsen, 2019).

### **2.3 Power and Influence**

Power and influence are closely intertwined concepts in the context of public relations, and both play crucial roles in interpersonal relationships, leadership dynamics, and social structures by shaping how decisions are made and how people interact within organizations and society as a whole (Simpson et al., 2019).

### **2.3.1 Power**

Power is a complex and multifaceted concept and can be interpreted in various ways depending on the context in which it is used. Generally, power refers to the ability or capacity of an individual, group, organization, or entity to influence, control, or affect the behaviour, decisions, or actions of others (Nanda, 2022). Nye (2021) submits that power represents the capability to bring about change or achieve desired outcomes, often by compelling or persuading others to comply with ones wishes or objectives. Key characteristics and aspects of power include: (a) Authority: Power is often associated with authority and can be formal or informal (Simeonova et al., 2022), where formal authority is granted by an official position or hierarchy within an organization or society, such as a government official or a company CEO (Bourgoin et al., 2020) and informal authority arises from personal charisma, expertise, or social influence (Hohmann et al., 2018). (b) Control: Power often entails the capacity to control financial resources, assets, or information that others value (Prinz & Rossi, 2022). (c) Context Dependency: This imply that power may vary depending on the situation, environment, or specific domain, and what constitutes power in one context may not necessarily be the same in another (Simeonova et al., 2022; Avelino, 2021), and (d) Influence: Zaaïman (2020) asserts that power frequently involves the ability to influence peoples thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, or decisions, and it can be exerted through various means, such as persuasion, coercion, leadership, or the control of resources (van Baarle et al., 2022).

### **2.3.2 Types of Power**

Power primarily is derived from one's position or authority, and it has the potential to impact people in both constructive and detrimental ways (Hasty & Maner, 2020). Eatough (2022) outlined several forms of power essential for understanding organizational dynamics. Coercive power involves enforcing compliance through threats or sanctions. Conversely, reward power

relies on the provision of incentives to shape behaviour. Expert power emerges from possessing specialized skills or knowledge. Referent power, on the other hand, is associated with an individual's charisma or popularity, often seen with celebrities. Finally, legitimate power arises from one's formal position within an institution, typically transient as noted by Juneja (2015). This classification aids in dissecting the mechanisms through which influence is exerted in corporate settings.

From the above, it is evident that power can be defined in various ways, but what truly matters is how individuals who hold it, use it (Juneja, 2015). Within an organizational context, it is crucial to effectively manage power dynamics and relationships because they profoundly influence employee motivation and engagement (Kovach, 2020). Moreover, these dynamics can impact decision-making, resource allocation, and social structures (Simeonova et al., 2022) and equally play an important role in modelling an organization's overall culture and the interactions among its members (Dolgaya et al., 2020; Ramos et al., 2019).

Power dynamics can be hierarchical or relational and are frequently at play in interpersonal relationships, organizations, and societies (Simeonova et al., 2022). It is imperative to note that power can be used for both positive and negative purposes (van Baarle et al., 2022), and its ethical use involves responsible and fair decision-making, transparency, and consideration of the interests and well-being of others (Grant, 2022). Conversely, the misuse or abuse of power can lead to oppression, inequality, and harm to individuals or groups (Drydyk, 2021).

In essence, effective use of power in public relations hinges on strategic participation in decision-making and is often contingent on the value management places on public relations functions (Berger, 2013). Accessibility to the dominant coalition amplifies the influence of public relations practitioners, enabling them to demonstrate the function's value and contribute meaningfully to

strategic planning (Grunig, 2022). Mastery in boundary-spanning roles enhances this influence, mitigating the restrictive impacts of organizational bureaucracy and culture (Edwards, 2009). Such empowerment, when properly harnessed, leads to optimized stakeholder engagement and crisis resolution, thereby sustaining social legitimacy (Verčič, 2008).

### **2.3.3 Influence**

Unlike power, influence is the capacity to shape opinions, attitudes, choices, or outcomes without direct coercion or control (Zaaiman, 2020), and exerted through strategies such as persuasion, inspiration, leadership, or social and psychological mechanisms (van Baarle et al., 2022). Key aspects of influence include: (a) Persuasion: Influence often relies on persuasive techniques, where individuals or entities use reasoning, communication, or emotional appeals to convince others to adopt a particular viewpoint, take specific actions or make certain decisions (Abrahams, 2020). (b) Authority and Credibility: Opinions and recommendations of influencers who may possess authority or credibility in a particular domain can carry significant weight due to their expertise or position (Rajaraman et al., 2021). (c) Social Influence: This aspect of influence can be driven by social dynamics and the desire to conform to social norms or expectations (Meylahn & Searle, 2023). Considering that, Foroughifar (2020) submit that people often look to others for cues on how to behave, and this social influence can shape individual choices and actions (Chambers et al., 2022). (d) Role Models and Inspiration: The behaviour and success of influential individuals or role models can inspire others through their actions, achievements, or values and motivate others to follow their footsteps or pursue similar goals (Oliver et al., 2021). (e) Network and Relationships: Strong connections and trust built through personal relationships and networks can amplify one's influence, and enable individuals to impact others through recommendations, referrals, or alliances (Lubbers, 2021; Chen et al., 2020).

In addition, influence can be used ethically or unethically, where ethical influence respects the autonomy and well-being of others, while unethical influence may involve manipulation, deception, or exploitation (Kuenzi et al., 2020).

### **2.3.4 Influence Tactics**

In the context of communication, the ability to influence others, requires the employment of tactics or what is best described as deliberate strategies and methods to persuade, guide, shape the opinions, behaviours, and decisions of others in a particular direction to achieve a specific influence-related objective (Hrebin, 2020). They can range from interpersonal relationships to structured techniques in marketing, negotiation, leadership, and public relations (Tenzer, 2020). Feser (2016) outline influence tactics as follows: (a) Hard Influence Tactics (i.e. Requesting, Legitimizing, and Coalition), and (b) Soft Influence Tactics (i.e. Rational Persuasion, Inspirational Appeals, and Consultation).

**Requesting Tactics:** Often termed as “pressure tactics”, relies on the principle of authority where individuals tend to comply with directives from authority. This tactic involves the leader making straightforward demands to prompt others into action, and entails gaining commitment from followers by clearly stating their expectations and asserting their position with confidence and certainty.

**Legitimizing Tactics:** It involves leadership providing legitimization or rationalization for employing a command-and-control approach. This is aimed at establishing the validity of a request by utilizing one’s authority or credentials to explain and exert influence.

**Coalition Tactics:** This is akin to legitimizing, but without references to authority. In this approach, leaders seek the assistance of others and utilize their support as a means to influence

behaviour. By so doing leaders enlist the help of others to expand their influence and achieve goals that they cannot accomplish alone. This tactic enables network building to broaden the influencers' power base and foster consensus among the group by defining a collective position or creating an "us-versus-them" dynamics.

**Rational Persuasion Tactics:** Executives use logical arguments, facts, and evidence to persuade others to support their ideas or proposals, by appealing to reasoning and demonstrating how their recommendations align with the organizations objectives and benefits.

**Inspirational Appeals Tactics:** Executives use inspirational and motivational language to appeal to their audiences' values, aspirations, and emotions, and usually aimed at creating a sense of purpose and commitment toward a shared vision or goal.

**Consultation Tactics:** Executives involve others in the decision-making process by seeking input, suggestions, and feedback. This inclusionary approach helps executives to gain the support and commitment of stakeholders who feel valued and engaged.

**Collaboration and Teamwork Tactics:** Executives foster collaboration and teamwork by creating an environment that encourages open communication, cooperation, and sharing of ideas. They promote a sense of collective ownership and empower others to contribute their expertise (Harrod, 2022).

**Exchange Tactics:** This includes offering rewards, resources, or support in exchange for compliance. For example, providing opportunities for career advancement, additional training, or other forms of recognition.

**Ingratiation/Socializing Tactics:** In this influence tactic, leaders demonstrate a genuine interest in the individuals they are leading by praising and flattering before or during an effort to encourage

them fulfil a request or support a proposal. This is aimed at establishing a foundation for performing task by behaving in a warm and cordial manner that influences others to take action. The underlying principle of the socializing influencing tactic is based on likability, which suggests that people are more easily persuaded by those they like.

**Personal Appeals Tactics:** This tactic centres on the interpersonal connection and mutual trust between a leader and the individuals being influenced. It assumes some level of existing relationships and relies on this foundation. Thus, when employing personal appeals, the leader requests others to fulfil a request or support a proposal based on friendship, and invoking a sense of personal favour before disclosing the specifics of the task.

To effectively navigate power and influence dynamics, it is crucial to recognize that communication plays a central role in shaping the attitudes and behaviours of others (Jantzer et al., 2020). Therefore, through effective leadership and guidance from top management, communication acts as a catalyst for modifying individual perspectives and actions, ultimately working towards the shared goals of the group or organization (Rajoria et al., 2022; Galli, 2021).

## **2.4 Power/Influence and Public Relations**

Power and influence play a significant role in the field of public relations. Public relations practitioners often use various strategies and tactics to leverage power and influence in order to achieve their communication goals and manage the reputation of individuals, organizations, or brands, shape narratives, persuade stakeholders, and maintain positive relationships with them (Ihlen & Raknes, 2020; Okereke, 2020). In doing so, practitioners employ various communication tools and tactics to exert influence and navigate the complex web of public opinion. By effectively managing public perception, public relations practitioners can enhance an organizations power and credibility (Ejaz & Khan, 2019), thereby increasing its ability to achieve its objectives.

The relationship between power/influence and public relations suggests that public relations practitioners have significant influence and power in society (Koch & Schulz-Knappe, 2021; Ihlen & Raknes, 2020), which therefore imply, that public relations operates through soft power, based on influence and attraction (Chernykh, 2023), such that practitioners access to and influence over senior management, bestows them with power (Oksiutycz, 2022), but they may perceive their influence as limited unless they are part of the dominant coalition (Koch & Schulz-Knappe, 2021). However, professionalism in public relations can provide credibility and autonomy, enabling practitioners to negotiate for decision-making power within organizations (Eyo & Hasan, 2021).

Within public relations, the exercise of power is pivotal in shaping strategic decision-making processes (Bowen et al., 2022). Public relations practitioners wield their expertise to mould organizational strategies and influence stakeholder perceptions, thus bolstering the organization's societal legitimacy (Berger, 2013; Verčič, 2008). Their capacity to effectively advocate for public relations values hinges significantly on their presence within the dominant coalition, enhancing their strategic influence within the organization (Grunig et al., 2006). Public relations roles also encompass crisis management and the development of sustainable relationships with stakeholders. These responsibilities are supported by practitioners command over information and their proficiency in spanning organizational boundaries—skills essential for manoeuvring through complex bureaucracies and cultural frameworks (Berger, 2013; Edwards, 2009). The extent of influence public relations practitioners hold in shaping organizational policies also depends on the importance management attributes to the public relations function. This relationship underscores the critical nature of public relations practitioners involvement in strategic decisions, reinforcing the need for their integration at higher levels of organizational planning (Place, 2012; Berger &

Reber, 2006). This integration not only empowers public relations practitioners but also ensures that their insights are pivotal in guiding organizational actions and maintaining stakeholder trust.

## **2.5 Public Relations' Influence Inhibitors/Challenges**

Despite the potential for power and influence, public relations practitioners often face inhibitors and challenges that impede their efforts and routine (Kyrychok, 2021). Most common obstacles identified by public relations scholars include: (a) Media Landscape –where the changing media dynamics, characterized by the rise of digital platforms and the 24/7 news cycle, poses challenges in controlling the narrative and managing public perception (Minow, 2018). (b) Misinformation and Fake News – essentially the proliferation of misinformation on social media platforms can undermine public relations efforts and damages an organizations reputation (Stubenvoll et al., 2021). (c) Stakeholder Expectations – which is highly binding on public relations practitioners to balance the expectations and demands of various stakeholders (Ihlen & Raknes, 2020), and (d) Crisis Management – with practitioners often finding themselves in high-pressure situations during crises, such that maintaining control over the narrative and public sentiment can be challenging (Kaleel, 2020).

However, major factors that hinder public relations practitioner's ability to achieve influence can be explored through various lenses. The level of support, resources, and autonomy provided by the organization can greatly impact public relations practitioner's ability to exert influence (Yu, 2023; Ahmad Ramli & Samat, 2020). In organizations where public relations is seen as a strategic function and practitioners are given a seat at the decision-making table, they are more likely to have the necessary authority and resources to effectively shape public opinion (Koch et al., 2017). Some major influence inhibitors include:

i. **Low Self-Efficacy of Public Relations Practitioner:** An illustrative example can be found in the study undertaken by Eyo and Hasan (2021), which emphasizes the significance of cultivating and nurturing self-efficacy within the realm of public relations. The study underscores the idea that organizations can foster a culture of ethical responsibility and integrity by empowering practitioners and enhancing their confidence in their own abilities to make ethical decisions. The authors delve into the intricate relationship between self-efficacy and its influence on ethical consideration and decision-making processes within the realm of public relations. Attention was brought to the crucial significance of self-efficacy, which denotes an individual's confidence in their own abilities to accomplish specific tasks and overcome challenges. One of the key findings of the study is the profound impact that self-efficacy has on practitioner's adherence to ethical standards and their compliance with organizational directives. The level of self-efficacy exhibited by public relations practitioners can either hinder or facilitate their ability to make ethical decisions. Thus, practitioners who lack confidence in their ability to make sound ethical choices may be more susceptible to external influences, organizational pressures, or conflicting directives (Eyo & Hasan, 2021; Shruthi Sai Chivukula et al., 2021; Kim & Yong Soo Kang, 2020).

ii. **Improper Strategies Adopted by Public Relations Practitioners (Internal and External Environment):** When public relations practitioners actively engage with stakeholders and implement effective strategies, they contribute to enhancing awareness, promoting a positive culture, and improving management systems (Madigan et al., 2020). Therefore, when public relations practitioners adopt strategies that align with their roles as change agents and facilitators, they are more likely to have a positive impact. Conversely, if public relations practitioners fail to employ appropriate strategies or rely on ineffective communication approaches, their ability to influence stakeholders and drive change may be hindered (Ahmad Ramli & Samat, 2020). This

emphasizes the importance of strategic thinking, understanding stakeholder needs, and employing communication strategies that are tailored to the specific context and audience.

- iii. **Non-Adherence to Ethical Practices:** The presence of egoism in the ethical climate within public relations firms has a negative impact on practitioner's ethical behaviour (Ki et al., 2011). Thus, when egoism prevails and self-interest takes precedence over ethical considerations, it hinders practitioner's adherence to ethical standards. This emphasizes that an ethical climate characterized by egoism can undermine and impede practitioner's ethical behaviour, compromising their ability to make principled decisions and uphold ethical practices that can enable their influence.
- iv. **Organizational Culture and Context:** Practitioners perceptions of their role and influence can vary between different regions, indicating that cultural and contextual factors can either hinder or facilitate their ability to achieve influence (Swerling et al., 2014). Pertinently, cultural factors play a significant role in shaping individuals attitudes, behaviours, and perceptions of authority and influence (Ahmad Ramli & Samat, 2020). The above submission imply that different cultures have distinct values, communication styles, and power dynamics that can impact the way public relations practitioners navigate their roles (Tam et al., 2020; Meng & Berger, 2019). For example, in some cultures, hierarchical structures and deference to authority may be more prevalent, influencing how practitioners assert their influence and make decisions (Arun et al., 2021). Thus, public relations practitioners need to be multicultural themselves to effectively communicate with culturally diverse stakeholders in today's globalizing era of multiculturalism (Yeo & Pang, 2017). Therefore, by embodying multiculturalism, practitioners gain a deep understanding of diverse cultures, which enable them to tailor their communication strategies and engage with audiences more effectively, and gain influence (Yeo & Pang, 2017).

v. Public Relations and CSR Initiatives: Depending on how the media covers the CSR initiatives of organizations and how well public relations practitioners communicate, public relations influence is either inhibited or enhanced (Pérez et al., 2018). Media coverage plays a crucial role in shaping public perception and opinion about companies and their CSR efforts, where positive media coverage that highlights companies CSR initiatives also enhance public relations practitioner's reputation, credibility, and influence (Schröter et al., 2021; Rothenhoefer, 2018; Saxton et al., 2017), and can generate goodwill among stakeholders, including consumers, investors, employees, and the wider community (Tetrault Sirsly et al., 2019). On the other hand, it is evident that a negative media coverage of CSR initiatives can hinder companies or public relations influence. Seemingly, media scrutiny and the revelation of potential CSR failures, ethical lapses, or inconsistencies can also damage a company's reputation, erode stakeholder trust, and undermine its influence (Ogunfowora et al., 2018). Thus, when the media exposes such shortcomings, stakeholders may feel deceived and question the company's commitment to social responsibility. Moreover, the influence of media coverage on companies varies depending on the stakeholder groups involved (Lund, 2016). Meaning different stakeholder groups may interpret media coverage differently based on their interests, values, and expectations. Therefore, positive coverage of a company's efforts in addressing these critical issues can bolster influence and support from stakeholders, and negative coverage or gaps in addressing key CSR issues can undermine influence and lead to reputational damage (Khuong et al., 2021; Soudi & Mokhlis, 2021).

vi. General Perception and Attitude: Public relations faces significant challenges due to prevailing public perceptions and attitudes. Often, public relations is mistakenly seen as merely a tool for spinning unfavourable news or manipulating public opinion, rather than a means of genuine

communication and relationship-building. This skepticism can undermine the effectiveness of public relations initiatives. Additionally, the rise of social media has heightened scrutiny of public relations practices. Every misstep or perceived inauthenticity is rapidly amplified, affecting public trust. Moreover, a diverse audience with varying expectations and media consumption habits complicates the task of public relations practitioners. They must adapt messages to resonate across different demographic and cultural segments without losing the core message. In some cases, the historical actions of an organization can also colour public perception, presenting a formidable barrier to re-establishing trust. Therefore, overcoming these perceptions requires transparent and consistent communication, emphasizing the ethical standards guiding public relations activities.

vii. Organizational Managements Understanding of Public Relations: The understanding of public relations within organizational management varies widely. In some firms, public relations is viewed as integral to strategic operations. Here, management actively engages with public relations teams, acknowledging their role in shaping corporate reputation and achieving business objectives. Conversely, other organizations may see public relations as a secondary function. This perspective relegates public relations to a reactive role, primarily for crisis management or occasional promotional efforts. Such discrepancies often stem from a lack of clear communication about Public relations potential value and its impact on long-term success. Education and advocacy within the organization are vital to elevate Public relations role. Management's commitment to public relations as a strategic partner can significantly influence its effectiveness and the organizations overall success. Bridging this gap requires ongoing dialogue and demonstrable results from public relations initiatives.

## **2.6 How Public Relations Enacts Power/Influence**

Public relations in the context of the C-suite is a critical instrument of influence and power, shaping strategic decisions and corporate governance from within (Anani-Bossman & Mudzanani 2021). In this capacity, public relations practitioners leverage communication strategies to align the organizations internal and external messaging (Marube, 2018). This thus plays a pivotal role in influencing C-suite executives. The primary function here revolves around the management of perceptions and relationships, essential for effective leadership and decision-making (Laskin, 2009). Further, distinct from the more visible aspects of public relations like media relations and public outreach, public relations within the C-suite operates through subtle mechanisms of influence. It involves advising on communication implications of executive decisions, preparing C-suite executives for public and internal presentations, and acting as a barometer for public opinion and employee attitudes. Grunigs model of symmetrical communication highlights how strategic use of public relations facilitates balanced exchanges between the organization and its stakeholders (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). This ensures that executive actions align with broader organizational values and expectations (Matias & Cardoso, 2019).

The enactment of power by public relations in the C-suite can be seen in how communication strategies are formulated (Borchard, 2018). This strategic communication goes beyond merely sharing information; it actively moulds the corporate narrative. According to Edelman and Kania (2013), public relations practitioners play a pivotal role by crafting the narratives that permeate both internal and external channels of the organization. This ability to influence narratives grants public relations practitioners' significant power over the organizations identity (Neill, 2016). As a result, they can significantly impact the strategic decisions made by the organization. This influence extends to guiding the cognitive frameworks of top executives, shaping their perceptions

and decision-making processes. The strategic use of public relations in this way highlights its essential function in steering not only public perception but also executive actions within a corporation (Place et al., 2016). Through effective narrative management, public relations serves as a critical tool in the executive arsenal, directing corporate direction and strategy by shaping how information is perceived and acted upon.

Moreover, the role of public relations in organizational leadership becomes crucial during crises. When challenges arise, effective communication is essential. Public relations practitioners play a pivotal role in these high-pressure situations. According to Coombs and Holladay (2010), Public relations leadership in crisis management involves several strategic actions. First, public relations practitioners frame the issues, defining the narrative before it can be set by external sources (Aubin et al., 2022). They also control the flow of information, ensuring that accurate and timely updates reach the public and stakeholders (Lee Wei Siang, 2022). Furthermore, they engage actively in shaping the organizations strategic response to the crisis. This involves collaborating with top management to devise and implement response strategies that protect and sometimes enhance the organizations reputation (Kanihan et al., 2013). By doing so, public relations helps not only in mitigating the immediate impacts of the crisis but also in maintaining the authority of executive leadership and the overall stability of the organization. This strategic involvement underscores the value of public relations beyond routine media interactions, marking its influence as both direct and profound in times of organizational turmoil.

Further illustrating the influence of public relations, Heath and Coombs (2006) describe the concept of issues management. In this framework, public relations practitioners pre-emptively identify potential threats and opportunities that could impact their organization. Neill and Barnes (2018) hint, that this forward-thinking approach allows public relations practitioners to guide C-

suite decisions effectively, ensuring outcomes that benefit the organization and reduce potential risks. This shift from a historically reactive posture to a proactive and strategic function signifies a profound evolution in public relations' role within organizations. By addressing issues before they escalate, public relations not only protects but also enhances the corporate reputation and operational stability (Reber & Berger 2006). This strategic integration within the corporate hierarchy illustrates public relations vital role in shaping business trajectories. This underlines its importance beyond traditional media and public outreach roles (Serpil Karlıdağ, 2020). This proactive engagement in decision-making processes highlights Public relations transition to a core strategic asset within the corporate structure, demonstrating its broad scope and critical influence.

## **2.7 Public Relations and the C-Suite**

Public relations and the C-Suite, which encompasses the highest-ranking executives within an organization, share a symbiotic relationship crucial to an organizations success. This partnership is characterized by collaboration, influence, and strategic decision-making aimed at enhancing the organizations reputation and achieving its broader objectives (Tam et al., 2020). The above is in line with Ferreira and Engelbrecht's (2022) assertion that the connection between public relations and the C-Suite is crucial, as public relations practitioners often work closely with top executives to align communication strategies with organizational goals by providing valuable counsel to the C-Suite on matters related to reputation management, crisis communication, and stakeholder engagement (Anuar et al., 2021; Okereke, 2020). However, the impact of public relations is minimized after its collaborated efforts are integrated into the overall strategic direction of the organization (Tam et al., 2020).

Moreover, in today's complex and interconnected world, public relations is no longer viewed as a standalone function responsible solely for managing communication but as a strategic partner in shaping an organizations direction and reputation (Okereke, 2020; Al-Jenaibi, 2019). The C-Suite, comprising the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Chief Operating Officer (COO), and others, plays a pivotal role in steering the organizations strategy and decision-making processes (Andriole, 2019). In light of that, public relations scholars have identified key areas of interaction between public relations and the C-Suite as follows:

**Strategic Alignment:** Public relations practitioners work closely with the C-Suite to align communication strategies with the organizations strategic objectives, and this ensures that public relations efforts are not only consistent with the organizations goals but also contribute to enhancing its reputation and relationships with stakeholders (Al-Jenaibi, 2019).

**Crisis Management:** Practitioners play an instrumental role in managing crises and mitigating potential damage to the organizations reputation (Kaleel, 2020), such that close collaboration with the C-Suite during such critical times is essential for making informed decisions and effectively communicating with stakeholders (Gutmann & Lang, 2022).

**Power Dynamics and Influence:** Power dynamics within the organization can impact the effectiveness of public relations efforts. Public relations practitioners often navigate these dynamics as they provide counsel and recommendations to the C-Suite regarding reputation management, strategic communication, and ethical considerations (Marube, 2018).

**Measuring Public Relations Impact:** Public relations practitioners rely on various metrics and evaluation tools to measure the impact of their efforts. These insights are invaluable in guiding

decision-making within the C-Suite, helping to ensure that public relations strategies are aligned with organizational goals and delivering the desired results (Tam et al., 2020).

Ethical Considerations: Upholding ethical standards in communication is vital. Public relations practitioners are responsible for maintaining transparency, authenticity, and ethical practices (Bonney & Donkor, 2021), a duty that becomes increasingly important when advising the C-Suite on sensitive matters.

Digital Public Relations and Technology Integration: With the advent of digital communication and technology, public relations has evolved significantly, such that practitioners leverage digital platforms and data-driven insights to guide strategic decisions within the C-Suite, harnessing the power of technology to manage the organizations reputation effectively (Matias & Cardoso, 2019).

However, the partnership between public relations and the C-Suite is not without its challenges, like power struggles, ethical dilemmas, and the need for transparent and authentic communication (Tam et al., 2020). But when managed effectively, this partnership can be a driving force behind an organizations success (Okereke, 2020). In conclusion, the relationship between public relations and the C-Suite is a dynamic and strategic partnership that is essential for shaping an organizations reputation, achieving its goals, and ensuring its long-term success in a rapidly changing world. As organizations continue to adapt to emerging trends and challenges, this collaboration will remain a cornerstone of strategic communication and leadership.

## **2.8 Empirical Review**

Public relations practitioners perceive their power and influence to be limited unless they are members of the dominant coalition (Kriyantono, 2019). However, corporate communications executives can contribute value and have influence within the C-Suite and executive-level committees (Posey, 2023). Moreover, public relations professionals are more likely to be part of the decision making processes when subjects fall within their domain, have support from the Chief Executive Officer, work in industries with frequent crises or reputation management focus, and in companies that utilize integrated decision teams (Mykkänen & Vos, 2015). That notwithstanding, public relations has become a powerful and pervasive discipline, with public relations strategies being used to engineer public perceptions on various fronts (Hopper, 2020). The authority of public relations practitioners lies in their ability to influence and persuade others, which can bring about social conditioning and potentially change society (Boitnott, 2020). Thus, understanding the role power plays in public relations practice can help practitioners identify organizations where their abilities will be matched with a corresponding degree of power. For instance, Neill (2012) investigated the roles and strategic positions of senior public relations practitioners within executive-level structures. The study emphasized the necessity for public relations executives not only to aim for inclusion in the dominant coalition of senior officers but also to integrate into division leadership groups and other decision-making groups. This approach according to Neill (2012) empowered them to perform crucial in-house boundary-spanning functions that have been underrepresented in public relations philosophy. Drawing on social capital concept, the study highlighted how public relations practitioners leverage their networks to acquire vital company intelligence, thereby facilitating improved premeditated decisions and preventing expensive errors. Through comprehensive interviews with 30 senior officials from diverse disciplines, Neill (2012) recognized extra responsibilities that enhance the authority and impact of public relations include overseeing digital reputations, bridging organizational boundaries, championing causes, and

analyzing stakeholder groups. Factors that positively or negatively affect the performance of these functions were also delineated. Favourable conditions include the utilization of assimilated decision-making teams, adoption of Theory Y management styles, recognition of public relations as a tactical business partner, a guarantee to transparent communiqué, strong internal connections and the integration of public relations efforts with fundamental organizational objectives.

In Bowen's (2009) study, 'What Communication Professionals Tell Us Regarding Dominant Coalition Access and Gaining Membership', explored the pathways through which communication practitioners can gain access to the dominant coalition within organizations and examined the challenges and opportunities associated with membership in the dominant coalition, with analyses how such membership influences communication strategies and decision-making processes within the organization. Findings showed that:

- i. Different routes such as organizational crises, ethical dilemmas, media prominence, leadership, and long-term credibility can elevate communication practitioners and pave the way for access.
- ii. Communication practitioners faced challenges including misunderstandings about the public relations function and the presence of 'spinmeisters' hindering access to the dominant coalition
- iii. Strong leadership traits help communication practitioners counteract negative perceptions of public relations, enhancing their influence within the dominant coalition. Thus highlighting the importance of leadership in the professi

- iv. Self-reports from communication practitioners who are members of the dominant coalition, particularly those who report directly to the CEO or President, are significant for understanding their experiences and influence.
- v. Gaining access to elite executives for research purposes is difficult, but the insights they provide are valuable for understanding the dynamics of the dominant coalition.
- vi. The prevalence of negative feedback in open-ended responses suggests communication practitioners face significant challenges and dissatisfaction with their access to the dominant coalition.
- vii. When it comes to data collection methods, open-ended responses, long interviews, and focus groups offer diverse perspectives on dominant coalition access and inclusion, enriching the study's findings.

Again in Bowen et al. (2020), the dynamics in multi-issue bargaining through a dynamic model, focusing on the roles of a consistent agenda-setter and a responder was explored. This study revealed how negotiations unfold over successive issues when the responder opposes the agenda-setter's proposals. The potential for the agenda-setter to enforce their preferred outcomes hinges on their 'personal power,' which affects the likelihood of her succeeding unilaterally. As negotiations encounter repeated stalemates, both parties gain insight into the extent of the agenda-setter's power. This process of mutual learning influences their strategic decisions. Bowen et al. (2020) point out that stalemates, or gridlocks, typically arise when the agenda-setter's power is misjudged as being either excessively strong or weak. Effective compromise emerges when both parties' perceptions align within a moderate spectrum of power estimates. Moreover, the introduction of complex issues encourages greater willingness to compromise to sidestep the risk and uncertainty associated with further exploration of the agenda-setter's power.

Further, Kanihan et al. (2013) investigated the power dynamics among corporate communications managers within the largest U.S. corporations, specifically those in the Structure and Process (S&P) 500. The study centered on distinguishing the power attributes that align with formal and informal influence within these organizations. Through a comprehensive survey targeting both communications managers and CEOs, data on various corporate characteristics such as industry sector, size, and financial performance were analysed. The study involved a comparison between firms that responded to the survey (n=161) and a control group of non-responders. Findings indicate no significant differences between these groups in terms of corporate metrics. Crucially, Kanihan et al. (2013) identified four key informal power attributes that set apart communications managers in the dominant coalition: reciprocal trust, involvement in strategic business decisions, social inclusion, and specialized communication skills. These attributes effectively differentiate influential communications managers from their peers.

Additionally, Place et al. (2016) delved into the dynamics of power within the framework of integrated marketing communication (IMC), assessing the role and influence of public relations amidst evolving corporate communication landscapes. The study extended previous explorations by Delaria et al. (2010) and Smith and Place (2013), focusing on the advent of digital and social media and its impact on public relation's stature within organizations. Place et al. (2016) in this regard highlighted the contention between marketing and public relations, often competing for dominance in new communication arenas. Empirical findings from this study illuminated that public relations practitioners could elevate their influence in IMC through demonstrated expertise in social media and by securing roles within top decision-making echelons of their organizations. These elements evidently contribute to a broader understanding of public relation's evolving role

in an integrated communication strategy, challenging previous assumptions of public relation's subordination to marketing.

Another key study is that of Neill and Barnes (2018) who examined the strategies employed by senior public relations executives to offer morals counsel within organizational hierarchies. The study focused on identifying the preferred influence tactics that these executives utilize when addressing ethical issues to their superiors. Findings from interviews with 34 members of the Public Relations Society of America College of Fellows revealed a predilection for rational tactics, such as utilizing study, citing case studies, and making appeals based on legitimacy. Notably, Neill and Barnes (2018) uncovered a gender disparity in approach: female executives were more inclined to form alliances and build coalitions as a method of exerting influence. This investigation provides valuable insights into both effective and less successful strategies for delivering ethics counsel, shedding light on the interplay between ethical guidance and organizational power dynamics. The implications of these findings are considered significant for enhancing the practice of public relations.

Neill (2015) conducted an investigation into the roles and contributions of senior corporate communications executives within formal executive-level committees. Through in-depth interviews with 30 senior executives across four US-based companies, the study explored the involvement of corporate communications in addressing eight strategic issues. The study findings challenged the traditional focus solely on the C-Suite, indicating that strategic issues also arise significantly at the division level and within executive-level committees. Neill (2015) found that corporate communications frequently competes with marketing for influence and key positions in boardrooms. Factors that enhance the likelihood of corporate communications' inclusion in decision-making processes include issue relevance to their domain, CEO support, operation within

crisis-prone or reputation-sensitive industries, and engagement in companies that advocate for integrated decision-making teams. These insights highlight the critical yet complex positioning of corporate communications in corporate governance and strategic management.

On a different note, Reber and Berger (2006) sampled 162 public relations practitioners including 97 executives and 65 respondents, and explored how public relations practitioners define influence, assess their perceived influence in various scenarios, and the strategies practitioners employ to exert influence within organizations. Findings reveal, that public relations practitioners define influence as the ability to persuade and convince others, being listened to and sought out, and having an impact on organizational strategy and decisions. Implying they feel most influential in crisis situations and when preparing communication messages, but perceive themselves as least influential in strategic decision-making and interactions with senior executives.

Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani (2021) in the Ghanaian context explored the strategic position and impact of public relations within the Integrated Marketing Communication (IMC) framework. The study centered on examining the perceptions of 15 public relations practitioners in Ghana through a cross-sectional qualitative study. The study articulated that IMC fundamentally relies on the synchronization of diverse promotional tools to meet organizational objectives. It emerged that public relations not only integrates into but also significantly steers the IMC process at the managerial level. The findings underscore that public relations functions as a pivotal component within the IMC structure, wielding substantial influence. According to Anani-Bossman and Mudzanani (2021), this influence manifests in several capacities: shaping organizational decisions, serving as the primary hub for communication and information, demonstrating expertise in the field, and overseeing broader roles within the communication strategy. The study recommended that public relations practitioners in emerging economies should assume leadership roles in driving

their organizations' communication integration efforts. Furthermore, these practitioners were advised to spearhead cross-functional teams to craft and execute communication strategies that incorporate elements from various communication disciplines.

## **2.9 Chapter Summary**

The chapter commenced with a detailed examination of theoretical underpinnings such as Excellence Theory and Role Theory. Subsequently, it explored the integration of public relations into decision-making echelons, emphasizing the significance of public relations practitioners in strategic roles. The discourse extended to the multifaceted nature of power and influence, categorizing different types of power and delineating specific influence tactics. Challenges that hinder public relations influence were identified, elucidating on the barriers that obstruct public relation's effectiveness in corporate governance. Furthermore, empirical studies corroborated these insights, affirming public relation's pivotal role in shaping corporate strategies. This chapter substantiates the imperative for public relations practitioners to navigate power structures adeptly, ensuring their integral role in decision-making processes within high-level executive environments.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted for the study. The study was rooted in the interpretivist paradigm, which emphasized understanding the subjective perceptions and social constructions of reality (Adil et al., 2022; Shah, 2021). This paradigm was chosen to capture the nuanced and multifaceted nature of power and influence dynamics within the corporate context.

#### **3.1 Research Paradigm**

A research paradigm is a structured perspective that shapes the methods and approach researchers use in their studies (Mattar & Ramos, 2022). Yan (2021) postulates that research paradigm encompasses the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and philosophies that shape the researcher's view of reality, knowledge, and the process of inquiry, and provides a foundational lens through which researchers conceptualize their research questions, design their studies, collect data, analyse findings, and interpret results (Mumba, 2021).

Several paradigms exist that reflect the major theoretical directions in social science research. However, the positivism and interpretivism are the two main research paradigms. In the positivist paradigm, reality is believed to exist independently of human perception and is subject to objective measurement and study (Shah, 2021), where knowledge within this framework is universal, and attainable through empirical observation and measurement (Habib, 2020). Positivist research is primarily concerned with identifying causal relationships and generalizing findings to broader populations, commonly employing quantitative methods like experiments, surveys, and statistical

techniques for data collection and analysis (Habib, 2020; Ling et al., 2023). Maintaining objectivity, minimizing bias, and adhering to systematic procedures during data collection and analysis are central tenets of the positivist approach (Habib, 2020).

Conversely, the interpretivist paradigm posits that reality is constructed through social interactions and is inherently subjective, influenced by individuals' perceptions, and cultural contexts (Shah, 2021). The philosophy of this paradigm is context-dependent, diverse, and emerges from an individuals' interpretations and meanings (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022). In addition, in interpretive research, the focus is on comprehending and exploring the subjective experiences, meanings, and social interactions of individuals (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022). As such, qualitative methods, including interviews, observations, and content analysis, are frequently utilized to delve into the intricate depths of human experiences (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022; Lamba et al., 2022). Dodgson (2019) opines that acknowledging researcher subjectivity and its influence on the research process is a hallmark of the interpretivist paradigm, as researchers strive to uncover and appreciate the unique viewpoints of participants.

Following the purpose of this study, the interpretivist paradigm was considered apt for exploring how public relations strategies impact strategic management and decision-making processes, as it allowed in-depth exploration of participants' emotional and cognitive perspectives. In essence, the interpretivist paradigm facilitated the aim of the study of uncovering the complex relationship between public relations influence and subjective perceptions of power within the boardroom.

### **3.1.1 Interpretivism**

Stemming from the above, the interpretivist paradigm is a philosophical and methodological framework used in social research to comprehend the personal meanings and interpretations individuals attribute to their experiences. (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022; Erciyes, 2020). Inghilleri (2021) asserts that this paradigm is based on the belief that reality is shaped by social and individual perspectives, and that the way people perceive and make sense of the world is influenced by their cultural, historical, and social contexts. At its core, the interpretivist paradigm emphasizes that human behaviour, interactions, and phenomena cannot be fully understood through purely objective observations or measurements (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022; Shah, 2021). Instead, the interpretivist paradigm presupposes that individuals actively engage in the process of giving meaning to their experiences and that this meaning is influenced by their unique perspectives, values, and cultural backgrounds (Rudvin, 2021).

The interpretivist paradigm as explicated by Chalmers (2021), is associated with key characteristics which include; (a) Subjectivity – in which case, individuals have their own interpretations of reality, where researchers operating within this paradigm must aim to capture and understand these subjective viewpoints and experiences. (b) Meaning and Context - requires focus on understanding the meanings people attribute to their experiences, actions, and interactions, by emphasizing the importance of context in shaping these meanings and interpretations. (c) Qualitative Methods – by employing interviews, observations, and document analysis, in-depth exploration and complexity of human experiences and perspectives are allowed. (d) Inductive Reasoning - is where theories and conclusions emerge from the data itself rather than being imposed on it from the outset, and enables new insights and unexpected patterns to be explored.

Other key features outlined are; (e) Social Construction: this indicates that social reality is constructed through the interactions and interpretations of individuals within their social and cultural environments, and challenges the notion of an objective reality that can be universally measured or defined. (f) Contextual Understanding – implies that this paradigm values understanding the context in which the phenomenon occurs, including acknowledging historical influences, cultural norms, and personal backgrounds that shape individuals' perceptions and actions. (g) Emphasis on Depth - this paradigm seeks to explore phenomena in depth, uncovering the underlying motivations, emotions, and beliefs that drive human behaviour. (h) Holistic View - Interpretivism encourages a holistic view of individuals and their experiences, considering their thoughts, emotions, and social interactions as interconnected components (Brown, 2019).

Furthermore, the interpretivist paradigm offers an alternative to the positivist approach, which focuses on objective measurement and quantifiable data, and prioritizes understanding the subjective worldviews of individuals and the way they construct meaning in their lives (Ikram & Kenayathulla, 2022; Syed & McLean, 2021; Shah, 2021). Rudvin, (2021) opines that the interpretivist paradigm is particularly relevant in fields where human behaviour, culture, and individual perspectives play a significant role, such as sociology, anthropology, psychology, and qualitative social research. In the context of this study, the study is acknowledging that power and influence are not objective entities but rather, are shaped by the perceptions, interactions, and interpretations of the decision-makers within the C-Suite.

### **3.2 Research Approach**

Research approach is a fundamental aspect of a research study that outlines the overall strategy and methodology that will be used to gather and analyse data in order to address posed research

questions or objectives (Veginadu et al., 2022). Research approach guides the researcher's actions throughout the research process, from selecting methods of data collection to determining the appropriate methods of analysis (Alasmari, 2020). Primarily, there are two research approaches namely; quantitative and qualitative.

The quantitative research approach, focuses on collecting and analysing numerical data to identify patterns, relationships, and statistical significance (Thuy, 2020). This approach is often used to measure variables, test hypotheses, and generalize findings to larger populations (Syed & McLean, 2022). Silva et al. (2022) assert that quantitative research is characterized by its structured and standardized data collection methods, which often involve surveys, experiments, or other forms of data collection that result in numerical data. Statistical analyses are used to draw conclusions based on the data's numerical patterns (Ery Arias-Castro, 2022).

On the other hand, the qualitative research approach seeks to understand the complexities of human behaviour, experiences, and interactions in their natural contexts (Cornejo et al., 2023). This approach emphasizes exploring meanings, interpretations, and social phenomena through in-depth analysis of non-numerical data, such as interviews, observations, and textual or visual materials (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). In addition, qualitative research seeks to reveal deep understanding and compelling stories, and contextual nuances that add to a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon (Hovey, 2022).

The choice between these research approaches is determined by the nature of the phenomenon being studied, the researcher's philosophical stance, and the research question. In light of that, the qualitative approach was selected for this study as it provided a platform to explore the depth and complexity of human experiences regarding the perceptions of public relations. By engaging with participants in a qualitative manner, the study captured the rich diversity in human interactions,

motivations, and viewpoints that contributed to the power dynamics in the boardroom. This approach aligned with the interpretivist paradigmatic position of the study and was particularly well-suited for investigating the interplay between public relations strategies and the complex relationships among top-level executives in the C-Suite.

### **3.3 Population and Sampling**

The population of a study refers to the entire group that possesses the characteristics the researcher wants to investigate, and it is the larger collection of individuals or items from which a sample is drawn for research purposes (Willie, 2023), and sampling design refers to the methodical plan used to select a subset of individuals, items, or data points from a larger population for the purpose of conducting research or making inferences about that population (Turner, 2020).

#### **3.3.1 Population for the Study**

Following from the above, the study actively employed twenty (20) participants for the study.

#### **3.3.2 Sampling Design and Technique**

Proper sampling design is essential in ensuring that the sample accurately represents the population, minimizing bias, and allowing for meaningful analysis (Jeliazkov et al., 2022). Sampling design can be classified into two broad categories: probability sampling and non-probability sampling.

Probability sampling methods are characterized by the use of random selection techniques such as Simple Random, Stratified, Systematic, and Cluster sampling, where each element or unit in the population has a known or equal chance of being included in the sample for statistical inferences about the population. On the other hand, non-probability sampling methods involve the selection of elements or units from a population that is not based on random chance, using various non-random techniques/methods such as Convenience, Snowball, Expert, Quota, and Purposive to select the participants, and are typically used when it is difficult or impractical to implement probability sampling techniques (Stratton, 2023).

In view of the above and following the phenomenological nature of this study, the purposive and expert sampling techniques under the non-probability sampling design were employed to select the participants of the study. Purposive sampling allowed the deliberate selection of fifteen (15) heads of public relations practitioners, which comprised of ten (10) practitioners from private, and five (5) practitioners from state organizations respectively. This technique was deemed suitable because, the heads of public relations possess relevant experiences and perspectives that contributed to the research objectives.

Expert sampling was used to complement the above by ensuring the inclusion of individuals with specialized knowledge in decision-making processes, thereby enriching the insights regarding views on public relations that were gained. Within the context of this study, the expert sampling enabled the identification of C-Suite members who have been involved in decision-making influenced by public relations strategies and communication efforts. In view of that, five (5) decision-makers were selected from public and state organizations for the study.

### **3.4 Data Collection Methods**

Data collection is the process of gathering, measuring, recording, and capturing information or data from various sources or subjects for the purpose of research, analysis, decision-making, or documentation (Fornaro et al., 2021). Paullada et al. (2021) opine further that data collection is a crucial step in the research and information-gathering process and is essential for generating insights, drawing conclusions, and making informed decisions. Based on that, interviews were utilized to collect data for the study.

#### **3.4.1 Interviews**

The main data collection approach was conducting interviews in this study (Thille et al., 2022), and for the purposes of gaining new insights, a semi-structured interview was utilized. To accommodate participants' availability and preferences, interviews were conducted through a combination of telephone calls, face-to-face meetings, and online (Zoom and Microsoft Teams). Specifically, 7 participants were interviewed via telephone 9 face-to-face meetings, 10 online (Zoom, and Microsoft Teams. This multi-modal approach provided flexibility and ensured that participants could engage in the study using the method most convenient for them. An estimated time of 30 – 40 minutes was used to solicit information from the participants.

The interview guide, was carefully constructed to align with the research objectives, in order to enable a comprehensive exploration of the perceptions of participants regarding the influence of public relations on power dynamics within the C-Suite. By this means the study unveiled the intricate layers of influence and the strategies employed to shape power dynamics from the perspective of public relations.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

Data analysis is the process of inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and interpreting data to discover useful information, draw conclusions, and support decision-making (Cuschieri, 2021; Islam, 2020). Cuschieri (2021) surmise that it involves the application of various techniques and methods to extract meaningful insights, patterns, relationships, and trends from raw data. In view of that, the data that was collected was analysed using; (a) Thematic analysis and (b) Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA).

#### **3.5.1 Thematic Analysis**

In line with this study's nature and approach, thematic analysis method was considered appropriate in identifying and analysing patterns/themes that emerged from the data. Conducting thematic analysis involves data preparation, familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, refining themes, data extraction, analysis, and reporting findings (Gauthier & Wallace, 2022). Systematically, adhering to the above after obtaining data from interviews and document analysis enabled effective categorization and interpretation of the data to uncover meaningful insights and patterns that provided deeper understanding of how public relations strategies impact power dynamics within the boardroom.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical considerations refer to the principles and guidelines that researchers must follow when conducting research (Grant, 2022; Ahmad Dar & Shairgojri, 2022). These considerations are designed to ensure that actions and practices align with moral and ethical standards, uphold the rights and well-being of participants, and promote fairness, honesty, and integrity of the researcher and the study in entirety (Feinsinger et al., 2022). Ethical considerations that were strictly

adhered to in this study included informed consent, privacy, scientific integrity, disclosure of conflicts of interest, respect for autonomy, compliance with regulations, cultural sensitivity, and transparency (Bhandari, 2021).

In line with the above, Cox et al. (2023) admonishes that adhering to ethical principles is essential for maintaining trust, respecting autonomy, and upholding responsible and ethical conduct in research, practice, and decision-making. In light of that, the study placed paramount importance on ethical considerations. Thus, informed consent was obtained from all the participants of the study, and deliberately ensured they were fully aware of the study's purpose and their rights and freedom to withdraw at any point they deemed fit. Confidentiality measures were implemented to protect participants' identities and the information they provided for the study. Additionally, ethical approval was sought from the institution's research department and the various organizations' review board earmarked for data collection, to ensure ethical guidelines were strictly adhered to.

### **3.7 Chapter Summary**

The research outlined focused on investigating the power and influence of public relations, and perceptions in the C-Suite. The nature of the study required an interpretivist paradigm, which emphasizes subjective experiences and social contexts. The chosen sampling method involved purposive and expert sampling to select relevant participants, primarily heads of public relations practitioners and C-Suite members. Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews that allowed participants to share their insights. Thematic analysis and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) were employed for data analysis, with the aim to uncover patterns and explore how people interpret and find meaning in their experiences. Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent, ensuring confidentiality, and seeking

ethical approval. Ultimately, the study aimed to delve into the subjective perceptions of public relations influence and the power dynamics within the C-Suite.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data gathered from the field. It examines the findings, correlating them with the objectives of the study. The analyses of the data comes from two viewpoints: Public relations practitioners from public and private sectors (P1-P15) and organizational decision-makers/management members (MM1-MM5). Pseudonyms were adopted for participants in conformity with ethical standards, safeguarding their anonymity. The dual-perspective method allows for a thorough examination, contrasting public relations practitioners' and decision-makers' views to reveal differences and similarities in their perceptions of power. This approach broadens the study, incorporating diverse viewpoints on the power dynamics with insights from both groups, ensuring a well-rounded comprehension. This method expanded the analytical framework, promoting a comprehensive debate.

#### **4.1 Demographic Information of Participants**

The participants included public relations practitioners (P1-P15) and organizational decision-makers (MM1-MM5), spanning both public and private sectors. Public relations practitioners ranged from content developers to senior vice-presidents, with ages between 28 and 50 years. They possessed strong educational backgrounds in communications and public relations, holding degrees and certifications. Their experience varied from 3 to 25 years, covering strategic communication planning, digital strategy, media relations, and crisis management. For sector representation, eight practitioners were from the private sector, while seven were from the public sector. Among the decision-makers, three were from the private sector and two from the public

sector, each holding significant roles within their organizations. The private sector leaders included Chief Financial Officers (CFOs) and Chief Operating Officers (COOs), while those from the public sector held similar strategic roles. These decision-makers were integral in shaping both organizational and operational strategies, leveraging their extensive experience, which ranged from 10 to 20 years, to guide their organizations through complex decision-making processes. Their experience and insights were vital in understanding the strategic value of public relations, especially in aligning communication strategies with broader organizational goals. The diversity in sector representation and professional experience enriched the study's findings.

## **4.2 RO1: To Explore How Public Relations Practitioners and Decision-Makers Perceive Public Relations and Its Influence in Strategic Decisions**

### **4.2.1 Understanding of Public Relations**

Understanding public relations within an organization encompasses diverse viewpoints that span strategic, relational, and communicative dimensions. Both public relations practitioners and decision-makers offered insights that reveal points of synthesis and divergence, making the analysis rich and comprehensive. On the whole, managers view public relations as a critical yet multifaceted function as affirmed by Zaaïman (2020). They saw it as essential for managing the organization's communication and reputation. However, there are sub-themes within their perceptions, including its role in information dissemination, strategic management, and crisis communication. These sub-themes illustrate the breadth of public relations' influence within organizations. This traditional view, supported by Theaker (2022), positions public relations as the organization's journalistic arm. Yet, it is not limited to this role alone. Additionally, some managers also acknowledged the strategic aspect of public relations. Common sentiments among

managers was that public relations is integral to the organization's communication strategy. Which MM1 and MM2 succinctly stated respectively that;

Public relations is basically in charge of communication, specifically relaying information to staff and the general public. Simply, we regard them as the organization's journalists.

Strategically managing relationships and communication to build a positive reputation, address challenges, and ultimately support the organization's goals and objectives.

This enhances the relational and strategic communication aspects of public relations, agreeing with Tam et al. (2020). MM5 further proclaimed its strategic importance saying;

PR is about strategically managing the organization's reputation. It's an essential function that communicates the company's values, achievements, and aspirations to the world.

This broader understanding is consistent with Stubenvoll et al. (2021), who underscore public relations' role in maintaining organizational stability during crises. Interestingly, the view that PR is pivotal in crisis management was shared by both managers and practitioners. P5 articulated that

PR as a crucial element in organizational communication strategy, emphasizing its role in building and maintaining public relationships, protecting the entity's image, and ensuring effective communication during both stable and crisis periods.

This view emphasizes public relations' critical function in reputation management and correlates with contemporary crisis communication viewpoints such as that of Men and Tsai (2016). In a separate context, the coming together in stances between managers and practitioners revealed that both groups recognize the strategic value of public relations, particularly in stakeholder engagement and crisis management. However, discrepancies arise in the perceived scope of public

relations' influence. Managers often saw it as a tactical tool, while practitioners stand for a more integrated role in strategic decision-making. For example, P8 was of the view that

PR should act as the guiding force for all company communication, helping the brand navigate through tough market conditions smoothly. It's about actively managing the company's reputation, effectively dealing with crises, and positioning the organization as a leader in its field.

This sought to accentuate its potential to guide the brand through complex market dynamics. This proactive stance is supported by Waters (2017). On the other hand, challenges to achieving this strategic role are noted by practitioners. P2 mentioned, "public relations is often micromanaged and considered an afterthought." This accentuates Meng and Berger's (2019) findings on the impact of organizational culture on public relations effectiveness. Practitioners like P4 brought to light that

Engagement at the decision and policy making level to ensure a mutual appreciation of PR from both Internal and External Publics perspective, give feedback based on informed decisions from the practitioner's interactions with stakeholders and manage the overall image of the organization whether there is calm or chaos

This harmonizes with Bajalia (2020), who positions public relations as central to organizational strategy. Conversely, there were also points of disagreement. Managers tended to emphasize the operational aspects of public relations, such as media relations and information dissemination, as noted by MM3: "Public relations involves effectively engaging with stakeholders and providing them with the information and assistance they require." In contrast, practitioners focus on strategic advisory roles, highlighting gaps between current and ideal public relations functions within organizations. Public relations practitioners emphasized their strategic advisory roles, revealing gaps between the current and ideal functions of public relations. For instance, PR1 noted, "We are

often limited to tactical tasks, despite our capability to influence broader strategic decisions.” Similarly, PR3 mentioned, “*There’s a disconnect between what we can offer and how we are utilized, especially in guiding communication strategies.*” These insights underscore the ongoing struggle to elevate public relations to a more strategic level within organizations.

In synthesizing these positions, it becomes clear that while both groups value public relations, their views on its implementation and scope vary. The overall assessment shows a recognition of public relations critical role but also reveals an ongoing need to bridge the understanding gap. This alignment can enhance public relations strategic integration, fostering a cohesive approach to managing communication and reputation. Addressing the barriers noted by practitioners, such as organizational culture and structural limitations, is crucial for leveraging public relations full strategic value, as made clear by Grunig (1992) and Grunig and Hunt (1984). By acknowledging these points of consensus and variances, the analysis underscores the multifaceted role of public relations and highlights areas for improved integration within organizational strategy.

#### **4.2.2 Role of Public Relations**

The role of public relations within organizations is perceived through a multifaceted lens by both public relations practitioners and decision-makers. This highlights various dimensions of its influence and strategic importance. Though Cutlip et al. (2005) highlights that it encompasses managing communication between the organization and its stakeholders, ensuring a positive public image and maintaining strong relationships, from the data, managers generally viewed public relations as crucial for communication management, reputation enhancement, and crisis navigation, revealing several sub-themes in their assessment. **Strategic Communication and**

**Reputation Management** emerged as key areas where public relations is seen as indispensable.

MM2 mentioned that

The role of public relations within our organization is to strategically manage communication and relationships to uphold and enhance our reputation, address challenges effectively, and ultimately support the achievement of our goals and objectives. This involves proactively engaging with various stakeholders, including customers, employees, investors, and the broader community, through media relations, community engagement, and strategic communication planning.

This attunes with Mikáčová and Gavlaková (2014), who position public relations practitioners as responsible for strategic communication planning, media relations, and crisis management. This notion is reverberated by MM5, who described public relations as

A guardian of our corporate reputation and a bridge to our stakeholders. It ensures our financial health and strategic decisions are communicated in a manner that reinforces investor confidence and customer loyalty. PR is closely involved in financial disclosures, ensuring they reflect our values and strategic direction.

This underscores the critical role of public relations in maintaining investor confidence and customer loyalty during financial uncertainties marrying with Cornelissen's (2014) argument on effective corporate communication enhancing a firm's value.

Further, **Operational and Tactical Functions** also formed a significant part of the managers' views. MM1 remarked that public relations practitioners are "communicators," capturing the essence of public relations as fundamentally about information flow. This view complies with Smith (2013), who notes that public relations' transactional aspect is often highlighted over its strategic elements. MM3 added that public relations' role includes "liaise with the PR department with respect to the inflow and outflow of information," reiterating a focus on the operational dimensions of public relations. Contrastingly, public relations practitioners often view their role through a broader strategic lens, though they also acknowledge operational aspects. P5 noted that

Public relations acts as the linchpin for an organization's communication strategy. It's about forging and maintaining a robust rapport with the public, safeguarding the entity's image, and ensuring transparent and effective communication during both placid and turbulent times.

This conception reconciles with the modern strategic communication theories that place public relations at the centre of organizational strategy (Grunig, 2022; Hung-Baesecke et al., 2021).

Again, **Engagement in Strategic Planning and Decision-Making** is another sub-theme where views diverge. MM4 highlighted that

public relations is a strategic partner in building and sustaining our corporate identity and employer brand...instrumental in crafting messages that resonate with our values and culture, especially in recruitment and employee engagement initiatives. PR also plays a critical role in internal communications, ensuring transparency and fostering a cohesive organizational climate.

This reflects Tao et al. (2022) and Carter et al.'s (2019) view of public relations' strategic importance and Grunig's (1992) call for deeper integration into strategic planning. However, some managers are content with the current role of public relations, suggesting it remains within traditional boundaries. MM2 stated that

Currently, our public relations function operates within the marketing department, not directly on the executive board. While effective in its current position, integrating PR more closely with executive decision-making could enhance strategic alignment. Ideally, a dedicated PR executive should be part of the C-suite, ensuring communication strategies are not only reflective of but also contribute to the organization's strategic vision. This placement would elevate the importance of communication in all aspects of organizational strategy and decision-making.

Public relations practitioners were found to support **greater strategic influence**, reflecting a gap between the ideal and current roles. P3 mentioned that public relations aims to "build and maintain positive relationships with various stakeholders," while P4 argued for engagement at decision and

policy-making levels to ensure a mutual appreciation of public relations. This proactive stance is supported by Meng and Berger (2019), who highlight the impact of organizational culture and structure on public relations effectiveness.

Points of overlap between managers and practitioners include the acknowledgment of public relations role in **crisis management** and **stakeholder engagement**. Both groups recognize public relations critical function in navigating organizational challenges. MM5 noted that “PR is closely involved in financial disclosures, ensuring they reflect our values and strategic direction,” while P8 described public relations strategic role as “the strategic compass for all organizational communication, steering the brand through the market’s choppy waters with grace.” These viewpoints underscore public relations strategic importance, particularly in managing reputation and stakeholder relationships, agreeing with Waters (2017).

However, discrepancies arise regarding public relations **integration into strategic decision-making**. Managers often see public relations role as peripheral, focusing on communication tasks rather than strategic input. In contrast, practitioners emphasize the need for a more integrated role, suggesting that their insights can significantly contribute to achieving organizational objectives. P1 described public relations as “the mouthpiece and organic brand ambassador,” emphasizing the strategic communication role over mere information dissemination.

The critique of these views, based on relevant literature, reveals that while there is a shared recognition of public relations strategic value, fully harnessing its potential requires addressing organizational culture and structural barriers. This positioning can enhance public relations strategic integration, fostering a cohesive approach to managing communication and reputation. Addressing these barriers is crucial for leveraging public relations full strategic value, as confirmed by Okereke (2020) and, Ejaz and Khan (2019).

By acknowledging these points of convergence and divergence, the analysis reiterates the multifaceted role of public relations and areas for improved integration within organizational strategy. This comprehensive understanding can lead to more effective utilization of public relations, enhancing its role as a strategic partner in organizational success.

#### **4.2.3 Placement of Public Relations**

The ideal placement of public relations within organizations is as a strategic partner integrated into high-level decision-making processes, ensuring alignment with organizational goals and values (Grunig, 2020). That notwithstanding, Grunig and Grunig (2013) affirm that the debate on public relations' placement within organizations and its role in executive decision-making illustrates an ongoing evolution. **Strategic Integration** is a crucial theme where views on public relations placement vary. MM5 articulated that

In our organization, public relations is somewhat peripheral to the core executive decision-making process. It is consulted on a case-by-case basis rather than being a constant presence at the decision-making table.

This stance reflects a common challenge where public relations is seen as important but not integral to strategic discussions. However, MM2 countered this by stating, “ideally, PR and communications experts should be part of an organization’s executive team to ensure their insights shape strategic decisions.” This resonates with the arguments of Zerfass et al. (2018), who lay emphasis on the necessity of integrating public relations into executive-level planning to enhance strategic impact. Additionally, public relations practitioners also highlight the need for strategic placement. P11 noted that

PR is undeniably a top management role within our organization, reflecting in my direct reporting to the CEO. This structure is designed to ensure that PR strategies fully comply with the company’s vision and objectives.

This direct reporting line underscores the strategic importance of public relations and its critical role in shaping organizational narratives, as advocated by Edelman and Kania (2013) and Neill (2016). **Operational Alignment** is another sub-theme where opinions differ. MM4 explained that

Currently, our public relations function operates within the marketing department, not directly on the executive board. While effective in its current position, integrating PR more closely with executive decision-making could enhance strategic alignment.

This view points to the traditional placement of public relations within marketing or communication departments, potentially limiting its strategic influence. Conversely, P7 shared that

In our structure, PR is considered a critical management function but not top-level. I report to the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO). This hierarchy stems from the belief that PR and marketing functions are closely interlinked.

This operational uniformity within marketing highlights a functional rather than strategic view of public relations. However, there are instances where public relations is placed in strategic roles. P13 remarked, “I report directly to the CEO, ensuring that our communication strategies are not only reflective of but also instrumental in achieving our business objectives.” This placement spotlights the potential for public relations to contribute significantly to strategic decision-making and organizational success, supporting the views of Zerfass et al. (2018).

Alongside, **executive Support** is a critical factor influencing public relations placement. MM3 observed, “depending on the capability of the communicator, he/she can be placed at middle management.” This perspective suggests that individual competence can determine public relations placement within the organization. However, MM1 pointed out, “PR’s influence is often limited to tactical roles due to a lack of executive support.” This view squares with the challenges

identified by Gregory and Macnamara (2019), who note that limited access to top executives can hinder public relations strategic effectiveness.

Consequently, the data suggested that public relations practitioners also put emphasis on the importance of executive support. P15 highlighted, “reporting directly to senior leadership for effective integration into organizational strategy and success.” This structure is crucial for ensuring that public relations strategic contributions are recognized and leveraged. P6 added, “I report directly to the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), which reflects the strategic importance of PR in our organization.” This direct reporting line enhances public relations ability to influence strategic decisions and synthesizes communication strategies with organizational goals.

Worthy of note, synthesis of the data indicated both union and variance. Managers and practitioners agree on the importance of PR but differ on its optimal placement. While some managers see PR as a strategic partner, others view it as a functional or tactical role. Practitioners consistently advocate for higher placement within the organizational hierarchy to enhance their strategic influence. Weighing these perspectives, it is obvious that for PR to achieve its full strategic potential, it needs to be positioned within top management levels with direct access to executive decision-makers. This synergy can facilitate better integration of communication strategies with organizational goals, enhancing overall effectiveness. Empirical evidence underlines this view, with Neill and Barnes (2018) and Serpil Karlıdağ (2020) emphasizing the importance of PR’s strategic role in achieving organizational success. This submits that the placement of PR within organizations is a critical factor that influences its strategic value and effectiveness. Recognizing and addressing the barriers to higher placement, such as executive support and operational alignment, can enhance PR’s role as a strategic partner in organizational success.

## **4.3 RO2: To Analyse How Public Relations Practitioners Achieve Strategic Influence within Their Organizations**

### **4.3.1 Perceived Influence and Power of Public Relations**

The perceived influence and power of public relations within organizations is a multifaceted issue that reveals a variety of views among both public relations practitioners and decision-makers. Generally, a review of PR by managers accentuates its potential strategic influence, but there were nuances in how this influence is realized and leveraged. **Strategic Importance** of PR is widely recognized. MM2 stated that

Influence or power within organizations can be defined as the ability of individuals or groups to affect decisions, actions, and outcomes. This influence may stem from various sources, including formal authority, expertise, relationships, and personal charisma.

This broad definition acknowledges the multifaceted nature of power and conforms to the resource-dependence perspective, which suggests that PR can leverage its strategic importance to influence organizational outcomes. MM5 added that

Public relations holds significant power through its role in reputation management and strategic communication. Its influence is palpable in how it navigates stakeholder expectations and mitigates financial risks associated with reputational damage.

This draws attention to the critical role of PR in shaping perceptions and managing crises, a view supported by Nutsugah and Anani-Bossman (2023). Moving on, **Communication Efficacy** is another critical sub-theme identified. P5 noted that

PR is most influential when shaping our brand narrative. During the launch of a new product line, I was integral in positioning, ensuring our messaging resonated with target demographics.

This amplifies the strategic communication role of PR in aligning organizational messages with audience expectations, which is essential for maintaining a cohesive brand identity. Similarly, P3 affirmed that

My role involves translating the organization's strategic goals into actionable communication plans. This ensures consistency in messaging and identifies opportunities for external partnerships.

This viewpoint underlines the operational aspect of PR in ensuring effective communication strategies, synchronizing with Kanihan et al. (2013) on the importance of strategic deployment of communication during critical junctures. In a different light, **Organizational Integration** of PR varies significantly among organizations. MM4 observed that

Public relations within our entity wields influence primarily through shaping organizational narratives and managing stakeholder relationships. This capacity to influence both internal and external perceptions directly impacts our strategic direction and reputation.

This view accentuates the strategic integration of PR into organizational decision-making processes, reflecting the need for PR to be deeply embedded within the corporate strategy. However, MM3 pointed out that “power is derived from the organization's structure, and each level of the structure determines the level of information accessible.” This points to a more hierarchical view where PR's influence is contingent upon its structural placement within the organization. This points to public relations practitioners often stressing the need for deeper integration into decision-making processes. P2 lamented, “my role is primarily seen as implementing rather than influencing strategy. This view overlooks the strategic potential of PR in shaping organizational direction.” This reflects the ongoing challenge of achieving recognition for PR's strategic value, a gap well-documented in the literature. P6 added, “The hierarchical

nature of our organizational structure poses challenges to fluid communication and swift decision-making, which can limit PR's influence in real-time strategic discussions." This resounds the findings of Sebastião et al. (2017), who note the impact of organizational culture on PR effectiveness.

Notwithstanding these issues, there are points of assembly between managers and practitioners. Both groups recognize the importance of PR in **crisis management** and **stakeholder engagement**. MM4 noted, "PR's role in crisis management exemplifies its influence, steering the organization through challenges by controlling the flow of information and maintaining stakeholder trust." This integrates with the views of practitioners like P8, who described PR as "public relations is crucial in managing an organization's communication strategy, ensuring brand stability and positive public perception during challenging times." These insights underscore the critical role of PR in managing reputational risks and navigating complex stakeholder landscapes, reinforcing the strategic importance of PR as highlighted by Khuong et al. (2021) and, Soudi and Mokhlis (2021).

Reviewing these viewpoints, it is clear that while there is a shared recognition of PR's potential strategic influence, fully harnessing this power requires addressing structural and cultural barriers within organizations. The need for deeper integration of PR into executive decision-making is evident, as is the necessity for ongoing support for PR's strategic value. Bajalia (2020) in this regard emphasizes the importance of integrating PR into strategic management to enhance organizational effectiveness. The perceived influence and power of PR within organizations is multifaceted and influenced by various factors, including strategic importance, communication efficacy, and organizational integration. Recognizing and addressing the barriers to PR's strategic influence can enhance its role as a critical component of organizational success.

### 4.3.2 Public Relations and Organizational Culture

The interplay between public relations and organizational culture reveals a complex dynamic that influences how PR functions within an organization. Overall, managers and PR practitioners recognize the significant impact of organizational culture on the effectiveness of PR. Sub-themes such as **Strategic Involvement** was a recurring theme where the extent of PR's integration into organizational culture. MM2 highlighted, "senior managers do not consistently prioritize or take the recommendations of the public relations and communication department as seriously as expected." This indicates a gap in strategic involvement, where PR's potential contributions are underutilized. P2 reiterated this sentiment, "no, because I am not a manager yet." This insight ties into Grunig and Hunt's (1984) discussion on the implication caused by lack of integration of PR into strategic decision-making, which can hinder an organization's ability to leverage stakeholder relationships effectively.

Conversely, some participants noted a high level of strategic involvement. P3 argued, "I actively contribute to the organization's strategic decision-making and planning from gaining stakeholders' perceptions to managing reputation and handling crisis communication." This advanced understanding of PR's role complies with the strategic management approach advocated by Men and Tsai (2016). Similarly, P9 stated that

By directly reporting to the CEO and participating in strategic meetings, I ensure that our communication strategies are not only reflective of but also instrumental in achieving our business objectives.

These insights reflect a more integrated approach to PR, where it is seen as a critical component of organizational strategy. In another vein, **Operational Challenges** were also identified as significant barriers to effective PR. MM4 observed, "The hierarchical nature of decision-making in many organizations can stifle PR's influence." This structural impediment limits PR's ability to

contribute proactively to strategic discussions. P6 added, “The current structure confines PR to a more tactical role focusing on execution rather than strategic planning.” This corresponds with Casero-Ripollés (2020), who note that traditional communication-focused perspectives can limit PR’s potential.

Regardless of these hurdles, there are occurrences of **Cultural Support** that enhance PR’s effectiveness. P7 annotated that “in our culture, PR is considered a critical management function but not top-level. This hierarchy stems from the belief that PR and marketing functions are closely interlinked.” This supportive culture facilitates collaboration and strategic alignment, even if PR is not at the top level. MM4 resonated this sentiment noting that “our culture of openness and stakeholder engagement provides a supportive backdrop for PR initiatives, encouraging cross-functional projects that can enhance PR’s strategic impact.” The data also highlighted discrepancies in how PR is perceived and utilized. P10 lamented that, “no, and it’s a missed opportunity. My role is primarily seen as implementing rather than influencing strategy.” This gap in perception showcases the need for organizations to recognize PR’s strategic value beyond traditional media relations. MM3 added, “PR is tasked with communicating final decisions, which limits its proactive strategic involvement.” These outlooks reveal a divergence in how PR’s role is understood and enacted within different organizational cultures.

There were points of agreement as well where both managers and practitioners acknowledged the importance of cultural support for PR. MM5 noted that

The culture within our organization values data-driven decision-making, which supports PR’s efforts when it can present compelling quantitative evidence of the impact of communication strategies on organizational objectives.

This emphasis on data provides a common ground for PR to align with other departments and assert its role in influencing decisions. P11 similarly highlighted that, “strong relationships with C-suite executives amplify my influence, granting me a platform to advocate for strategic communication’s role in achieving our objectives.” These insights reflect the critical role of executive support and a data-driven culture in enhancing PR’s strategic involvement.

Assessing these opinions, it became obvious that while there is recognition of PR’s potential strategic influence, fully leveraging this potential requires addressing both structural and cultural barriers. Existing literature (Bryson, 2021; Mithani & OBrien, 2020; Wu, 2023) corroborates this, in that the importance of integrating PR into strategic management to enhance organizational effectiveness. Organizational cultures that value openness, data-driven decision-making, and stakeholder engagement provide a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. The relationship between PR and organizational culture is complex and multifaceted, influenced by strategic involvement, operational challenges, and cultural support. By fostering a deeper integration of PR into the organizational culture, companies can better leverage its full potential to navigate complex communication challenges and achieve strategic objectives.

#### **4.3.3 Public Relations Role in Decision-Making and Organizational Culture**

Public Relations plays a crucial role in decision-making by providing strategic communication insights (Grunig, 2020), which help shape organizational culture and ensure alignment with overall business objectives (Everett, 2020). The role of public relations in decision-making and its interaction with organizational culture is a complex interplay that significantly influences its effectiveness. Managers and PR practitioners generally recognize PR’s strategic potential, but their views diverge on its practical integration and impact. From the data, **Strategic Integration** of PR

into decision-making was widely acknowledged as essential by both managers and practitioners.

MM2 remarked that

In our organization, it is highly likely that the Head of Public Relations would be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning. The expertise and strategic insights offered by the Public Relations department are sometimes recognized as essential components of effective strategic planning. Including the Head of Public Relations in such meetings ensures that communication strategies are aligned with organizational goals and that potential reputational risks are considered and addressed proactively. This collaborative approach enables the organization to integrate communication efforts seamlessly into its overall strategic direction, fostering transparency, trust, and credibility with stakeholders.

This statement illuminates the perceived importance of PR in shaping strategic decisions, uniting with Reber and Berger's (2006) espousal for PR's role in strategic management. Similarly, P9 described the proactive involvement of PR in strategic planning. Underscoring this pivotal role, P9 underscored that

my involvement is pivotal. By directly reporting to the CEO and participating in strategic meetings, I ensure that our communication strategies are not only reflective of but also instrumental in achieving our business objectives. This integration is crucial for cohesive brand messaging.

These descriptions underscore the evolving role of public relations beyond traditional communication functions, embodying the integrative role envisioned by Cornelissen (2014). Conversely however, the findings noted challenges in achieving this level of integration. MM1 observed, "PR is tasked with communicating final decisions, which limits its proactive strategic involvement." This reflects a more traditional view where PR is seen as an implementer rather than a strategic advisor. P2 echoed this sentiment, "my role is primarily seen as implementing rather than influencing strategy. This perspective overlooks the strategic potential of PR in shaping organizational direction." Meanwhile, the Excellence Theory emphasizes that for public relations to truly benefit an organization, it must be integrated into strategic decision-making processes.

Thus, utilizing public relations solely as a tactical tool diminishes its potential to contribute to the organization's overall success and its ability to navigate complex stakeholder environments (Tam et al., 2022; Grunig et al., 2006).

From another standpoint, **Operational Challenges** was found to often hinder PR's effectiveness in decision-making. MM3 pointed out, "the hierarchical nature of decision-making in many organizations can stifle PR's influence." This structural limitation prevents PR from fully contributing to strategic discussions. P6 added, "the current structure confines PR to a more tactical role focusing on execution rather than strategic planning." Such views highlight the operational barriers that limit PR's potential, dovetailing into Sriramesh and Verčič's (2019) position, which discussed the impact of organizational structure on PR effectiveness.

In spite of these obstacles, there are examples where PR has successfully navigated operational barriers. P7 noted, "in our culture, PR is considered a critical management function but not top-level. This hierarchy stems from the belief that PR and marketing functions are closely interlinked." This collaborative approach within marketing facilitates strategic alignment even when PR is not at the top level. MM5 further illustrated that

The hierarchical nature of our organizational structure poses challenges to fluid communication and swift decision-making, which can limit PR's influence in real-time strategic discussions. However, the culture within our organization, which values data-driven decision-making, supports PR's efforts when it can present compelling, quantitative evidence of the impact of communication strategies on organizational objectives. This emphasis on data provides a common ground for PR to align with other departments and assert its role in influencing decisions.

This dual nature of organizational dynamics showcases how culture can sometimes mitigate the limitations imposed by structure. Additionally, **Cultural Perceptions** of PR vary significantly across organizations. MM4 stated that

Our organizational structure sometimes impedes direct communication and collaboration across different units. This can dilute the efforts of PR to influence decision-making at the highest levels, as information and insights may not flow seamlessly. On the other hand, our culture of openness and stakeholder engagement does provide a supportive backdrop for PR initiatives, encouraging cross-functional projects that can enhance PR's strategic impact.

This supportive culture enhances PR's ability to influence decision-making positively. However, P10 pointed out, "No, and it's a missed opportunity. My role is primarily seen as implementing rather than influencing strategy." This perception gap draws attention to the need for a cultural shift to recognize PR's strategic value beyond traditional communication roles. This points out the importance for companies to adopt structures and cultures that empower public relations teams to play a more strategic role as Arun et al. (2021) and Yeo and Pang (2017) illuminate.

These varied opinions however revealed points of confluence and some levels of inconsistency in how PR's role in decision-making is perceived. The data showed that managers and practitioners agreed on the importance of strategic integration and cultural support for PR. However, discrepancies arose in the practical implementation of these ideals. While some organizations successfully integrate PR into strategic planning, others still view it through a tactical lens. Studying these viewpoints, it becomes clear that for PR to realize its full strategic potential, there must be a concerted effort to address structural and cultural barriers. Empirical evidence underlines this, with Badi et al. (2020) stressing the need for PR to be deeply embedded within strategic decision-making processes. Organizations that foster a culture of openness, data-driven decision-making, and stakeholder engagement provide a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. This comprehensive understanding is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness and strategic value of PR, ultimately contributing to better organizational outcomes and reputation management.

#### 4.3.4 Public Relations Influence and ‘Most’ Effectiveness

Public Relations exerts its most significant influence when it is integrated into the strategic management process (Cutlip et al., 2005). The influence of public relations within organizations is recognized as most effective when it is strategically integrated and supported by leadership.

**Crisis Management** was a critical area where PR’s influence is most evident. MM5 outlined that

Public relations becomes most influential in scenarios where the organization’s reputation or market position is at stake. PR’s ability to analyze, interpret, and communicate complex information during these times helps shape perceptions and can lead to a more favourable outcome for the organization.

This observation highlights the strategic importance of PR in navigating crises, a view supported by Kaleel (2020), who advocates for clear and empathetic messaging to maintain stakeholder trust during challenging times. P14 corroborated this by noting, “my influence peaks during crises. A notable instance was during a public health emergency where I advised on communication strategies that balanced transparency with reassurance.” Equally, **Strategic Communication** was another domain where PR exerts significant influence. P6 explained that

I’m most influential when shaping our brand narrative. During the launch of a new product line, I ensured our messaging resonated with target demographics by leveraging market research and trend analysis.

This proactive approach signifies the strategic role of PR in interlocking communication strategies with business objectives, fitting with Smith (2013), who emphasizes the importance of data-driven decision-making in modern PR practices. MM4 also noted,

Public relations exerts its greatest influence during periods of organizational change or crisis. It’s at these critical junctures that the strategic deployment of communication can either fortify or weaken stakeholder trust. Effective PR navigates these challenges by crafting clear, empathetic, and transparent messages that align with our core values and mission.

This underscores the pivotal role of public relations in managing perceptions during turbulent times. This view is in line with Kanihan et al. (2013) work on crisis communication, which showcases the critical function of strategic communication in preserving stakeholder trust and organizational reputation during crises. From a separate angle, **Stakeholder Engagement** was crucial for effective PR. MM2 remarked,

PR is most influential when it is integrated into organizational decision-making, proactive in managing reputation and relationships, and strategic in its approach to communication. By leveraging its influence in these key areas, PR can effectively support the organization's goals and objectives while safeguarding its reputation and credibility.

This view highlights the necessity for PR to be embedded within the strategic framework of the organization, ensuring that stakeholder interests are aligned with corporate goals. P8 expanded on this by stating, "PR Public relations should lead company communication, effectively guiding the brand through difficult market situations and maintaining a strong reputation." This sentiment reflects the views of Grunig and Hunt (1984), who underscore the importance of PR in stakeholder relationship management.

However, there were inconsistencies in how PR's influence is realized across different organizations. MM1 pointed out that, "the influence of PR is often limited by organizational structure, which can confine it to a tactical rather than strategic role." This structural limitation can hinder PR's ability to contribute to broader strategic discussions, echoing the findings of Macnamara (2019), who notes the importance of integrating PR into strategic management. P12 further added that

I find my role most influential in digital strategy formulation. A significant contribution was integrating social media into our overall PR strategy, which

substantially increased our brand visibility. My strategy involved using data analytics to drive content decisions and engaging with influencers to amplify our message.

Kietzmann et al. (2011) reinforce this pointing out that the growing importance of online reputation management. This view magnifies a gap between the ideal and current roles of PR within many organizations.

Even with these hindrances, there are instances where PR's strategic value is fully recognized. MM3 observed, "PR's strategic input is most valuable when it is part of the executive team, directly influencing organizational direction and decision-making." This take fits with the resource-dependence theory, which suggests that PR's influence is maximized when it has direct access to top management. P7 supported this by noting, "strategic involvement in decision-making processes enhances PR's ability to shape organizational outcomes positively."

Examining the data, it is evident that while PR's potential for strategic influence is widely recognized, fully realizing this potential requires addressing structural and cultural barriers within organizations. Organizations that foster a culture of openness and proactive stakeholder engagement provide a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. The influence and effectiveness of PR within organizations are most pronounced in areas such as crisis management, strategic communication, and stakeholder engagement. By fostering deeper integration of PR into organizational decision-making, companies can better leverage its full potential to navigate complex communication challenges and achieve strategic objectives.

#### 4.3.5 Public Relations Influence and ‘Least’ Effectiveness

Based on Reber and Berger’s (2006) perspective on public relations and power dynamics, public relations has the least significant influence when it is confined to a tactical role. This encompasses being isolated from strategic decision-making and lacking support from the dominant coalition. The study aimed to uncover the scenarios where public relations exerts the least influence. The study aimed to uncover the scenarios where public relations exerts the least influence. The data showed that public relations influence is least effective when it is marginalized within the organizational hierarchy, lacks strategic integration, and faces cultural resistance. Sub-themes such as **marginalization, lack of strategic integration, and cultural resistance** emerge prominently. **Marginalization** of PR within the organizational hierarchy significantly undermines its effectiveness. MM1 observed, “PR often ends up being relegated to a tactical role, primarily focused on media relations and internal communications, rather than being involved in strategic decision-making processes.” This position enhance the structural limitations that confine PR to peripheral activities, which is echoed by Anani-Bossman (2021b), who emphasizes the need for PR to be recognized as a strategic management function. P2 reinforced this by stating, “In my organization, PR is seen as an afterthought, consulted only when there is a crisis or specific communication need, but not included in the strategic planning stages.” MM2 buttresses this position when they elucidate that

PR may be least influential in situations where its role is marginalized, resources are limited, or communication efforts are ineffective in managing reputation and relationships. To maximize its influence, PR must be integrated into organizational decision-making, supported with adequate resources, and proactive in its approach to communication and relationship management.

This aligns with the Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which posits that for public relations to be effective, it must be practiced as a strategic management function. PR professionals should participate in decision-making processes and receive necessary organizational support.

In another vein, **Lack of Strategic Integration** further diminishes PR's effectiveness. P6 noted,

Without being part of the strategic discussions, our efforts in PR are reactive rather than proactive. This limits our ability to shape and influence the direction of the organization effectively.

This view identifies the necessity of embedding PR into the strategic fabric of the organization, blending with the resource-dependence theory that advocates for PR's integration to enhance its strategic impact. MM3 added that, "the failure to integrate PR into strategic management results in a disconnect between communication efforts and overall organizational goals, leading to inefficiencies and missed opportunities." Conversely, **Cultural Resistance** is another significant barrier. MM4 remarked, "There is a pervasive culture of undervaluing PR within our organization. Many still see it as a soft function, not realizing its potential for strategic influence and crisis management." This cultural bias against PR's strategic value limits its effectiveness and is supported by Argenti (2017), who discuss the impact of organizational culture on PR's role. P10 iterated this sentiment, "the organizational culture does not support PR's strategic initiatives. There is a lack of understanding and appreciation for what PR can bring to the table beyond basic communication tasks."

Notwithstanding these difficulties, there are cases where PR has managed to overcome these barriers, albeit inconsistently. P14 highlighted

in certain projects, when PR is brought in early and allowed to contribute to the strategic planning, the results are significantly better. However, this is not the norm.

This insight brings to light the potential for PR to be effective when given the opportunity to engage strategically. MM5 observed, “when PR is included in high-level meetings and its recommendations are taken seriously, it can drive significant positive outcomes. Unfortunately, this level of inclusion is rare.” The findings also highlighted discrepancies in how PR’s role is perceived and utilized. P13 lamented, “there is a persistent view that PR is just about managing press releases and social media. This narrow perspective undermines our ability to influence broader organizational strategies.” MM2 added, “the undervaluing of PR’s strategic potential often leads to its late involvement in projects, limiting its ability to shape outcomes from the start.”

Convergence occurred where both managers and practitioners agreed on the importance of strategic inclusion for PR. MM2 stated, “to maximize PR’s effectiveness, it must be integrated into the strategic management framework from the beginning.” P12 conceded, “PR should be seen as a strategic partner, not just a communication tool. This shift in perception is crucial for enhancing its effectiveness.” These insights reflect the views of Men and Tsai (2016), who emphasize the strategic importance of PR in organizational decision-making. Scrutinizing these viewpoints, it is apparent that while there is a shared recognition of PR’s potential strategic influence, fully realizing this potential requires addressing structural and cultural barriers.

Lee and Queenie Li (2020) back this asserting that broader implications of excluding public relations from discussions that, while seemingly unrelated to communication, have significant communicative outcomes and stakeholder impacts, reverberating the argument for a more inclusive approach to strategic planning. Consequently, organizational cultures that value openness, proactive stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication provide a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. PR’s influence is least effective

when it is marginalized, lacks strategic integration, and faces cultural resistance. By fostering deeper integration of PR into organizational decision-making and shifting cultural perceptions, companies can better leverage its full potential to navigate complex communication challenges and achieve strategic objectives.

#### **4.3.6 Public Relations Expected Role**

The expected role of public relations within organizations encompasses various dimensions that reflect its strategic potential, operational responsibilities, and cultural integration. The data showed that **Strategic Advisor** is a role widely expected for PR. MM2 noted, “PR should be deeply integrated into strategic decision-making processes, providing insights and guidance on stakeholder management and communication strategies.” This approach heightens the anticipated strategic influence of PR, complementing with Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) view that PR should be part of the strategic management team. P9 iterated this idea, “our role should be to advise on all aspects of communication and public perception, ensuring that our strategies align with the overall goals of the organization.” This perspective is supported by the Excellence Theory (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), which advocates for public relations as a strategic management function. The theory posits that effective PR requires practitioners to be integrated into the organization’s decision-making processes, actively engage with stakeholders, and align communication strategies with broader organizational goals.

In a different light, **Crisis Manager** is another critical role that participants expect PR to fulfill. MM5 noted, “PR is expected to lead the organization’s response during crises, managing communication and mitigating reputational damage.” This give prominence to the crucial function of PR in crisis management, a view supported by Kaleel (2020), who advocates for clear and empathetic communication during crises. P12 shared a similar view, “during crises, our role is

pivotal in shaping the narrative and maintaining stakeholder trust. We must be prepared to respond swiftly and effectively to any situation.” Taking a different path, **Brand Custodian** was found to reflect the ongoing responsibility of PR in managing and maintaining the organization’s image. P6 stated, “PR should be the guardian of the brand, ensuring that all communications reflect the organization’s values and mission.” This resonates with the resource-dependence theory, which emphasizes the importance of PR in maintaining a consistent and positive brand image. MM3 added, “The role of PR in brand management is critical. It ensures that our messaging is consistent and that our reputation is protected across all channels.”

Despite these common expectations, there are discrepancies in how PR’s role is perceived and enacted. MM1 observed, “while we expect PR to play a strategic role, it is often side-lined in favour of more immediate operational concerns.” This gap between expectation and reality bring to the fore the structural and cultural barriers that limit PR’s strategic influence. P13 lamented, “there is a disconnect between what is expected of PR and the actual support and resources provided to fulfill those expectations.” However, there are instances where PR successfully meets these expectations. P7 noted

In organizations where PR is given the necessary support and access to strategic discussions, it can effectively fulfill its role as a strategic advisor, crisis manager, and brand custodian.

This success is contingent on the level of integration and support PR receives within the organization, aligning with Theaker (2020), who emphasize the importance of integrating PR into the strategic framework. The findings also highlighted the need for PR to evolve and adapt to changing organizational dynamics. MM4 stated, “PR should be agile and responsive, adapting its strategies to meet the evolving needs of the organization and its stakeholders.” This expectation

demonstrates the dynamic nature of PR and its need to remain relevant in a rapidly changing environment. P10 added, “as communicators, we must continually update our skills and strategies to effectively engage with our audiences and support our organization’s objectives.”

There was a meeting point where both managers and practitioners agreed on the essential roles of PR. MM2 pointed out, “to be truly effective, PR must be seen as a strategic partner, not just a communication function.” P8 conceded,

our role is to support the strategic goals of the organization through effective communication and stakeholder management. This requires us to be involved at the highest levels of decision-making.

These insights reflect the views of Pidgeon (2020), who advocate for the strategic integration of PR into organizational management. Critiquing these views, it is clear that while there is a shared recognition of PR’s potential strategic influence, fully realizing this potential requires addressing structural and cultural barriers within organizations. Simpson et al. (2019) supports this emphasizing the need for PR to be deeply embedded within strategic decision-making processes to enhance its effectiveness. Organizations that foster a culture of openness, proactive stakeholder engagement, and strategic communication provide a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. The expected role of PR within organizations is multifaceted, encompassing strategic advisory, crisis management, and brand custodianship. By fostering deeper integration of PR into organizational decision-making and providing the necessary support, companies can better leverage its full potential to navigate complex communication challenges and achieve strategic objectives.

#### **4.4 RO3: To Explore the Factors That Either Facilitate or Hinder the Ability of Public Relations Practitioners to Achieve Influence and Power Within the C-Suite**

##### **4.4.1 Relationship with C-Suite and Influence**

The relationship between public relations and the C-Suite is crucial for strategic influence and organizational success (Ferreira & Engelbrechts, 2022; Neill, 2015). Bowen et al. (2020) validate this position indicating that integrating public relations within executive decision-making enhances reputation management and fosters trust with key stakeholders. Probing whether interactions and relationships with C-suite executives contributed to or inhibited public relations practitioners' capacity to drive influence within the organization revealed a consensus on the pivotal role these relationships play. Overall, the data pointed to the recognition of the strategic value of PR but highlight varying degrees of integration and support from the executive level.

**Strategic Alignment** was found to be a critical factor in the relationship between PR and the C-suite. MM2 remarked, "the Head of PR must be part of the senior management team to ensure alignment between communication strategies and organizational goals." This view enumerates the importance of including PR in strategic discussions to ensure coherence and alignment with the overall business strategy. P15 explained that

my direct access to the CEO allows me to align our PR strategies with the company's vision and goals, ensuring that our communication efforts support our strategic objectives.

This direct line of communication enhances the strategic integration of PR, aligning with Ihlen and Raknes's (2020) lobbying for PR's role in strategic management. Together with, **Executive Support** is another crucial element that influences the effectiveness of PR. P7 warned of the "double-edged sword" where executive backing could either elevate public relations status or

constrain it to a tactical role, depending on executives' perception of public relations function. P7

elaborated:

Engagement with the C-suite is a double-edged sword. On one side, their backing can elevate the status of PR within the organization, integrating our insights into strategic decisions. On the flip side, if they view PR as merely a tactical tool, it can be challenging to shift perceptions and demonstrate the strategic value we bring.

These reflections underscore the notion that supportive, engaged relationships with top executives can significantly empower public relations functions. When public relations is integrated into strategic planning, Bryson (2021) ascribes that it can shape organizational narratives and drive key initiatives. This proactive role enhances the overall effectiveness of communication strategies. P6 shared, "having the CEO's backing means that our PR initiatives receive the attention and resources they need to be successful." This executive endorsement is critical for the success of PR efforts, reflecting the resource-dependence theory that emphasizes the importance of executive support for organizational functions. P9 espoused that:

C-suite relationships are foundational to our success in PR. Their endorsement empowers us to experiment with innovative communication strategies and ensures our participation in decision-making. Lack of engagement from these executives often results in a reactive approach to communication, diminishing our potential impact.

This highlights the empowerment that comes from executive endorsement for innovative strategies and decision-making participation. This observation emulates the argument that executive support is crucial for public relations to function as a strategic partner within organizations (Grunig, 2022).

From another angle, **Communication Channels** between PR and the C-suite was found to also be significant. MM3 observed, "open and regular communication with the C-suite is vital for ensuring

that PR strategies are understood and supported at the highest levels.” This view deepens the importance of maintaining open lines of communication to facilitate mutual understanding and support. P3 added,

regular meetings with the executive team allow us to update them on our PR activities and receive their input, ensuring that our strategies are aligned with the company’s direction. This regular interaction helps maintain alignment and fosters a collaborative environment.

Despite these commonalities, there are variances in the extent to which PR is integrated and supported by the C-suite. MM1 pointed out, “in some cases, PR is not seen as a strategic function and is excluded from high-level discussions, limiting its influence.” This exclusion reflects a more traditional view of PR as a tactical rather than strategic function, limiting its potential impact. P2 lamented, “without a seat at the executive table, our ability to influence strategic decisions is significantly reduced.” This sentiment intensifies the need for greater recognition of PR’s strategic value.

A central point of agreement had to do with the importance of strategic alignment and executive support. MM4 stated, “for PR to be effective, it needs to be integrated into the strategic management framework and receive consistent support from the executive team.” P5 articulated the benefits of strong C-suite relationships. P5 noted that:

Strong relationships with C-suite executives amplify my influence, granting me a platform to advocate for strategic communication’s role in achieving our objectives. When these relationships are robust, I’m included in early strategic discussions, enabling proactive planning. Conversely, a lack of direct engagement with these leaders often relegates PR to a reactive, less influential role.

Similarly, P10 stressed:

Constructive relationships with C-suite executives are instrumental in embedding PR into the strategic heart of the organization. Their support not only legitimizes our role but also provides access to critical information, enhancing our strategic contributions. Conversely, a disconnect with the C-suite can isolate PR, impeding our ability to function effectively.

Furthermore, P8 views on the impact of C-suite relationships on the strategic role of public relations. P8 asserted:

My ability to drive influence is significantly enhanced by strong C-suite relationships. These connections have allowed me to position PR as a strategic partner rather than a support function. Without such relationships, PR risks being side-lined, limiting our capacity to contribute to broader organizational strategies.

These insights reflect the views of Ejaz and Khan (2019), who emphasize the strategic importance of PR in organizational decision-making. Considering these views, it is evident that while there is a shared recognition of PR's potential strategic influence, fully realizing this potential requires addressing structural and cultural barriers within organizations. Scholarly analysis agrees with this, highlighted by Bowen et al. (2022), the need for PR to be deeply embedded within strategic decision-making processes to enhance its effectiveness. Organizations that foster a culture of openness and proactive stakeholder engagement provide a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. This alludes to the notion that the relationship between PR and the C-suite is crucial for its influence and effectiveness within organizations. By fostering deeper integration of PR into organizational decision-making and providing the necessary executive support, companies can better leverage its full potential to navigate complex communication challenges and achieve strategic objectives.

#### 4.4.2 Challenges to Public Relations Influence within the C-Suite

Public relations often faces challenges in exerting influence within the C-Suite due to a lack of understanding and appreciation of its strategic value (Gregory & Macnamara, 2019; Whiting, 2022). According to Gregory and Willis (2022), these challenges include limited access to top executives and the perception of PR as merely a tactical function rather than a strategic asset. When it comes to exploring the above subject matter, managers and PR practitioners alike recognized these challenges but offer varied insights into their root causes and potential solutions. Sub-themes such as **lack of strategic recognition**, **limited access to decision-making**, and **cultural biases** emerge from the analysis.

Under **Lack of Strategic Recognition**, MM1 noted, “PR is often not seen as a core strategic function. It’s frequently relegated to a support role, which limits its influence within the C-suite.” This perception confines PR to a tactical position, undermining its potential to contribute strategically. P2 resounded this sentiment, “our work is often undervalued because it is seen as just managing media relations rather than contributing to strategic planning.” This viewpoint synthesizes with Berger (2013), who argues that PR must be integrated into strategic management to enhance its effectiveness. Further, MM5 suggests, it requires of public relations practitioners to:

Articulate their strategies and outcomes in terms that resonate with executive priorities, such as risk mitigation and market positioning. Moreover, the evolving digital landscape demands that PR practitioners constantly update their skills and strategies, which can be resource-intensive and thus, a barrier to securing a seat at the strategic table.

This supposes integrating public relations contributions with overarching business objectives. This recommendation resonates with Men and Stacks’ (2013) emphasis on the importance of aligning public relations objectives with business goals. Viewing from another lens, **Limited Access to Decision-Making** also was found to hamper PR’s influence. MM3 observed, “PR professionals

are not always included in key decision-making processes, which limits their ability to shape organizational strategy.” This exclusion prevents PR from leveraging its full potential in guiding corporate communications and stakeholder engagement. MM2 in an attempt to explain assert that

PR faces challenges including its perception as merely tactical, not strategic, complicating its integration into core organizational strategies. Demonstrating PR’s ROI and value is tough due to less tangible metrics compared to sales or revenue, leading to difficulties in proving its impact.

Echoing the implication of this sidelining, P6 shared that, “our capacity to impact decisions is greatly limited in the absence of direct access to the executive team.” This challenge reflects the resource-dependence theory, which suggests that access to top management is crucial for enhancing PR’s strategic impact. From another standpoint, **Cultural Biases** against PR further turned out to impede its influence. MM4 in this regard remarked, “there is a persistent cultural bias that views PR as a soft function, not essential to the hard-nosed business of strategy and operations.” This cultural perception diminishes the perceived value of PR, limiting its integration into strategic discussions. P10 added, “the organizational culture often doesn’t support the strategic potential of PR, viewing it as a reactive rather than proactive function.” This cultural resistance reverberates the findings of Bajalia (2020), who highlight the impact of organizational culture on PR’s effectiveness.

Even with these barriers, there are situations where PR has successfully navigated these barriers.

P5 noted

in organizations where PR is valued and included in strategic discussions, its impact is significantly greater. This is often a result of having leaders who understand and appreciate the strategic value of communication.

This success rebounds the importance of executive support and recognition. MM5 observed, “when PR is included in high-level meetings and its recommendations are taken seriously, it can drive significant positive outcomes. Unfortunately, this level of inclusion is rare.” These standpoints highlight the potential for PR to influence strategy when given the necessary support and access. The data also highlighted discrepancies in the integration of PR within the C-suite. MM2 pointed out, “the influence of PR varies greatly depending on the organization. In some companies, it is a strategic partner, while in others, it remains a peripheral function.” P8 noted, “our role is often dependent on the CEO’s understanding and appreciation of PR. Without their support, it’s challenging to be effective.” Then again, P10’s experience points to a recurring challenge:

I find myself least influential in matters considered ‘purely business or financial.’ For instance, a decision on cost-cutting directly impacted our campaign budgets but was made without PR consultation. The subsequent reduction in campaign effectiveness could have been mitigated had the implications been discussed beforehand.

This perception gap signifies a broader industry challenge of articulating and demonstrating public relations’ full value proposition (Mithani & OBrien, 2020). These insights reflect the varying degrees of recognition and support that PR receives across different organizations.

Convergence occurs where both managers and practitioners agree on the importance of strategic integration and executive support for PR. MM2 expressed that “for PR to be truly effective, it must be seen as a strategic partner and included in the decision-making process from the beginning.” P7 assented stating that “our influence is maximized when we have direct access to the executive team and are involved in strategic planning.” These insights align with Sriramesh and Verčič (2019), who emphasize the strategic importance of PR in organizational decision-making. Probing these

views, it is clear that while there is a shared recognition of PR's potential strategic influence, fully realizing this potential requires addressing structural and cultural barriers within organizations. This rebounds the need for PR to be deeply embedded within strategic decision-making processes to enhance its effectiveness.

As a result, the findings point to organizations that foster a culture of openness and proactive stakeholder engagement as providing a fertile ground for PR to thrive and contribute meaningfully to strategic goals. This means that challenges to PR's influence within the C-suite are multifaceted, encompassing lack of strategic recognition, limited access to decision-making, and cultural biases. The findings advocate for a paradigm shift in how public relations is perceived and integrated within the corporate hierarchy in line with Tandoh et al.'s (2022) observation. By fostering deeper integration of PR into organizational decision-making and shifting cultural perceptions, companies can better leverage its full potential to navigate complex communication challenges and achieve strategic objectives.

#### **4.4.3 Facilitators and Barriers to Influence**

Facilitators to public relations influence include strong leadership support and integration into strategic planning, which enhance public relations' ability to shape organizational narratives (Reber & Berger, 2006; Badi et al., 2020). Neill (2015) in support agrees that barriers, such as limited resources and inadequate recognition of public relations' strategic role, hinder its effectiveness and diminish its impact on organizational outcomes. This study aimed to ascertain how organizational structure or culture either supports or impedes public relations practitioners' efforts to influence decision-making processes. The data hinted that participants identified various

facilitators and barriers that impact PR's strategic role. Sub-themes such as **organizational structure, organizational culture, and professional competence** emerged.

Justifying **Organizational Structure** as being crucial for enhancing PR's influence, MM2 remarked that

Organizational structures and cultures that promote collaboration, transparency, innovation, and data-driven decision-making are more likely to support PR's efforts to influence decision-making processes. Conversely, structures and cultures characterized by hierarchy, silos, resistance to change, and a lack of emphasis on data may impede PR's influence.

This angle calls attention to the importance of executive endorsement, which is essential for the success of PR efforts. P5 corroborated this by stating, "the CEO's backing is instrumental. When the top leadership values PR, it cascades down the organization, giving us the leverage to implement strategic initiatives effectively." This view resonates with the resource-dependence theory, which emphasizes the critical role of executive support for organizational functions.

**Organizational Culture** plays a significant role in either facilitating or hindering PR's influence. MM3 observed, "A culture that values open communication and stakeholder engagement creates a fertile ground for PR to thrive. It allows for proactive rather than reactive communication strategies." This view highlights the impact of organizational culture on PR effectiveness. P10 added, "In a supportive culture, PR can act as a strategic advisor, contributing to decision-making processes and enhancing the organization's overall communication strategy." Conversely, MM4 discussed structural impediments and cultural support:

Our organizational structure sometimes impedes direct communication and collaboration across different units. This can dilute the efforts of PR to influence decision-making at the highest levels, as information and insights may not flow seamlessly. On the other hand, our culture of openness and stakeholder engagement does provide a supportive backdrop for PR

Initiatives, encouraging cross-functional projects that can enhance PR's strategic impact.

This cultural resistance illuminates the findings of Neill (2012), who discuss the influence of organizational culture on PR's role. Additionally, **Professional Competence** of PR practitioners is another critical facilitator. P6 stated that

our ability to influence is directly related to our expertise and competence. When we demonstrate a deep understanding of the business and provide strategic insights, we earn the respect and trust of the executive team.

This belief illuminates the importance of professional skills and knowledge in enhancing PR's influence. MM1 remarked, "PR professionals who are knowledgeable and can provide valuable insights are more likely to be included in strategic discussions and have their recommendations taken seriously." This view is supported by Pinkleton (2015), who emphasizes the need for PR professionals to possess strategic management skills to enhance their effectiveness. Despite these facilitators, several barriers hinder PR's influence. MM5 pointed out

Structural limitations, such as not having a direct reporting line to the CEO, can significantly reduce PR's influence. The hierarchical nature of our organizational structure poses challenges to fluid communication and swift decision-making, which can limit PR's influence in real-time strategic discussions. It confines PR to a tactical role rather than a strategic one.

This structural barrier limits the potential of PR to contribute to broader organizational strategies. P2 noted, "without direct access to the C-suite, our ability to influence strategic decisions is significantly constrained. This lack of access is a major hindrance to our effectiveness." This challenge reflects the resource-dependence theory, which suggests that access to top management is crucial for enhancing PR's strategic impact.

Additionally, **Perceptual Barriers** are significant hindrances. MM4 remarked, “there is a persistent perception that PR is only about managing media relations and not about strategic management. This limited view restricts the potential influence of PR.” P8 shared a similar sentiment, “The undervaluing of PR’s strategic potential often leads to its late involvement in projects, limiting its ability to shape outcomes from the start.” These perceptual barriers reduce the recognition of PR’s strategic value, integrating with Grunig and Hunt’s (1984) argument for deeper integration of PR into strategic management.

These findings highlight how the design and ethos of an organization can either support or obstruct public relations practitioners’ ability to shape decisions. It points out the importance for companies to adopt structures and cultures that enable public relations teams to play a more strategic role as Arun et al. (2021) and Yeo and Pang (2017) illuminate. Key to this integration are practices like fostering teamwork, providing adequate resources, valuing data in decision-making, and maintaining an open environment. Conversely, the presence of rigid hierarchies, compartmentalization, and resistance to change stands as major obstacles to the influence of public relations, emphasizing the critical need for businesses to be more flexible and responsive in today’s dynamic market landscape.

#### **4.5 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented an in-depth analysis of the data, revealing insightful trends and perspectives from public relations practitioners and decision-makers. It was observed that public relations practitioners advocate for a more strategic integration within the corporate strategy, emphasizing their role in crisis management and strategic decision-making. Meanwhile, decision-makers displayed a range of views, from acknowledging public relations strategic value to viewing it as

primarily a communication tool. The analysis also uncovered a consensus on the importance of public relations in reputation management and stakeholder engagement. The chapter concluded that despite differing views, there is a shared recognition of the need for public relations to play a more integrated role in organizational strategy and governance.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing key findings and offering targeted recommendations based on the data collected. It connects insights from the research to practical suggestions aimed at strengthening the role of public relations in the C-Suite, addressing any identified gaps. The goal is to enhance the practice of public relations within organizational frameworks, contributing positively to the fields of corporate governance and strategic communication. The chapter ends with forward-thinking strategies to advance the practice of public relations, underscoring its significance in shaping corporate strategies and outcomes.

#### **5.1 Summary of Key Findings**

The aim of this study was to investigate the dynamics of public relations (PR) inclusion in the dominant coalition of organizations. It focused on its role in strategic decision-making, challenges faced by practitioners, and potential strategies for enhancing PR's influence and impact in the contemporary business environment. The objectives were to explore how PR practitioners and decision-makers perceive public relations and its influence, analyze how practitioners achieve strategic influence within their organizations, and identify factors that either facilitate or hinder the ability of PR practitioners to achieve influence and power within the C-Suite.

The study revealed that PR is essential for building and maintaining positive relationships between organizations and their stakeholders. However, PR practitioners often lack power and influence during strategic decision-making processes. This was evident in the Ghanaian context, where PR is rarely practiced at the strategic level despite its recognized importance (Anani-Bossman, 2021).

The study found that the perception of PR by both practitioners and decision-makers is crucial in determining its influence within the C-Suite. PR is often seen as a tactical rather than a strategic function, limiting its potential impact on organizational decisions (Reber & Berger, 2006).

PR practitioners achieve strategic influence by aligning their communication strategies with organizational goals. This requires demonstrating the value of PR in terms of return on investment (ROI) and its contribution to the overall success of the organization (Tam et al., 2020). The study highlighted the importance of building strong relationships with C-Suite executives, as trust and credibility are essential for PR practitioners to gain influence (Meng & Berger, 2019). Additionally, the integration of PR into decision-making processes was found to be beneficial, allowing practitioners to provide valuable insights that align with communication strategies (Marsen, 2019).

Several factors were identified as either facilitating or hindering the ability of PR practitioners to achieve influence within the C-Suite. Organizational culture and structure play a significant role; open and collaborative environments tend to prioritize PR's strategic counsel (Lee & Queenie Li, 2020). Skills and competencies in strategic communication, reputation management, and media relations were also crucial for enhancing PR's value within the organization (Argenti, 2017). Conversely, challenges such as the lack of recognition by top management, resistance from line managers, insufficient resource allocation, and negative perceptions about information leakage were found to hinder PR's influence (Tandoh et al., 2022).

The study's findings are consistent with existing literature on the strategic role of PR in organizations. It underscores the importance of PR in managing and enhancing an organization's reputation, providing strategic insights, and ensuring that the firm's messages and actions align with its goals and values (Leonard, 2019). The research also highlights the need for PR

practitioners to be included in the dominant coalition to effectively influence organizational strategies and decision-making processes (Grunig & Grunig, 2000).

The study emphasizes the critical role of PR in organizational success and the challenges practitioners face in achieving strategic influence. The findings suggest that organizations should prioritize the strategic integration of PR, provide adequate resources and support, and recognize the value of PR in achieving organizational objectives. These insights have important implications for both theory and practice. Theoretically, the study contributes to the understanding of PR's role in strategic management and decision-making. Practically, it offers recommendations for organizations to enhance the influence and impact of PR practitioners within the C-Suite.

Further, the study suggests that organizations should adopt a more strategic approach to PR, recognizing its importance in building and maintaining relationships with stakeholders, managing reputation, and contributing to organizational success. By empowering PR practitioners and integrating them into the decision-making process, organizations can enhance their overall effectiveness and achieve their strategic goals.

In addition, the implications for theory include a deeper comprehension of the power subtleties within organizations and the role of PR in influencing these dynamics. For practice, the study offers practical recommendations for enhancing the strategic role of PR, including the need for continuous professional development, building strong relationships with key decision-makers, and demonstrating the value of PR through measurable outcomes. These insights can help organizations navigate the complex landscape of strategic communication and ensure that PR practitioners have the influence and power needed to drive positive organizational outcomes.

## **5.2 Conclusion**

Power and Influence in the Boardroom encapsulates the dynamic interplay of leadership, decision-making, and strategic direction at the highest echelons of an organization, highlighting the crucial role that governance structures and executive interactions play in shaping corporate policy and direction. Within the corporate space, the influence of public relations in the C-Suite emerges as a pivotal force in steering organizational narrative, managing stakeholder perceptions, and facilitating effective communication strategies. The essence of public relations role at this level lies in its capacity to align corporate messaging with strategic business goals, thereby enhancing reputation management and contributing to the organization's overall success. This stresses the significance of public relations as not just a tool for crisis management or media relations but as a strategic partner in the executive suite, integral to navigating the complexities of modern corporate environments.

This study therefore focused on probing the pivotal role of public relations in shaping power and influence within the boardroom, with a particular focus on its impact and interplay within the C-Suite. The essence of public relations as a strategic partner in organizational leadership and decision-making processes emerges as a central theme. This exploration is crucial, given the evolving dynamics of corporate governance and the increasing importance of reputation management in today's digital and globalized marketplace. The significance of public relations in navigating boardroom dynamics cannot be overstated.

In the context of strategic decision-making and crisis management, public relations practitioners are not merely communicators but strategic advisors who guide the C-Suite in managing stakeholder relationships, corporate reputation, and organizational narratives. The ability of public relations to influence boardroom decisions and organizational strategy marks its critical role in

safeguarding an organization's reputation and ensuring its long-term sustainability. The influence of public relations within the boardroom is essential for navigating the complexities of the Ghanaian market, where reputation and stakeholder trust are invaluable assets. As Ghanaian companies seek to expand their reach and compete on a global stage, the strategic role of public relations becomes even more critical. Effective public relations practices can drive sustainable growth, enhance corporate reputation, and build resilient organizations capable of thriving in the face of challenges.

### **5.3 Recommendations**

Centred on the aims and outcomes of the study, three key recommendations emerge to heighten the influence of public relations within the C-Suite and ensure its strategic integration in organizational decision-making processes as follows:

1. First, organizations should formalize the role of public relations practitioners as strategic advisors within the corporate governance framework. This means giving PR practitioners a seat at the table in high-level strategy meetings and decision-making processes. By doing so, organizations can ensure that strategic communications and reputation management are integral to the planning and execution of corporate strategies. This integration will enhance their ability to navigate complex stakeholder landscapes and market dynamics effectively.
2. Second, there is a pressing need for continuous professional development programs focused on enhancing the business acumen of public relations practitioners. These programs should cover topics like corporate finance, strategic management, and organizational behaviour. By equipping PR practitioners with a deeper understanding of business and finance, they can offer more relevant and strategic advice to the C-Suite. This

alignment will strengthen the connection between public relations strategies and overall organizational goals.

3. Third, to maximize the strategic impact of public relations, organizations should foster a culture of collaboration between public relations practitioners and other departments, including finance, marketing, and operations. Encouraging cross-functional teams and projects will ensure a more cohesive and integrated approach to managing corporate reputation, stakeholder engagement, and crisis management. This collaborative approach will facilitate a more holistic view of organizational challenges and opportunities, allowing for more effective and coordinated strategic responses.
4. Finally, practitioners should take advantage of the current digital evolution powered by AI to enhance their strategic and professional skills. AI tools can provide valuable insights into market trends, stakeholder behaviour, and media sentiment. By leveraging AI, PR practitioners can develop more data-driven strategies, improve their decision-making processes, and enhance their ability to predict and respond to emerging issues. This technological integration will not only boost their strategic impact but also solidify their role as essential contributors to the C-Suite.

Implementing the above suggested recommendations can significantly enhance the strategic role and impact of public relations within organizations, ensuring that it is recognized not just as a tool for communication, but as a critical component of strategic management and corporate governance.

## **5.4 Areas for Future Research**

Future researchers could delve deeper into how public relations practitioners influence strategic planning and decision-making within the C-Suite. This research area would benefit from a qualitative approach, exploring case studies of successful PR interventions that have shaped organizational strategy, potentially offering a model for how public relations can be more effectively integrated into strategic decision-making processes.

Also, given the identified need for public relations practitioners to enhance their business acumen, future studies should investigate the specific training and development programs that would best equip practitioners for their evolving role. This could involve surveying public relations practitioners to identify gaps in their current knowledge and skills, as well as designing and testing targeted training programs focused on strategic management, financial literacy, and organizational behaviour.

Alternatively, there is a clear need for further research into the mechanisms and outcomes of collaborative practices between public relations and other departments within organizations. Studies could examine how these collaborations are structured and managed, the challenges they face, and the impact on organizational outcomes such as reputation management, crisis response, and stakeholder engagement. This research could provide valuable insights into best practices for fostering a culture of collaboration and integration that leverages the strategic worth of public relations across organizational functions.

These areas of future research are crucial for advancing the understanding of public relations strategic role within organizations and for developing frameworks that can enhance the effectiveness and full integration of public relations in achieving organizational goals.

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**APPENDIX 1**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE**  
**INTERVIEW GUIDE –DECISION MAKERS**

**TOPIC:** Power and Influence in the Boardroom: An Examination of Public Relations Influence within the C-Suite

This study is an academic exercise that aims to delve into and comprehend the involvement of decision-makers within an organization, focusing on their authority and the dynamics of influence within the C-Suite. I would be very grateful if you would help me conduct the interview to obtain the needed information for the study. I assure you of my utmost confidentiality because the data to be collected is solely for academic purposes.

**Section A**

(Note: Wording will vary slightly in some sections to be more appropriate to the role of CEO.)

**Warm-up:**

Tell me about your role in this organization.

- a. Can you tell me about yourself? Your current role in this organization, age range, work experience, how long have you been in this role?
- b. In what types of senior executive decisions are you likely to provide counsel, and how would you characterize the scope of your involvement?

**Section B**

**RO1: Decision-makers perception of PR and PR's influence/power in strategic decisions**

*I would next like to discuss the role of public relations in your organization because I am interested in public relations' involvement in organization problem-solving*

1. In the first place, can you tell me about your understanding of public relations?
2. Based on your definition, how would you describe the role of public relations within your organization
3. Does this description fit what you would describe as the ideal role for public relations or not?

**Prompt:** If not, what would you change?

4. Within your perspective, how would you describe the position of public relations within the organization? Is it part of the executive decision-making body? **Prompt:** if not, where do you think PR/communication's position should be?
5. In your view, what key components do you believe make public relations most effective? Is this the ideal situation in your organization?

**RO2: Analysis of how practitioners achieve strategic influence within organizations**

6. Generally, how will you define influence or power within organizations? How will you describe the influence of public relations in this organization?
7. How would you describe the organizational culture regarding communication and decision-making processes?
7. Generally, how would you describe the public relations/communication department position within the organization? (Essential to organizational success, anticipates & deals with conflicting issues, irreplaceable, etc.)
8. In your organization, how seriously do senior managers take the recommendations of the public relations and communication department?
9. How likely is it, within your organization, that communication would be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning?
10. In your view, when is public relations most influential? Can you give me an example or examples of a time when public relations was included in executive decision-making in a key way or when public relations played a crucial role in addressing a key strategic issue? What was the role of public relations in this situation? What strategies/tactics did public relations use to gain influence (if any)?
11. When is public relations least influential? Can you give an example or examples of a time when public relations was excluded from deliberations or not optimally involved in resolving a key strategic issue when it should have been?
12. What do you believe public relations practitioners can do to play the role they should play?

### **RO3: Factors that facilitate or hinder practitioner's ability to achieve influence**

13. Are there any specific challenges PR practitioners face in gaining influence within the C-suite? If so, what are they and why?
14. What do you perceive as the primary facilitators in public relations role that enable the function to exert influence within the C-Suite?
15. In your experience, how do relationships with members of the C-Suite contribute to or inhibit public relations capacity to drive influence within the organization?
16. How does the organizational structure or culture either support or impede your efforts to influence decision-making processes?

### **Wrap-Up Question**

17. Is there a question I should have asked you that you'd like to address that would benefit this study?

I want to thank you for participating in this study. If you have any additional thoughts or questions, please contact me by phone or email.

Thank You!

## **INTERVIEW GUIDE- SENIOR PR PRACTITIONER**

**TOPIC:** Power and Influence in the Boardroom: An Examination of Public Relations Influence within the C-Suite

This study is an academic exercise that seeks to explore and understand the power and influence dynamics of public relations practitioners, and how practitioners can enact such influence within the C-Suite. I will be very grateful if you would help me conduct the interview to obtain the needed information for the study. I assure you of my utmost confidentiality because the data to be collected is solely for academic purposes.

### **Section A** **General questions**

Kindly tell me about yourself:

- a. Your age/ highest level of education/ current position
- b. Do you have any certificate in public relations and communication?
- c. Number of years you have practiced as a practitioner
- d. Within your organization, what are the key activities that you are responsible for?

### **Section B**

#### **RO1: Practitioners perception of PR and its influence/power in strategic decisions**

1. As a senior practitioner, how would you describe the role that you believe public relations ideally should serve in an organization
2. Based on your description, would you say this is the reality within your organization at this point in time or not?
  - **Prompts:** If not, why not? What do you think would need to change in your organization to enable public relations to fulfil what you've just described as the ideal role?
  - **Prompts:** If yes, what are the key factors enabling public relations to play this role? Has it always been this way? If not, why not? What do you think enabled public relations to evolve to this role?

3. What can you tell me about how key senior executives in this organization view the role of public relations? Can you tell me who constitutes the key executives and then elaborate on how you think they view the role? Are there differences in how each views this role?
4. Do you consider public relations to be a top management position? Who do you report to? Why do you report to this person?

**RO2: Analysis of how practitioners achieve strategic influence within organizations**

18. How would you define influence/ power? What do you think about the power or influence in public relations practice?
19. How would you describe the organizational culture regarding communication and decision-making processes?
20. Are you involved in the organization's strategic decision-making/planning process?  
If yes.....How? If no.....Why?
21. Generally, how would you describe the public relations/communication department position within the organization? (Essential to organizational success, anticipates and deals with conflicting issues, irreplaceable, etc.)
22. In your organization, how seriously do senior managers take the recommendations of the public relations and communication department?
23. How likely is it, within your organization, that communication would be invited to senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning?
24. In your view, when are you most influential? Can you give me an example or examples of a time when you were included in executive decision-making in a key way or when you played a crucial role in addressing a key strategic issue? What was your role in this situation? What strategies/tactics did you use to gain influence (if any)
25. When are you, as a practitioner, least influential? Can you give an example or examples of a time when you were excluded from deliberations or not optimally involved in resolving a key strategic issue when you should have been?
26. What do you believe public relations practitioners can do to play the role that they should play?

### **RO3: Factors that facilitate or hinder practitioner's ability to achieve influence**

27. Are there any specific challenges PR practitioners face in gaining influence within the C-suite? If so, what are they and why? (e.g. management style, knowledge and understanding of PR and communication, organizational culture, reporting relationship etc.).
28. What do you perceive as the primary facilitators in your role that enable you to exert influence within the C-Suite?
29. In your experience, how do relationships with members of the C-Suite contribute to or inhibit your capacity to drive influence within the organization?
30. How does the organizational structure or culture either support or impede your efforts to influence decision-making processes?

### **Wrap-Up Question**

31. Is there a question I should have asked you that you would like to address that would benefit this study?

I want to thank you for participating in this study. If you have any additional thoughts or questions, please contact me by phone or email.

Thank you!