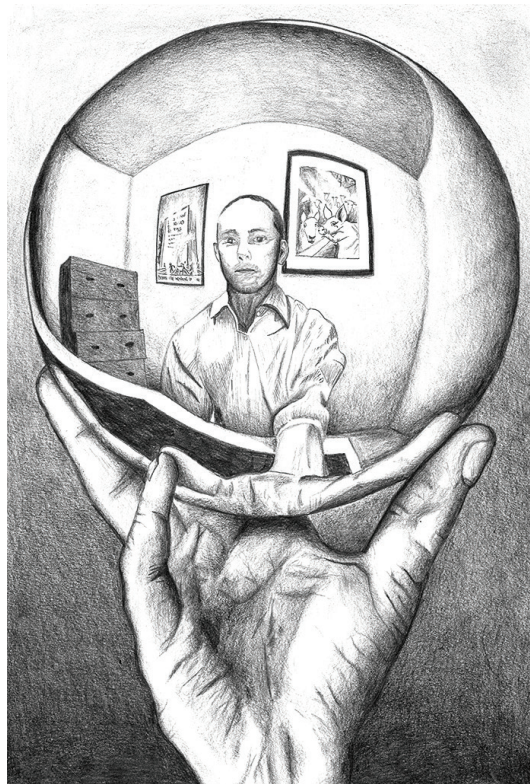


Markus Mykkänen

The Contribution of Public Relations to Organisational Decision Making and Autopoiesis of Organisations

The Perspective of the Luhmannian
Social System Paradigm



JYVÄSKYLÄ STUDIES IN HUMANITIES 326

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ABSTRACT

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This doctoral dissertation investigates the contribution of public relations professionals to organisational decision-making processes and autopoiesis of organisations. The research approach utilises Niklas Luhmann's functional method approach, regarded as an observational tool to create a distinction between problems and solutions.

The research progresses through three parts: Part 1, the preliminary empirical work; Part 2, insights gained from academic articles and reports, and Part 3, empirical work on the perceptions of professionals. This qualitative, content-oriented, interpretive research approach concludes that public relations (PR) is a responsive, managing and adapting function in organisational decision making. In addition to responsibilities in gathering, interpreting and distributing of information, PR professionals counsel, manage the process, and implement the outcomes of decision-making processes. Overall, PR contributes to decision making and autopoiesis, the self-production of organisations on three levels: operational, tactical and strategic.

As a central conclusion, this dissertation presents a model to clarify the contribution of PR to organisational decision making. This autopoiesis contribution model emphasises the internal operations of organisations and describes how PR as a reflective function contributes through various decision-making strategies. The results of the studies and the model provide a foundation for a better understanding of PR's function in organisational decision making and further enable professionals to support organisational autopoiesis.

Keywords: decision making, autopoiesis, contribution, public relations.

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PREFACE

This dissertation is a result of my professional interest into public relations, organisational decision making and communication management. My theoretical interests led to a systematic investigation into how public relations (PR) professionals contribute to organisational decision making. The original inspiration to study the topic came from my experiences in daily work as a PR professional. During the dissertation journey of almost seven years, I have found the phenomenon to be more complex and multidimensional than I previously thought. Moreover, the topic has also proved to be important and relevant to current practice. While journeying the path of doctoral studies and exploring the research field of public relations, I have been supported by several people who I owe my gratitude to.

First and foremost, I want to thank my professor Marita Vos. During these years she has taught and guided me to become a researcher, supported my ideas and methods, given me constructive criticism and provided me with tools to become successful in researching. She has also given me other project possibilities outside of my dissertation to explore and find new ideas and openings for future studies in the PR field. Thus, I have grown to be an independent scholar.

I want to thank the doctoral school of communication studies, VITRO, along with professor Mikko Lehtonen and research manager Sanna Kivimäki from the University of Tampere, for making it possible for me to travel across Europe and participate in congresses and PhD seminars of the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA). I also want to thank the fellow VITRO students for expanding my knowledge of different communication fields and sharing their views of my work and expressing their support during the years 2012-2015.

I want to express my gratitude to EUPRERA PhD seminar organisers and participants. During the three individual seminars in Istanbul, Barcelona and Oslo I got ideas, useful comments and constructive criticism. All these helped me to further define and deepen my research work. The seminars also gave me insights into different cultures and ways to see communicative phenomena around the world. I'm also very grateful for the feedback received in local doctoral seminars by other doctoral students and professor Vilma Luoma-aho, and international scholars when presenting papers in several seminars and conferences throughout the whole research process.

I especially want to thank my colleague researcher Aleksi Koski for supporting me and listening to my ideas and worries, helping me to develop my strategic thinking and lending me books that had a vital role in this dissertation. Moreover, the time spent on discussing research, society, communication and the "games of boards" have further supported my scientific and critical thinking. I also want to thank my colleague research coordinator Heikki Kuutti for being a helpful and guiding co-teacher in our media relations course for over 6 years.

I would like to express my gratitude to the reviewers of this dissertation, associate professor Inger Jensen and adjunct professor Elisa Juholin. Your encouragement meant much to me and your constructive feedback, comments and useful suggestions have made the overall work much better in quality.

I would also like to thank lecturer Kirsi Silonsaari for the language checking of my dissertation manuscript and papers, editing comments and lingual advice. Many thanks, also, to lecturer Elina Jokinen, who has helped me on several occasions to become a more fluent science communicator. Special thanks to my friend and former fellow student Jukka Matilainen for bringing to life my idea of the cover picture of this dissertation. All my dear friends who have repeatedly asked or wondered about what I am researching deserve their share of my thankfulness as well.

I am deeply thankful to my beloved family for supporting me in my endeavours to realise my dreams and goals. My mother, especially, has encouraged me to study and learn new things. My sister, Mari, has also helped and supported me for as long as I can remember. Vilja and Eemeli, hopefully your uncle's achievement encourages you to pursue your dreams and goals in life, too.

This study was carried out at the University of Jyväskylä, Department of Languages and Communication studies during the years 2010-2017. I want to thank the staff of the department and express my gratitude to senior lecturer emeritus Pertti Hurme and professor Epp Lauk as the previous heads of the department for supporting my dissertation. I also want to thank the Publishing Unit for their smooth and friendly service in finalising the layout of my thesis and helping me in the printing process.

This research was funded by grants from the University of Jyväskylä, the Faculty of Humanities and the Department of Communication, from VITRO doctoral school of communication and from the Finnish Cultural Foundation's Central Finland Regional Fund. Thanks to all the funders and referees who supported my funding applications. At last, I would like to express my gratitude to professor Kaja Tampere, who originally encouraged me to step on the path of doctoral studies.

Jyväskylä, 30.11.2017
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1 INTRODUCTION

“Communication duplicates reality.” — Niklas Luhmann

Organisations provide the settings for various processes. For instance, communication and decision making are highly formalised in organisations, and considered part of a complex set of social processes (Scott and Davis, 2015). Making decisions and forming strategies in organisations is undertaken by the dominant coalition in the organisation, a group which has the power to make plans, and direct the actions, tasks and functions of an organisation (White and Dozier, 1992).

The external environment of organisations consists of publics and other organisations that influence the operating environment and, to some extent, controls organisational activities (Jahansoozi, 2006). This creates uncertainties that challenge organisational management (White and Mazur, 1995). In the past decades, it has been suggested that PR professionals should be part of the organisation’s dominant coalition to contribute as a strategic partner to the success of the organisation (e.g. Dozier, Grunig, and Grunig, 1995). The contribution of Public Relations (PR) to strategy-making has been considered to contain helping to collect information and interpreting it, and communicating with strategically important stakeholders (Gregory, 2008).

In addition to the strategic perspective of decision making by the dominant coalition in organisations, decisions play another significant role, too. Organisations are locations where decisions and decision making concentrate, forming a history and routines. They create internal stability by establishing roles, positions, processes and tasks. Organisations are regarded as systems (Luhmann, 2003), consisting of elements, which are affected by and in turn affect others (Scott and Davis, 2015), and which need to make the decision-making process visible. Decisions themselves are not observable which means that organisations have to supply them visibility (Luhmann, 2000), while interacting dynamically with their environments (Morgan, 1998). Communication is important for organisations and their well-being, because through communication organisations organise and

structure themselves and adapt to the changing environment, which is built by economic, political, cultural and social dimensions (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988).

Communication enables that organisations can remain adaptive, open and viable (Kennan and Hazleton, 2006). But together with organisations, PR professionals face an environment where the only stable thing is change, and the only certainty is uncertainty (Bauman, 2013). Distinguishing how organisations, as a system, differ from their environment is based on observation and it is pursued for higher purposes, e.g. for interests in control or in learning (Luhmann, 1995). Differences between a system's behaviour and what is expected in the environment can invite adjustment of the processes within the system. The observation produces meanings, which by using communication are enriched to organisational actions.

This dissertation is dedicated to clarifying the contribution of PR professionals to organisational decision making. More understanding is needed about how PR professionals affect organisational decision making and what contribution is made by them to organisations' strategies. Recent studies have shown (e.g. European Communicator Monitor, 2016) that linking business strategies and communication is one of the key challenges for PR professionals.

It is often unclear what it entails to be involved in organisational decision making. This chapter introduces the topic by positioning the study within the field of PR and outlining the research aim, the process and the thesis structure. First, the study is positioned at more detailed level and the research gap the dissertation addresses will be introduced. Secondly, the research process and the focus of the studies and how these were reported, are shortly described. Last, the structure of the thesis is summarised.

1.1 Positioning the study and research gap

In this dissertation, PR is understood as an umbrella term representing the management function that includes both internal and external communication of an organisation. The dissertation acknowledges PR as a multidisciplinary discipline. Therefore, the theoretical framework of the thesis combines three fields of research: management, sociology and public relations. Although the empirical part of this work concentrates on the practical level, it utilises management and sociological theories with Niklas Luhmann's social system and autopoiesis perspectives, and places them into the PR research context. The multidisciplinary approach supports a wider understanding of this complex research topic.

This dissertation focuses on how PR professionals contribute to organisational decision-making processes and autopoiesis of organisations. To explore the topic, the research approach is built on a multidisciplinary theoretical framework concentrating on decision making and system theories. Theoretically, the topic is further investigated discussing sensemaking and enactment in decision making. Finally, the theoretical basis for the contribution of PR explores scholarly views on the role of PR in organisations.

The empirical data were collected in Finland and intend to fill the research gap regarding how in practice, contemporary Finnish professionals contribute to organisational decision making. It does not focus on how decision-making processes work, or how PR professionals make decisions. Instead, the empirical work endeavours to gain a better understanding of what kind of roles PR professionals fulfil, what kind of tasks they have, and what kind of capabilities professionals in their view need in order to contribute to organisational decision making. Together this work formulates a theoretical and empirical framework for the analysis of the PR function and its contribution to organisational decision making and autopoiesis.

1.2 Research aims and process

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of PR's contribution to organisational decision making and autopoiesis of organisations and social systems. Firstly, this aim is approached by presenting a theoretical framework for organisational decision making, system theory and autopoiesis of organisations. Secondly, the contribution of PR in practice is discussed from the perspectives of sensemaking and enactment together with theoretical insights of PR roles, tasks and capabilities. Thirdly, the empirical findings of three independent studies present how in practice PR professionals contribute to organisational decision making. This synthesis shell reports and evaluates the inputs of three independent parts and compiles the findings of all six papers. The research process of this dissertation included several sub-studies that each had a different focus (Figure 1).



FIGURE 1 The research process

The initial interest in the topic in the preliminary phase, Part 1, began with autopoiesis, organisational decision making and decision communication during a Master's thesis. After graduation, a more specific research focus was formulated around the theoretical background, findings and conclusions of the master thesis. The emphasis was then shifted to the contribution of PR to organisational decision making. Based on the new approach, Part 2 comprised insights gained from academic articles and reports. The last phase, Part 3, concentrated on the

empirical work based on qualitative interviews of Finnish PR professionals. The focus of each study is explained in Table 1.

TABLE 1 The focus of the studies and how they were reported.

| Focus of the studies | Titles |
|--|--|
| <p><i>Part 1. Preliminary empirical work:</i> 1. Decision making in organisations – a study within one organisation</p> | <p>Paper I. Mykkänen, M. & Tampere, K. 2014. Organisational decision making: The Luhmannian decision communication perspective. <i>Journal of Business Studies Quarterly</i>, 4(5), 131-146.</p> |
| <p><i>Part 2. Insights gained in academic articles and reports:</i> 2a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making – in literature 2b. Role of PR professionals in organisational decision making – in academic reports 2c. Role of PR professionals in decision making – in crisis situations</p> | <p>Paper II. Mykkänen, M. & Vos, M. 2015. The contribution of Public Relations to organisational decision making: insights from the literature. <i>Public Relations Journal</i>, 9(2).</p> <p>Secondary analysis of European Communicator Monitor reports 2007-2016 (unpublished study by Mykkänen, reported in Chapter 3 and 4.2).</p> <p>Paper III. Mykkänen, M. & Vos, M. 2015. Clarifying the Role of Communication Experts in CBRN Crises. In Schmidt, S. & Vos, M. (Eds.), <i>Behaviour and Communication in CBRN Crises: Findings and Recommendations in Case of Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear Attacks on Society</i>. Pabst-SciencePublishers, 110-116.</p> |
| <p><i>Part 3. Empirical work on perceptions of professionals:</i> 3a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making – expert views 3b. Tasks of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views 3c. Skills and competencies of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views</p> | <p>Paper IV. Mykkänen, M. 2016. Communication Professionals and Organisational Decision making: A Finnish Study of Practitioner Roles. In Bronn, P., Zerfass, A. & Romenti, S. (eds), <i>The Management Game of Communication (Advances in Public Relations and Communication Management, Volume 1)</i>, Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 143-161.</p> <p>Paper V. Mykkänen, M. 2017. Clarifying Communication Professionals' Tasks in Supporting Organisational Decision Making. <i>The International Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities Invention</i>, 4(5), 3460-3468.</p> <p>Paper VI. Mykkänen & Vos, M. 2017. (forthcoming). Clarifying the Skills and Competencies in Organisational Decision Making - a Finnish Study. In Van Ruler, B., Smit, I., Romenti, S. & Ihlen, O. (eds), <i>How Strategic Communication Shapes Value and Innovation in Society (Advances in Public Relations and Communication Management, Volume 2)</i> Emerald Group Publishing Limited.</p> |

The starting phase of this dissertation, reported in Part 1, concentrated on the preliminary empirical work. Based on a case study within one specific organisation, the main research question concentrated on clarifying decision communication and its meaning to organisations. Decision communication (based on Luhmann, 1995) contains all communication related to a process of connecting decisions to another decision.

In the second phase, Part 2, several insights were gained by studying academic articles and reports. Three individual studies were used. These studies and their research questions mainly focused on gaining a better understanding of the roles of PR in decision making and identifying possible emerging trends. First, the topic was explored from the perspective of previous studies reported in scientific articles between 2002-2012. Secondly, with a secondary analysis of European Communication Monitor surveys. Finally, with a review of PR's contribution to CBRN crisis preparedness.

In the empirical phase, Part 3, qualitative interviews were conducted with Finnish PR professionals. The research questions concentrated on clarifying PR professionals' contribution to decision-making processes. Three individual topics were investigated: the roles, the tasks and the capabilities of professionals in decision-making contribution. All research questions are presented in detail in Chapter 3.2.

The studies have been reported in six papers, of which four were co-authored. The thesis author was the first author of the papers I-III and VI, and thus responsible for preparing the research plans, collection and the analysis of the data.

In paper I Mykkänen was the main responsible author writing the article and the contact during the review process and revisions, whereas Tampere contributed to the writing and revisions. In paper II Mykkänen was the main author responsible for writing the article, and the contact during the review process and revisions, whereas Vos contributed to the research design, writing and revisions. In paper III Mykkänen was the main author responsible for designing and writing the article, whereas Vos contributed to the writing.

In papers IV and V Mykkänen was solely responsible for writing the articles, and making revisions after reviews. In paper VI Mykkänen was the main author responsible for writing the article, research design, and contact during the review process and revisions, whereas Vos contributed to the writing.

1.3 Thesis structure

In this dissertation shell, the studies are synthesised on a meta-level, the contribution of PR to organisational decision making is presented and the significance of the PR function to organisational autopoiesis is introduced and further discussed.

The thesis is structured as follows. The theoretical framework, in Chapter 2, introduces different theories that provide insights on the topic. After this,

Chapter 3, presents the research design and clarifies the three parts mentioned in Table 1. The research questions together with the methods used are explained in detail. This section is followed by the findings of the studies, in Chapter 4. In the discussion, Chapter 5, the results of the studies are discussed and a theoretical model is proposed. Finally, the thesis ends with conclusions in Chapter 6. In this chapter the main insights from this dissertation are presented, and its contribution to research and practice is discussed. Also, suggestions for further research are given and the dissertation and research process are evaluated.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The environment of organisations consists of changes and contingencies. Like other systems, organisations are in constant interaction with their environment (Morgan, 1986). The changes and contingencies are acknowledged as challenges to which the organisation must respond. Organised and unorganised interactions continuously occur between organisations and their publics. How do organisations acknowledge the interactions and react to them? How does it affect organisational decision making and how does PR contribute to it? This dissertation is based on literature from various disciplines. Particularly, it presents literature from the fields of sociology, communication sciences and organisational studies.

In its theoretical framework, this dissertation argues that the changes in communication technology and in society in recent decades are more in favour of communication-based theories, especially the theory of social systems. It has been argued that the classical theories in the social and behavioural sciences were developed to suit industrial society with the emphasis on power or action (Vanderstraeten, 2012). In these societies, the emphasis was on producing goods or commodities. In current society, the central forces and produced resources are information, knowledge and communication (Baecker, 2006). More communicative approaches will reflect the current society more adequately. In the same manner from the perspective of PR, it should be studied on and analysed how the rise of information and communication networks affect organisations and decision making. The next paragraph presents the conceptual framework of this dissertation.

2.1 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework with the core concepts of this study is shown in Table 2. It starts from organisational decision making and social system theory, which are the theoretical foundations of this research. In the centre of the research of this dissertation are the autopoiesis, sensemaking and enactment, theoretical approaches, which in this dissertation are used to explore how organisations observe,

identify and operate with the environment where they exist. Theories related to the roles, tasks and skills of PR are used to examine how professionals contribute to organisational decision making in the context of their daily working life.

TABLE 2 Conceptual framework

| Main concepts | Clarification |
|-----------------|--|
| Decision making | "Thinking and problem solving that is directed toward the discovery and selection of courses of action is usually called decision making" (Simon, 1968: 76). |
| Social systems | "A set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment," von Bertalanffy (1975: 159). |
| Organisation | "A particular type of social system that reproduces itself on the basis of decisions" (Seidl, 2005: 407). |
| Autopoiesis | Self-creation or self-production of a system (Luhmann, 1995). |
| Sensemaking | Collaborative process of creating shared awareness and understanding out of different individuals' perspectives and varied interests (Weick, 2001). |
| Enactment | The process to bring organisational structures and events into existence and set them in action (Weick, 1988). |

This dissertation comprises of various theoretical approaches and multidisciplinary literature frames. The key authors in the thesis are presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 Theoretical approaches and key sources

| Theoretical approach | Key sources |
|--------------------------------|---|
| Organisational decision making | Simon (1957, 1960, 1968), Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Théorêt, (1976) March (1988, 1991), Brunsson (1982, 1990) Luhmann (2003, 2005) |
| System theory | von Bertalanffy (1968, 1975), Baecker (2001), Pearson (1990), Luhmann (1995), Pieczka (2006), Seidl and Becker (2006) |
| Autopoiesis | Maturana and Varela (1980), Luhmann (1995, 2003), Morgan (1986; 1998), Hernes and Bakken (2003), Pieczka (2006), Holmström (1998, 2007) |
| Sensemaking | Weick (1979; 1995; 2001), Weick et al. (2005), Dervin (1992) |
| Enactment | Weick (1979, 2001), Morgan (1998), Cheney et al. (2004), Huebner, Varey and Wood (2008) |
| PR roles | Baskin and Aronoff (1988), Dozier (1992), Dozier and Broom (1995, 2006) |
| PR tasks | Baskin and Aronoff (1988), Dozier and Broom (1995), White and Mazur (1995), Berger and Meng (2014) |
| PR skills and competencies | Cornelissen (2008), Gregory (2008), Hazleton (2006), Tench and Moreno (2015) |

The various theoretical concepts are discussed in the following chapters in a detailed manner. Organisational decision making is discussed in section 2.2. This section concentrates on organisations' strategic decision making. System theory is presented in section 2.3. This chapter discusses systems and communication, and introduces the system theoretical approach of Luhmann. Section 2.4 further discusses the Luhmannian approach by giving insight into the autopoiesis of organisations. The sensemaking approach and its contribution to decision making and autopoiesis are introduced and explained in section 2.5. Section 2.6 discusses how organisations engage their environment by enacting it. Finally, in section 2.7, the contribution of PR professionals is reviewed and further discussed. This section also covers how professionals support the interpretation, implementation and assessment of decisions from the autopoiesis perspective.

2.2 Organisational decision making

Organisations, as defined by Barnard (1938), can be characterised as cooperative systems. These systems are constituted by human activity (Aldrich, 1999) and strategically integrate contributions of individuals for decision making (Barnard, 1938), including diverse knowledge and interests (Simon, 1968). This dissertation considers decision making as a strategic goal-oriented process. In organisational theories this conversion of the individual contributions into coordinated efforts has been considered to support both the continuation of the organisation and the survival of the individuals involved (March and Simon, 1993).

"These contributions to survival are accomplished primarily through control over information, identities, stories, and incentives. Organisations process and channel information. They shape the goals and loyalties of their participants. They create shared stories - an organisation ethos that includes common beliefs and standard practices. They offer incentives for appropriate behaviours." (March and Simon, 1993: 2)

From Barnard's perspective, communication links the purpose of the organisation to its members and produces cooperative system dynamics (Luthans, 1989). Thus, organisations can be seen as systems built by various communications that bring all organisational members together (Scott and Davis, 2015).

Organisations are goal-oriented systems (Simon, 1957; 1968, Scott and Davis, 2015) which can be understood as systems made up by decisions (Luhmann, 2003). Empirical and theoretical studies of decision making have portrayed it as "intentional, consequential and optimising" (March, 1988: 1). He argues that decision making is based on the knowledge of alternatives, the knowledge of consequences, the order of consistent preferences and decision rules. Decision making can also be considered irrational and biased by organisational ideologies (Brunsson, 1992).

Decisions are assumed to be based on certain preferences and expectations about the outcomes associated with different alternatives (March, 1988). They are also seen as commitment to action (Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Théorêt, 1976), distributing responsibility or providing legitimacy (Brunsson, 1990). Several scholars (e.g. Brunsson, 1982; March, 1988; Luhmann, 2005) have pointed out that there are various viewpoints and perspectives on decision making, but mostly it has been understood as discovering alternatives and making a choice. As phrased by Luthans (1989: 231), "Decision making has almost universally been defined as choosing between alternatives". Decision making has also been characterised as an information-processing activity (Vroom and Jago, 1974), form of communication (Luhmann, 2000; Jönhill, 2003) or communicative event which consists of information, utterance and meaning (Luhmann, 2000; Czarniawska, 2013). The decision process has been described as "a set of actions and dynamic factors that begins with the identification of a stimulus for action and ends with the specific commitment to action" (Mintzberg et al., 1976: 246). Simon et al. (1987) differentiate problem solving and decision making by pointing out, that the former concerns setting agendas, goals and actions, whereas the latter focuses on evaluation and choosing. To help both these processes, organisations make explicit and implicit decisions about seeking information (Feldman and March, 1981).

In 21st century organisations, decision making is greatly influenced by the information environment (Luhmann, 2005), the flow of information (Cheney et al., 2004), as well as by employees and stakeholders (Michel, 2007). Essentially organisational decision making concerns shaping the strategy and future directions of the organisation. To achieve desired goals and objectives organisations bundle their members into various positions, duties and responsibilities (Nassehi, 2005). Organisations support decision making by providing resources, information and equipment to participants (Scott and Davis, 2015).

Decision making has generally been considered as a part of the information and interpretation processes in organisations (Daft and Weick, 2001). Hendry (2000) argues that strategic decision making is a part of organisational discourse and communication. According to Greenberg and Baron (2008), organisations make programmed and non-programmed decisions. They argue, that for programmed decisions a pre-established set of alternatives is used, whereas for non-programmed decisions there are no ready-made solutions.

According to Brunsson (1990), decisions in organisations have multiple roles. He acknowledges four interpretations of decisions: purpose of choice, mobilising actions, distributing responsibility and providing legitimacy. The differentiation of decisions means "different designs of decision processes, different usages of information, different costs and different needs for making decisions at all" (Brunsson, 1990: 47). Made decisions, organisational actions and how the organisation presents itself to the environment can be considered as outputs (Brunsson, 1990).

In organisations, it is impossible to decide when a particular decision begins and when it ends (Luhmann, 2000). Thus, it is also problematic to define

who is actually making the decision. Luhmann claims that it cannot be determined if an individual or an organisation is making the decision. By accrediting a certain person or group with a decision, the uncertainty and complexity of decisions are opened and the actions and events related to the process are summarised (Luhmann, 2000). Decision making is a balancing act in which decision makers may claim a particular decision or rather avoid responsibility by cutting a less desirable decision into pieces (Brunsson, 1990).

Organisational decision making is considered to include phases, that are dynamic and contain feedback loops (Luthans, 1989). He mentions two models that are used to follow a logical path to narrow the choice. Simon's (1960) model divides decision making into three activities: intelligence, design and choice, whereas Mintzberg et al. (1976) suggest a similar model of three phases: identification, development and selection. Basically, both models propose that logically information is gathered from the environment, solutions are developed and finally, the particular course of action is selected.

Decision making in organisations is often considered to be based on rational choices for an identified problem. As such, decision making would be based on the knowledge of alternatives, the knowledge of consequences, consisted preference ordering and rules on how to make the decision (March, 1991). However, decision makers don't always have goals or may not communicate them (Stone, 2002). They might be forced to make decisions without any information search or debate (Barnard, 1938), or to rely on intuition while satisfying or optimising solutions in a collision of problems and answers (Miller, 2006). Organisational goals are not rational for all decision makers, and some rationalities might be supported more than others due to the tasks, careers and personal interests of decision makers (Morgan, 1986). However, the members of organisations will rationalise decisions in whatever way they consider it fits their society or organisation best (Baralou, Wolf and Meissner, 2012). Therefore, although the process is not always rational, the outcome may be presented so (Brunsson, 1982).

Decision making is also influenced by power relations. Within the dominant coalition in the organisation, the individual members have different levels of power (Grünig, 1992). Thus, as March (1991: 104) concludes, some preferences and interests receive more attention than others and "the decision processes we observe seem to be infused with strategic actions and politics at every level and every point". In organisations, the sources of power available to individuals are based on various factors, such as ownership, expertise and roles (Scott and Davis, 2015). When the membership in a dominant coalition changes, the goals of the organisation and the power relations in the domination coalition may also change (Scott and Davis, 2015). Additionally, the critical contingencies of the environment affect internal power patterns (Hambrick, 1981).

The complicated structure of organisations might result in changes in the difference between alternative solutions while decisions are being made. Thus, the quality of a decision can change before, during and after the decision-making process, as the contingency is also leading to changing expectations

(Luhmann, 1995). Moreover, when opening new areas of decision making, contingency in an organisation is increased (Knudsen, 2006).

Organisational mechanisms, e.g. roles, rules and communication channels, might restrict the range of decision making or participation (Scott and Davis, 2015). The information could be manipulated (March, 1988) and the evidence selected or distorted by participants in the discussion to support their own values and preferred solutions, which may worsen the problem at hand (Majchrzak and Markus, 2013).

Decision makers as individuals have cognitive and attention limits and the alternatives are constrained by external conditions (Weick, 1995). The environment affects what consequences decision makers anticipate and what not, and what alternatives they consider or ignore (March and Simon, 1993). Choices made by individuals may eventually not result in organisational actions as all the choices at hand might seem somewhat ambiguous (Weick, 1995). Decision makers might also want to hold their authority and prefer only information which supports their perspectives (Cornelissen, 2008). Decision makers might systematically ignore needs for decisions in the environment and just make decisions which only satisfy rather than optimise the needs of the organisational environment (Cornelissen, 2008). Decisions may also have a symbolic value, as the process or how the decision was made is sometimes valued more than the final outcome (Stone, 2002).

2.3 System theory

“It is necessary to study not only parts and processes in isolation, but also to solve the decisive problems found in organisation and order unifying them, resulting from dynamic interaction of parts, and making the behaviour of the parts different when studied in isolation or within the whole” - Von Bertalanffy (1968: 29)

Systems theory is based on the idea that an organisation can be compared with an organism, and that both try to maintain balance with their environment (Jahansoozi, 2006). Generally, systems are divided into open and closed systems. Initially, as Jahansoozi (2006) points out, systems were assumed to operate as closed systems to control their environment. Later, the perspective was moved to open systems by Katz and Kahn (1978). The open system perspective considers that “the external operating environment exerts a level of influence and control over the organisations as goal-meeting activities” (Jahansoozi, 2006: 72).

System theory was first proposed by Von Bertalanffy who defines a system as “a set of elements standing in interrelation among themselves and with the environment” (1975: 159). A system has also been defined as an “interrelated set of parts or components that create a unique bounded entity” (Witmer, 2006: 362). Scott (1961; see also Scott and Davis, 2015) argues that the parts communicate with each other. The system is presented by the communication function of the parts and, thus, the communication forms the system. Later Heylighen (1998) stated that the system and its environment are separated by a

boundary. He argues that open systems interact with other systems outside of themselves. The components of this interaction are input and output. Input is what enters the system from the outside and output is what leaves the system for the environment (Heylighen, 1998). By establishing a difference between the system and its environment, social systems reduce the complexity of the environment (Holmström, 1998). Open systems interact with the environment, while closed systems function in isolation. One of the major advantages of system theory is that it opens possibilities to observe complex behaviours and relationships between system components (Witmer, 2006).

Scientific literature portrays three system models that can be used to understand human organisations: equilibrium, homeostasis and the process of an adaptive system (Pieczka, 2006). She refers to Buckley (1967) who capsulises the differences of systems by explaining, that an equilibrium system tends to balance the forces affecting it, whereas a homeostatic system tries to maintain a high-level organisation against changes, and an adaptive system is capable of evolution based on the changes in its environment.

2.3.1 Systems and communication

The concept of systems in modern society can be related to organisations attempting to monitor and control themselves. The control is tied to communication as “any control is an act of communication and can only be successful to the extent that communication is successful” (Baecker, 2001: 59). The interactions in systems are communicative acts which include exchange of information and transmission of meanings (Katz and Kahn, 1966). Communication is essential for the well-being of any system, as systems organise and structure themselves and adapt to their changing environment (Kennan and Hazleton, 2006). Social systems consist of people and of systems that are imperfect (Katz and Kahn, 1966). In open systems individuals have multiple loyalties and identities, and they might not have the same goals as the system (Scott and Davis, 2015). Systems as a combination of interdependent activities are either tightly connected or loosely coupled (Scott and Davis, 2015).

System approach explains that there needs to be a set of possibilities before any specific possibility can be selected at all. The selection of possibilities is not given but is “reproduced by the very selections being feasible” (Baecker, 2001: 66). Communication in systems means the production of this selection. In this selection, the message and the possibilities from which it was selected are defined (Bateson, 1979). The selection is checked upon by communication, by what has been said and what not, whereas what meaning is included and what is excluded (Luhmann, 1997).

System theory is also an epistemological device to analyse how communication is established. The communication can be analysed by the social distinction between actor and observer, the ecological distinction between system and environment, and the temporal distinction between past, present and future (Baecker, 2001).

Management in social systems is concerned with the development of the system. The management “tries to serve the purposes of the system, its parts, and its containing systems” (Gharajedaghi and Ackoff, 1984: 300). They argue that the planning of social systems should consist of designing desirable future by finding and inventing ways approximate it as closely as possible. Systems should not be understood as one organism, as Pearson (1990) reminds, but rather as involving a group of human decision makers, which enables the selective process of self-preservation.

Earlier models of system theory, the modern theories, concentrated on finding clear cause-and-effect relationships which guided the actions to control and predict the environment. The modern system approach viewed organisations as machines, which compartmentalised problems and saw the solutions from social engineering and expertism perspectives (Montuori and Purser, 1995). The later one, the postmodern approach, emphasises local knowledge and insights together with reflection and reflexivity. It encourages to explore the life-world of organisations, emphasises actual practices and experiences, and intends to build a network of knowledge throughout the organisation and its environment (Gephart, Thatchenkery and Boje, 1995).

The first proposal that system theory could be relevant to organisational management was made by Katz and Kahn (1966) and Buckley (1967). Later, Pearson (1990: 223) emphasised the usefulness of the theory for PR as it values “relationships, interconnectedness and the idea of interdependence”. He argued that change in a system or subsystem must logically have an impact on other parts of the system because of the interconnectedness of these parts. Gollner (1983) stated that the impact of decisions in one system affects eventually other systems because the decision outputs of one organisation are the decision inputs of another organisation.

In PR literature, the system theory approach is used for investigating the organisation and the publics within its environment (Pieczka, 1996). PR is seen as a boundary spanning function. System theory was also the foundation of the four models of PR developed by Grunig and Hunt 1984 (Pieczka, 2006). The activities of PR serve as a feedback function which helps an organisational system to interpret the environment and maintain a certain level of homeostasis (Witmer, 2006). System theory emphasises processes and uses the terms input, throughput and output, which can be applied to PR content and daily work.

System theory, as Pearson (1990: 232) theorises, could serve as a concept for reconstructing PR “as a particular kind of collaborative decision-making process”. PR theories and the practice would focus on the communicative and collaborative decision-making processes, and on mediating tensions among social systems (Pearson, 1990). Although the system approach influenced PR methodologically and theoretically, it has some limitations related to PR. It cannot adequately address organisational culture because this is produced by social interactions and human experience and it provides a limited understanding of communication trends, globalisation and differentiation through time and space (Witmer, 2006).

2.3.2 Luhmann's system theory

In the centre of this dissertation is the social system thinking proposed by German sociologist Niklas Luhmann. Especially the theory of organisation is further utilised. Luhmann (1995) considers social systems as operating units which themselves produce both their problems and solutions using their own resources. He argues that social systems are communication systems consisting of a network of communication, which emerges in time and from event to event (Nassehi, 2005; Vanderstraeten 2012). Luhmann considers the environment of systems to consist of an enormous amount of communication and data, which partly can be considered ambient noise. The communication and data are produced by other systems (including stakeholders in the organisational context). A system addresses a specific amount of communication or data, and otherwise regards its environment as complex and chaotic (Baralou et al., 2012).

For Luhmann, communications are the elements of social systems. His theory considers actions which are constructed to observe and to communicate about a system's communication. Actions are communicative events (observations or communications) and they are related to previous actions (Seidl, 2004). Although Luhmann's theory does not focus on actors, it also does not reject the participation of human beings in the process of communication (Nassehi, 2005). The theory also seeks to "understand how events that can be attributed to individual actors become meaningful within a process that itself cannot be attributed to individual actors" (Nassehi, 2005: 183). In that sense, Luhmann's system theory is not a macro or micro theory but may serve both purposes (Nassehi, 2005).

Systems operate through differentiation from other systems (Hernes, 2008). Communicative processes establish connections between systems, between a system and its environment and with the environments of other systems (Vermeer, 2006). This creates complexity in the relations between systems and it is experienced as contingencies (Luhmann, 1995). Systems consider the environment from two possible perspectives: as a resource or as information. When the environment is regarded as a resource, the contingency is experienced as a dependency. When the environment is regarded as information, the contingency is experienced as uncertainty (Luhmann, 1995).

In Luhmann's system theory, organisations reproduce themselves on the basis of decisions (Luhmann, 2003; Seidl, 2004; Nassehi, 2005; Seidl and Becker, 2006). Luhmann (2000) points out that past decisions affect the current and future decisions. Every decision is the product of earlier decisions and the process of connecting decisions to each other is regarded as uncertainty absorption, which shares the same ideological concept as uncertainty absorption by Simon and March (1958). Some uncertainty will always remain, and no decision can rely on complete information (Seidl, 2004).

Luhmann's theory emphasises the concept of decision premises. This concept, originally introduced by Simon in 1957, refers to the structural preconditions of a decision situation, which could create or restrict the situation at hand

(Seidl, 2004). Decision premises delimit decision space and increase the possibility that a decision is connected to another decision, although this might increase the complexity of the organisation (Knudsen, 2006). For Luhmann, three types of premises are distinguishable: programmes, personnel and communication channels (Seidl, 2004). Programmes define the conditions of decision making for certain decisions. The conditions can be conditional (when certain conditions are given) or purposeful (when specific goals are given). Personnel concerns the recruitment and organisation of personnel. Communication channels are related to the "organisation of organisation". For example, the vertical communication channels are related to the hierarchical structure (Seidl, 2004). In this dissertation, all the three premises are considered to be closely related to the PR function. PR is able to promote suitable decision-making conditions, cooperate with the personnel of the organisation in decision-making processes and choose suitable communication channels for decision making.

Compared to authors such as Weick or Giddens, Luhmann's system theory is largely ignored in organisational studies (Baralou et al., 2012). Luhmann's theory and his concept of decisions, have been criticised by Mingers (2002), as stereotyped versions of rich and complex social phenomena within organisations. Mostly, reasons why Luhmann's theory hasn't been popular are that the theory concentrates on systemic structure instead of people, and that Luhmann's systemic approach has earlier been seen as non-conductive for empirical research. Luhmann never provided empirical evidence for this theory, which challenges its potential value for research (Baralou et al., 2012).

This dissertation explores how the contribution of PR to organisational decision making, along with more process related theories, can be studied from Luhmann's system theoretical perspective. In the following chapter, the concept of autopoiesis, which is related to Luhmann's system theory, will be discussed.

2.4 Autopoiesis

In the 1970s two Chilean biologists, Maturana and Varela, in cooperation with the system theorist Uribe, introduced the autopoietic model of a system. Autopoiesis, originally presenting a fundamentally different relationship between a system and its environment, means self-production. The term is invented from the Greek words "auto" for self- and "poiesis" for creation or production (Maturana and Varela, 1980; 1987). In social sciences, it was introduced by Luhmann.

The traditional model of autopoiesis sees systems adapting to the environment, while the systems are self-referential and to some extent closed (Piecicka, 2006). "The system is driven by its need to survive, but survival is understood as the maintenance of self-identity. The environment exists for the system only as a projection of its self-identity - or, to simplify, it is constructed by the system" (Piecicka, 2006: 339). Luhmann's changes into autopoiesis highlighted

the self-referentiality of the system. He chose communication as the basic element of autopoietic social systems.

"Social systems use communications as their particular mode of autopoietic reproduction. Their elements are communications which are recursively produced and reproduced by a network of communications and which cannot exist outside of such a network." (Luhmann 1986: 174)

In Luhmann's theory, communication is constituted of utterance, information and understanding (Seidl, 2004; Hernes, 2008; Seidl and Schoeneborn, 2010; Vanderstraeten, 2012). "Information is what the message is about, utterance is the form in which it is produced together with the intentions of its sender, and understanding is the meaning that it generates" (Mingers, 2002: 286). Communication creates a need for new communication as the observing system is required to show comprehension by addressing either the information component or the utterance (Vanderstraeten, 2012). Social systems construct an image (self-description) which then constitutes a simplification of the system and serves as orientation for its (re-)production (Seidl, 2004).

In Luhmann's theory, organisations are systems observing communication, which are constituted "of nothing but communication of decisions" and related communication (Luhmann, 1997: 833). His theory is applicable to studies regarding communication processes and interrelations between state, society and organisation (e.g. Andersen, 2003; Bakken and Hernes, 2003; Holmström, 2007). In this dissertation Luhmann's theory of communication functions as a foundation for studying the work of public relations (which is further explained later).

With a focus on communication, as Hernes (2008) emphasises, autopoietic systems become systems of meaning creation. The reproduction of a system is based on internal meaning creation. In Luhmann's perspective, systems are closed for their own operations, allowing interaction among themselves to make sense of events, whereas they are open for the observation of the outside world (Hernes, 2008). The autopoiesis continues and an organisation lasts as long as decisions are reproduced from previous decisions (Luhmann, 2003), based on the interpretations the system makes. Interpretations are formed over time and systems are formed based on past choices. The effects of those choices interact to constitute the identity of the system. Luhmann's autopoietic perspective emphasises the internal operations of a system.

Later Morgan (1986), in his theory of images of organisations, also touched on the concept of autopoiesis. He explained that autopoiesis produces images of reality as an expression or description of the organisation. The process of autopoiesis suggests that the way the change is seen and managed "is ultimately a product of how we see and think about ourselves and consequently how we enact relationships with the environment" (Morgan, 1998: 254). The autopoietic approach has "powerful implications not only for our understanding of systems, but our relationship to ourselves, our organisations, and our theorising efforts" (Hatch, 1997: 373).

Morgan's (1986, 1998) theory linked Weick's enactment concept with autopoiesis. Organisational enactment is part of the self-referential process "[...]

through which an organisation attempts to tie down and reproduce its identity. For in enacting the environment an organisation is attempting to achieve the kind of closure that is necessary for it to reproduce itself in its own image" (Morgan, 1986: 241). The reproduction creates new openings and possibilities for systematic patterns of evolution, and because of the capacities for self-reflection organisations are capable of enacting "new, more systemic identities that break the rigid boundaries between organisation and environment" (Morgan, 1998: 255).

The autopoiesis theory is recognised as having environments but the relation to environments is internally determined (Luhmann, 1995). An environment consists of all the elements that are existing outside the boundary of the organisation that could potentially affect some part or the whole organisation (Daft, 1997). The environment can function in various ways such as irritation, disturbance or noise, and becomes meaningful when having an impact in the decision-making context (Luhmann, 1995). There can also be numerous chains of interaction within and between systems. The distinction drawn between organisation and environment is problematic. Organisations are not separated from the environment and the survival can be "survival with, never survival against, the environment or the context in which one is operating" (Morgan, 1998: 255). Organisations have to remember that they are more than just themselves, as Morgan (1998) concludes. Defining boundaries and elements in the operating environment are required in order to survive with, not against the environment. Organisations gain competitive advantages by forming successful relationships with the publics and stakeholders in their environment, e.g. competitors and governments (Toth, 2006).

The autopoiesis approach has been criticised for forgetting the importance played by human activity and the members of the organisation. Furthermore, it has been expressed that Luhmann neglects people's contribution to the communication processes (Mingers, 2002). Indeed, Luhmann's theory approaches communication as abstract mechanisms. For Luhmann, communication has to be conceptualised as an emergent phenomenon that arises from the interaction between individuals within a system (Schoeneborn, Blaschke, Cooren, McPhee, Seidl, and Taylor, 2014). Autopoiesis has also been criticised for not explaining the concept of change. The term autopoiesis lends an impression and false assumption that systems engage only while maintaining, unchanged, their basic features (Hernes, 2008). "The autopoietic theory is developed to provide an analytical framework that accounts for how systems emerge and uphold themselves" (Hernes, 2008: 93). In the light of the topic of this dissertation, Luhmann's theoretical framework on decisions and autopoiesis is valuable, as the approach enables analysing the contribution of PR as a subsystem to the organisation as a whole. The author acknowledges that organisations need to make decisions, adapt to a changing environment and constantly reproduce themselves in order to survive.

As stated earlier, the purpose of this dissertation is to combine the system theoretical perspective to more operational theories, especially PR related theo-

ries and thus form a theoretical framework. The application of system theory and autopoiesis to PR research is discussed next. Luhmann never studied PR as a such, but his theories together with the system approach can be applied to a PR research context. The environment in which PR operates consists of political, cultural, social and economic dimensions (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988) and of decisions made by other systems. Luhmann's theory of organisation (1995) is related to the reflective paradigm of PR that "analyses the function of public relations in relation to changing forms of societal coordination and social relations" (Holmström, 2005: 497). Luhmann's theories can be applied to PR, especially the general social theory, the theory of modern society and the theory of organisation (Holmström, 2007). Luhmann's organisation theory sees organisations as being continuously reproduced and changed by self-referential communicative processes, for instance decision-making processes that select meaning (Luhmann, 1995). In his definition, a social system emerges whenever the actions of two or more persons are meaningfully coordinated (Luhmann, 1982).

Luhmann's general social theory (1995) acknowledges specific social filters through which our perceptions of reality are constructed. These filters in systems are defined as communication (Holmström, 2007). Luhmann's modern society theory (1997) describes that communication will flow where the establishment of connections is most likely. In his organisation theory, organisations are constituted not by employees, factory buildings, products or services, but by communication of decisions and related communication (Luhmann, 1997; 2000).

In social theories, different perspectives on how PR is seen as part of organisational systems can be identified, i.e. PR can be seen as a reflexive social expert system or a reflective functional system practice (Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2014). The empirical practice of PR, as Holmström (2007: 260) theorises, can be identified as reflection - "the specific worldview which facilitates self-insight in relation to the social context". She proposes that PR could be described as an institutionalised form of self-observation and a medium that compels second-order observations (Holmström, 1998).

In PR, different categories of practice can be identified based on the difference between reflexivity and reflection (Holmström, 2007). She emphasises that the reflective approach can be applied to PR processes as reflection copes with contingency but reflection also increases the perception of contingency and the flux of the environment. However, the reflective paradigm also has its hindrances. It is resource-demanding, as reflection doubles the communicative processes and makes decisions and processes related to it more ambiguous (Holmström, 2005). Holmström (2007) concludes that using Luhmann's theoretical foundation could serve as a platform for applied research and that it could hold potential for perceptive, enlightened practice.

To further explore how Luhmann's approach can be applied to PR from a decision-making perspective, the next chapter discusses the sensemaking methodology which, from Luhmann's perspective, helps organisations to understand their environment and contributes to autopoiesis through decision making.

2.5 Sensemaking

The sensemaking methodology, originated by Dervin since 1972, provides means to understand how publics act enabling the development of studying and practicing communication (Walker, 2006). Individuals struggle to gain understanding on troubling issues, experiencing constant knowledge needs and gaps as they sense the environment in small pieces (Dervin, 1992). In practice, sensemaking is a retrospective process, where understanding is based on rich qualitative information currently available and how this is interpreted in the organisation (Weick, 2001).

Dervin's approach is more individual oriented, for instance towards a single decision maker or communication professional, whereas Weick's (2001) view on sensemaking is suited to organisational settings. Weick (1979) considers organisations as complex systems that strive to achieve several goals through coordinated actions and relations between subjects and objects. Typical occasions for sensemaking in organisations are ambiguity and uncertainty (Weick, 1995). Ambiguity is experienced when events in the environment permit several equivalent contrasting interpretations. Uncertainty is experienced when the future consequences based on actions cannot be estimated (Czarniawska, 2013).

Whereas Luhmann (2005) focuses on the communication between system and environment, Weick focuses on the process how a system makes sense of the information interpenetrating the system from the environment (van Lier, 2013). Weick (1995) acknowledges an organisation as a social entity which operates and executes activities, for instance decision making, using information as raw material.

In this dissertation, the theories of Luhmann and Weick are not seen as rivals but as complementing each other. The former is considered a general theory to explain organisation as a system and how it observes and is affected by its environment, whereas the latter is considered a process theory describing how an organisational subsystem actively operates with the environment. Sensemaking will be the bridge to connect autopoiesis to more practice-oriented theories and perspectives of PR. These will be discussed later.

The survival of an organisation depends on other subjects and (sub)systems within a greater social entity, such as society (Van Lier, 2013). In organisational settings where the elements of the context of choice, irreversibility and visibility are high, the sensemaking process is more serious (Weick, 1995). In organisational settings, decisions are made to choose one way of action in an ambiguous, constantly changing and evolving environment. When a system assigns meaning to information, i.e. sensemaking, this enables the system "to perpetuate existing executions, and to pass the ambivalence between knowing and not knowing on to a subsequent situation" (Van Lier, 2013: 78). In the current context of the information society, organisations will always lack information and are not able to make purely rational decisions. Incoming changes

require organisations or a specific function to make sense of them (Van Lier, 2013). The interpenetrating information later constitutes the process of sense-making within the organisation, but the incoming changes require “the organisation to act in the form of assigning meaning (enactment) by subject or objects” (van Lier, 2013: 80).

The basic difference between Luhmann’s theory and Weick’s theory is that Luhmann concentrates on intertwining process and structure. His theory includes insights into what happens between an organisation and its environment. In this dissertation, PR is considered as part of the system and organisational communication. The provided perspective considers PR as a connective dimension which operates based on both theoretical perspectives and, in this way, connects the two theories.

The sensemaking perspective is relevant to PR professionals and could contribute to the understanding of publics and how they could behave (Dervin, 1984; 1998). Its metatheoretical presuppositions are in many ways similar to Grunig’s two-way symmetrical communication theory (Walker, 2006). The sensemaking perspective guides us appropriately to investigate a situation, it doesn’t make us concentrate on fixed or unchanging circumstances and it mandates a dialogic approach in order to understand and interpret the environment (Walker, 2006). In the organisational context, as van Lier (2013: 80) argues, the observation of the environment “does not lead to everyone observing a common world in the same way”.

From the perspective of PR function, more research and measurement used in organisational decision making would be demanded. PR professionals might find information, concepts and propositions that suit particular situations, but those will not be applicable to all times and places (Walker, 2006). The principle of sensemaking in PR, can be used to study a variety of phenomena, e.g. information seeking and use, and attitudes toward issues (Walker, 2006).

Organisations are a collection of people, whose task is to make sense of what is happening around them (Weick, 2001). For organisations, the most common problem is how to proceed under uncertainty and make decisions (White and Mazur, 1995). PR as a function enacts with the organisational environment and, in this way, reduces the uncertainties and supports meaning creation (Berger and Meng, 2014). But still, no observer, neither organisation nor PR professional, can in any way represent the actual degree of complexity or uncertainty (Hernes, 2008). Sensemaking includes clarifying to organisational members how things come to an event and what it means for the organisation (Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld, 2005). Active communicative interaction invokes macro-organisational structures and, as Falkheimer and Heide (2014) argue, supports the process of constructing and maintaining an organisation or the process of autopoiesis (Luhmann, 2005). From Weick’s (1995: 75) perspective, “the communication activity is the organisation”.

2.6 Enactment

The process in which reality is shaped and structured is called enactment (Morgan, 1998; Weick, 2001). Enactment is the only process through which an organisation approaches its external environment (Van Lier, 2013). Vanderstraeten (2012: 380) emphasises that “whereas autopoiesis theory primarily emphasises the closure of circular processes, the concept of enaction stresses the organism’s active engagement with its surroundings”. This process emphasises the proactive role used in creating our world (Weick, 2001). Enactment, as Weick (1988: 306) defines, is action to “bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion”.

A social system opens itself up to the environment through enactment (van Lier, 2013), which is related to organisations and their strategic environment management. Organisations can be characterised by their attitude and behaviour when enacting their environment, as the attitude toward the environment is either rational or hard to define, whereas the stance towards the events shows how active or passive the behaviour is (Daft and Weick, 1984).

Organisations, as Morgan (1998) argues, experiment when engaging with their environment and attempt to shape the environment through their behaviour. The enactment of shared reality has become central to the task of organisational analysis and management (Morgan, 1998). Decision making in organisations is generally part of the information and interpretation processes. Weick (2001: 256) considers interpretation one of the most important function of an organisation, as “interpretation is the process through which information is given meaning and actions are chosen” and, in this way, the organisation provides meaning for the organisational members.

“Many activities in an organisation, whether under the heading of structure, decision making, strategy formulation, organisational learning, goal setting, or innovation and change, may be connected to the model of interpreting the external environment.” (Weick, 2001: 255)

The environment is constructed by the action and creativity of individuals, groups and organisations (Morgan, 1998). The power and the influence of organisations and its members is shaping the future. Morgan (1998) criticises the adaptive approach and the survivalist view on organisation and environment.

“Organisations, unlike organisms, have a choice as to whether they are to compete or to collaborate. We may agree that an organisation acting in isolation can have little impact on the environment, and hence that the environment presents itself as external and real in its effects, but it is quite a different matter when we consider the possibility of organisations collaborating in pursuit of plural interests to shape the environment they desire.” (Morgan, 1998: 65)

Vital questions for organisations are how they are created, communicated, sustained and what the references are that make the organisation possible? Organisations, as Morgan (1998: 135) theorises, can be seen as socially constructed and

exist “as much in the minds of their members as they are in concrete structures, rules and relations”.

The theory of autopoiesis proposes that systems have environments but the relation to these is internally defined (Luhmann, 1995). The interactions within a system and with the environment may be numerous, and relating enactment to autopoiesis has further implications for the understanding of organisations (Morgan, 1998). It helps to see that organisations are seeking to achieve “a form of self-referential closure in relation to their environments, enacting their environments as extensions of their own identity” (Morgan, 1998: 217). It also helps to understand that the problems that organisations are facing are related and connected to the identity they are trying to maintain. Moreover, it explains the evolution, change and development of organisations.

Enactment, as Cheney et al. (2004) describe, is considered an important part of the decision process of an organisation when it purposefully monitors the environment and, using its internal processes, chooses what information is needed for further action. Individuals enact the environment differently, which might result in various typologies of organisational environments even in the same context (Pfeffer and Salancik, 2013). Decision makers in an organisation must be and are actively interpreting information from the environment but still, organisational rules and decisions must undergo a process of interpretation within an organisation. Often these interpretations are presented as narratives (Boje, 1991).

PR as a function is seen to support the management and decision making of organisation, as Baskin and Aronoff state (1988). They argue that PR professionals contribute to organisational decision making through their daily work. How this is done will be discussed in the next section.

2.7 Investigating PR's contribution to decision making

As discussed previously, system theory and the autopoiesis perspective suggest that a specific function is needed to reduce uncertainty. In this dissertation, PR is considered a function that is strategically important to decision making, and its contribution to autopoiesis is studied from the perspectives of its roles, tasks and capabilities in decision making. The roles and tasks support interpreting, implementing and assessing decision making and decision outcomes.

In Luhmann’s theoretical perspective, decision making and its processes in organisations need to be made visible (Luhmann, 2000). This is done by managing them in e.g. meetings and documents and by communicating the goals and objectives which “instruct the attention of internal and external observers of the organisation and so are able to simulate a rational type of order” (Nassehi, 2005: 190). To contribute to the decision-making process, the top management should be aware of the ways in which PR professionals can contribute to the strategic areas (Bowen, 2009).

The strategic position of PR professionals has been questioned and the influence of PR advice has been considered higher than their actual participation at the decision-making table (Zerfass et al., 2014). However, it has been acknowledged that PR professionals should ensure that communicative implications are integrated into decision making (Zerfass and Franke, 2013).

The contribution of PR to organisational decision making may be examined by using the input, throughput and output perspective, which emphasises processes and can be applied in PR work (Pearson, 1990). The perspective of system theory provides a suitable vehicle to describe PR as a function and the PR tasks contributing to organisational decision making (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988).

But still, more understanding is needed about how PR professionals affect organisational decision making and what contribution is made by them to top-level strategies. The European Communication Monitor reports (European Communicator Monitor, 2016) have frequently shown that linking business strategy and communication is one of the key challenges for communication management. This chapter aims to give more insights into the roles, tasks and capabilities of PR, and into how these contribute to organisational decision making and autopoiesis.

2.7.1 Roles of PR professionals

Organisations are systems comprising various roles (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2006). Organisations bundle their members into different positions, responsibilities and duties to pursue certain goals and objectives (Nassehi, 2005). A role is defined as “recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome” (Katz and Kahn, 1978: 189). Therefore, roles are constructed from the observed behaviour and theoretical expectations (Dozier and Broom, 2006). The representation of organisation itself and its goals are the basis of defining the roles of organisation members.

“Roles tell organisation members how to reason about the problems and decisions that face them: where to look for appropriate and legitimate informational premises and goal (evaluative) premises, and what techniques to use in processing these premises” Simon (1991: 126-127).

By communicating with internal and external publics PR professionals support organisational operations (Juholin, 2010). In particular, they help bridge the gap between organisational goals and stakeholder expectations (Hazleton, 2006). This contributes to organisational decision making, which is considered one of the most important functions of PR professionals (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988). The role of the PR function in an organisation has considerable importance for individuals' roles (Dozier and Broom, 1995; 2006). However, PR professionals may not always be regarded as a strategic resource to top management (Juholin, 2004). The dominant coalition in an organisation, those individuals that affect its strategy and top decisions, has role expectations concerning the PR function.

But in turn, the enacted roles might not have one-on-one correspondence to the expected professionals' roles.

The founding fathers of research on PR roles are Broom and Ferguson, who separately examined professionals' roles by the end of the 1970s. Both developed a typology of PR roles, while in the 1980s Dozier, based on Broom, brought the number of roles back to two (Dozier and Broom, 2006). Following this dichotomy (Dozier, 1992), it would be logical that PR managers participate in decision making and support communication and management in organisational problem solving processes, whereas PR technicians are mainly excluded from the management's decision-making processes and generate only the related communication products when disseminating the outcomes of the decisions.

The proposed manager-technician dichotomy has since been very often the basis of research in the field of PR. But the role dichotomy also evoked lots of criticism. The critique ranges from methodological to ideological (Dozier and Broom, 2006). The typology of two different roles has been criticised for oversimplifying the complexity of the role enactment of professionals (e.g. Leichy and Springston, 1996; Toth, Serini, Wright, and Emig, 1998). Moreover, many of the role studies had also been conducted in U.S. based organisations only (Moss, Warnaby and Newman, 2000).

During the last 30 years, PR roles have been studied from several perspectives. In the 1990s, the Excellence study by Grunig (1992) showed that the manager role in practice was more influential than the role of the technician. After the turn of the millennium, the roles have been remodelled by several scholars (e.g. Van Ruler, 2004; DeSanto and Moss, 2005; Verčič et al., 2001; Nothhaft, 2010). Dozier and Broom (2006) noted, that the roles are constantly reinvented through observation of one's day-to-day work. They encouraged to further study role implications for the practice and education of PR. Discussion around the topic has been built around recent quantitative research (e.g. Swerling et al., 2014; Brønn, 2014; Kanihan et al., 2013), along with some qualitative research (e.g. Huebner et al., 2008; Nothhaft, 2010; Smith and Place, 2013). The different roles and focus of PR need further clarifying, as the PR professionals' perceptions of their profession and tasks differ with the expectations within the organisation regarding the role and outcomes of PR (Asunta, 2016).

PR role theories provide a general picture of PR in practice, but do not focus specifically on the roles of PR professionals in decision-making processes. In this dissertation, the focus is on organisational decision making as inspired by Luhmann.

2.7.2 Tasks of PR professionals generally

PR departments are anticipated to help organisations to understand their environments (White and Mazur, 1995), enact it (Cheney et al., 2004), anticipate and defuse potential problems (Fawkes, 2004) and adjust and adapt to changes in the environment of an organisation (Jensen, 2002; Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2006). Baskin and Aronoff (1988: 4) define the tasks of PR as follows:

“Public relations practitioners develop, execute, and evaluate organizational programs that promote the exchange of influence and understanding among organization's constituent parts and publics.”

The research on the work of PR professionals has traditionally emphasised PR roles, e.g. related to internal and external enabling and legitimating the operations of the organisation, while concerning the tasks, the focus has been on identifying PR tasks and how demanding they are (Asunta, 2016). Ideally PR helps an organisation to observe and analyse the public sphere (Jensen, 2002) and establish its objectives and adapt to the changing environment (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988). In this dissertation, the research on tasks focuses on the decision-making processes.

2.7.3 Capabilities of PR professionals

To enact the roles and execute the tasks, PR professionals need to have certain skills, competencies and personal attributes. These capabilities that professionals need to meet the expectations have become more diverse over time. In PR literature, the studies of capabilities overlap in terminology (Tench and Moreno, 2015). A skill is a “task-specific ability of communication professional to effectively perform a certain task”, while a competence is more broadly defined as “a domain of knowledge or specific expertise that an individual needs to possess to properly perform a specific job”, as Cornelissen states (2008: 159). Personal attributes are defined as “soft skills” or “employability skills” and are in the literature described as the basis for how well competencies are performed (Tench and Moreno, 2015).

Different capabilities, knowledge bases and sources of motivation are related to competent role performance and identification (Hazleton, 2006). Identifying the capabilities of PR professionals is important for the professional development of the practice and its input to management and organisational decision making (Cornelissen, 2008). In this dissertation, capabilities will be investigated focusing on decision-making processes.

Thus, looking back on the previous sections, in order to better understand the contribution of PR to decision making, the related roles, tasks and capabilities all need to be clarified.

2.7.4 Contribution to autopoiesis

Research that investigates how PR contributes to organisational decision making is scarce. Some research relates to PR as a source of intelligence concerning the social environment of the organisation. PR professionals are considered to span the organisational boundaries and to carry information to groups outside and inside the organisation (White and Mazur, 1995; see also Baskin and Aronoff, 1988). Coping with uncertainty and identifying environmental conditions that will allow to pursue a certain strategy are the basis for demonstrating the value of PR (Hambrick, 1981).

PR can be illustrated as a subsystem bounded by the environment to which it must respond by executing its core tasks: research, planning, action and evaluation (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988). The permeable boundaries of the organisation are penetrated by inputs from the environment. After contributing to the decision making, outputs are directed back to the environment and publics of the organisation. Publics can be defined as e.g. media and employees, but any definable group, such as the dominant coalition of the organisation or the decision makers, can be classified as a public as well (Baskin and Aronoff, 1988).

In the theoretical framework of this dissertation PR's contribution to decision making and autopoiesis of organisations has been addressed. Professionals present organisations to support survival through control over information and processes (March and Simon, 1993). PR as a subsystem of a system or as a management function of an organisation observes the environment, makes sense of it and enacts it by shaping and structuring information. Top management formulates the strategy of an organisation. In the process of organisational decision making, the organisation interprets its environment (Daft and Weick, 2001).

The organisation may assume the environment to be more or less predictable according to the experienced contingency. This relates to how an organisation engages with its environment to support autopoiesis, the self-production of the system. The stance towards the environment varies, as some organisations do not actively gather intelligence, whereas others proactively monitor developments while interacting with publics (Daft and Weick, 2001). Miles, Snow, Meyer and Coleman (1978) mention prospecting, analysing, reacting and defending stances. The first two are anticipative modes, which could be considered to be enacting and discovering. In this way, the four modes are summarised in Figure 2 and described as follows.

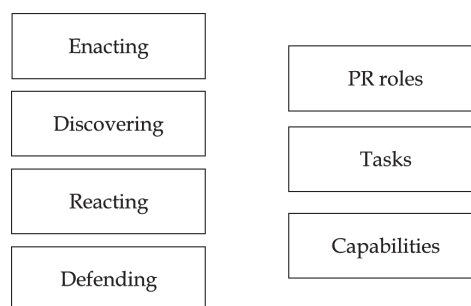


FIGURE 2 Strategic modes and PR

Enacting means engaging actively with the environment and experimenting behaviour through decision making. Discovering means analysing the environment and trying out weighed alternatives logically. Reacting helps to adapt to the changes of the environment through unrationalised decision making where various alternatives and interpretations compete. Defending operates together with the programmed decisions of an organisation based on internal knowledge and experiences of past events.

PR may contribute to all four modes in which organisations support autopoiesis. However, it is unclear how PR roles, tasks and capabilities actually contribute to organisational decision making and the autopoiesis of organisations. In the next chapter the research design is introduced.

3 RESEARCH DESIGN

The approach utilised in this dissertation follows Luhmann's functional method approach. This is regarded as an observational tool (Knudsen, 2010: 6) and "generates its observations by means of the distinction between problems and solutions". The problem is built by theory (Luhmann, 1991) and the solution is clarified by comparing different solutions to the same problem.

At the end of the theoretical framework, PR professionals' contribution to decision making was presented as a basis for the research. Decision making patterns often form blind spots for organisations and their members, and second order observations by researchers can offer input to stimulate reflection of practice (Baralou et al., 2012). This is a way to give meaning to strategic content, processes and the context of organisations (Vos, 2005). The research was conducted in various studies, presented here in three parts. An overview of the studies is presented in the following section.

3.1 Overview of the studies

The research of this dissertation focuses on the contribution of PR professionals to organisational decision-making processes and the autopoiesis of organisations. It investigates the related roles, tasks, and capabilities of professionals. Each of the studies has its own research questions and research methods. The multidisciplinary theoretical framework and the research methods complement each other. Here the focus is on how the studies contribute to the overall purpose of the dissertation. Overall, the research in this dissertation was guided by a qualitative, content-oriented, interpretive research approach. An overview of the studies is presented in Table 4. The work consisted of three parts; the first two parts lead up to the third and main part of this research.

TABLE 4 Overview of the studies

| |
|--|
| <i>Part 1. Preliminary empirical work:</i> 1. Decision making in organisations - a study within one organisation |
| <i>Part 2. Insights gained in academic articles and reports:</i> 2a. Role of PR professionals in organisational decision making - in the literature 2b. Role of PR professionals in organisational decision making - in academic reports 2c. Role of PR professionals in decision making - in crisis situations |
| <i>Part 3. Empirical work on perceptions of professionals:</i> 3a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making - expert views 3b. Tasks of PR professionals concerning decision making - expert views 3c. Skills and competencies of PR professionals concerning decision making - expert views |

3.1.1 Part 1 - Preliminary empirical work

The preliminary study examined decision communication in an engineer-based organisation in 2008 to 2009. The purpose of this study was to increase the understanding of organisational decision making. It explored how an engineer based organisation communicates decisions and outcomes inside the organisation. The study also contributed to the discussion of the concept of decision communication generally and from a theoretical point of view. The study contained two separate parts. The first part of the research consisted of five in-depth interviews with the team leaders and the head of the department. The interview comprised 14 questions and the interviews lasted for up to one hour. The interviews were transcribed, then content analysed and finally different theme groups within a question were formed. The second part of the research utilised an online quantitative survey, which was targeted at all employees of the researched organisation. Overall 36 out of 74 employees participated. The quantitative data was analysed with SPSS statistical analysis software by using means, ranges, numbers of respondents and deviations.

Key findings demonstrated that decision communication can be considered as the backbone of internal communication, which can benefit the whole organisation from the top management to lower levels. Decision communication should include the "right amount" of information and use communication channels that the employees find most suitable for receiving information about decisions and decision making. Decision communication benefits from the use of collective information databases and an open discussion culture about decision making. The daily work in an organisation is full of decisions and the boundaries of decisions disappear in the everyday action. This means that usually only big and important decisions are truly acknowledged as decisions. The

decision-making process is very strongly based on information and facts. The flow of information and messages build the most important decision premise in organisations. Decisions are a special form of communication and also social events and consist of coordinated actions. The first study presented a connection for the research questions and approach for the studies of Part 2.

3.1.2 Part 2 - Insights gained in academic articles and reports

Part 2 consists of three independent studies. The first one (2a) examined the contribution of PR professionals to organisational decision making and how this has been covered in peer-reviewed scientific journals during the timeline 2002-2012. The purpose of this study was to broaden the knowledge base of how PR professionals' contribution and involvement is studied and discussed, and how the empirical work on perceptions (Part 3) could be executed later on. This study utilised a computerised search of relevant scientific articles in October 2012 from three major databases: EBSCOhost, Web of Science and ProQuest. After the systematic literature search and manual three-phase selection of articles, 38 articles originating from 26 different journals were further analysed using thematic analysis. To answer the research questions, each article was given a primary and secondary code by the theme it addressed. By coding the articles, relevant research themes were identified across the sample of articles. The main findings and conclusions of each article were transferred to a data extraction table.

The second smaller study (2b) consisted of a secondary analysis of European Communication Monitor surveys from 2007 to 2016. It aimed to clarify the contribution of PR function and professionals to organisational decision and strategy making. It also investigated possible actions and means how PR function contributes to the autopoiesis of organisations. This additional study was not reported in a paper as it primarily served to gain background information for the research.

The third smaller study (2c) consisted of reviewing the CBRN Communication Scorecard tool, which facilitates the preparedness of crisis communication in the cases of CBRN terrorism incidents. The scorecard aims to offer a framework for evaluating and improving crisis communication, and assisting in communication planning. For this dissertation, the role and contribution of PR professionals were reviewed and reported.

3.1.3 Part 3 - Empirical work on perceptions of professionals

Part 3 is the main part of the research and builds on the previous parts 1 and 2. Part 3 investigated qualitatively how PR professionals contribute to the organisational decision-making process. This study aimed to clarify how PR managers and press officers in Finland perceive their roles (3a), tasks (3b) and capabilities (3c) in organisational decision-making processes and how they contribute to the communicative value of the process. Semi-structured interviews were selected as a research method since a rich description of the phenomena, based on experience in practice, was sought. The research data for this study were collected

by interviewing 12 PR professionals, managers and press officers, based on availability and willingness, during the period from December 2013 to May 2014. The interviews were conducted in person by the author and lasted up to 70 minutes. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed for further analysis. The transcribed interview texts were content analysed in Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software. The analysis followed the content of questionnaire (see Appendix 1) and the interviewees' quotations were coded according to the questions asked. The codes were divided into three main code families: professionals' roles, tasks and skills. Appendix 2 shows an example of code families and codes used in Study 3b. The data were analysed in a data-extraction table with one row for each fragment and columns for the quantities of codes, their descriptions and, finally, the original quotations. After the analysis, the interpreted data of Part 3 was split into three different articles (see Table 5).

3.2 Research questions

This dissertation combines three larger scale research parts to create one combined body of knowledge. The research questions for each individual part and smaller scale study are presented in Table 5.

TABLE 5 Research questions of the studies

| Studies | Research questions |
|---|--|
| <i>Part 1. Preliminary empirical work:</i> 1. Decision making in organisations - a study within one organisation | RQ 1: What is decision communication? RQ 2: What is its meaning to organisations and PR? |
| <i>Part 2. Insights gained in academic articles and reports:</i> 2a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making - in the literature 2b. Role of PR professionals in organisational decision making - in academic reports 2c. Role of PR professionals in decision making - in crisis situations | RQ 1: How, according to the scientific literature in refereed journals, do PR professionals contribute to organisational decision making? RQ 2: What research trends on this topic are revealed in the literature? RQ: How is the role of PR professionals in organisational decision making depicted in quantitative reports about the profession? RQ: How is the contribution of the PR function to crisis management and decision making seen during various phases of crisis? |
| <i>Part 3. Empirical work on perceptions of professionals:</i> 3a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making - expert views | RQ: How do public relation professionals contribute to the organisational decision making in Finland? |

| | |
|---|---|
| 3b. Tasks of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views | RQ: How do PR professionals’ communicative tasks contribute to organisational decision making? |
| 3c. Skills and competencies of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views | RQ: What kind of competencies and skills do PR professionals need in order to contribute to organisational decision making? |

The first study, the preliminary empirical work, investigated the significance of decisions and decision communication within one organisation. The study clarified how decisions are communicated and what meaning decision communication has in the daily work of the organisation. It also revealed that not all decisions are considered with equal emphasis in organisations. This study provided insights, which helped to clarify the focus of the systematic literature review (2a).

The literature study on the roles of PR professionals (2a) had a significant impact on the dissertation. It provided a foundation for the knowledge of PR professionals’ contribution as well as guided the planning of the empirical work for Part 3. The literature study was supported by the secondary analysis of European Communicator Monitor reports (2b) to achieve a more coherent picture of the state of PR’s contribution to organisations. The contribution to decision making was complemented with a small review of the role of PR in crisis management and decision making (2c). It resulted in a model on how PR could support decision making in various phases of crisis.

The empirical phase, Part 3, concentrated on clarifying the roles, tasks and capabilities of PR professionals when contributing to decision making. The rich interview data gave a deeper insight into the topic. The study on roles (3a) gave an unexplored picture of the PR’s contribution to decision making in Finnish organisations. The study on tasks (3b) further clarified the daily operations of PR professionals related to decision-making processes. Finally, the study on capabilities (3c) complemented the picture by clarifying what professionals need in order to contribute to decision making. Every individual study was significant on its own, but together they helped to understand what the contribution of PR is and what is needed to be contributive.

The methodology behind the studies is presented in the following section.

3.3 Methodology

This dissertation builds on three research parts. Each of the three studies has its own research questions but utilises similar phases of research. First, the theoretical frame is formed by multidisciplinary literature search. Then the research questions are approached, mostly using a qualitative approach, data collection methods such as semi-structured interviews and data analysis methods such as thematic content analysis. The studies combine mainly qualitative methods (used in all of the three parts) and some quantitative methods (in Part 1). Both,

qualitative and quantitative methods, aim to create knowledge and understanding of how PR professionals contribute to organisational decision making.

Qualitative research generally includes several perspectives as organisations and the work of PR can be studied from various premises and points of view. In this dissertation, the perspective can be seen as the social constructive approach. This approach suggests that all our knowledge and understanding are socially constructed (Spencer, Bryce and Walsh, 2014). The work of PR influences the meaning of reality (White, 1987). Organisations pursue solutions and make decisions when dealing with, for example, publics, complex social relationships, power and politics. Also, the meaning of the environment for organisations is socially constructed, in which PR professionals have an important role (White, 1987). PR represents the organisation to the outside world through various communication channels and constructs the reality to both sides. The reality is then negotiated for. The reality is context and socially relative, and many realities can exist simultaneously (Spencer et al., 2014).

The next sections introduce the main research methods used in the research.

3.3.1 Semi-structured interviews

Conversations are a rich and essential source of knowledge about the personal and social aspects of peoples' lives (Brinkmann, 2014). Semi-structured interviews are probably the most widespread form of interviews in social sciences and are even described as "a conversation with purpose" (Kahn and Cannell, 1957: 97). They allow much more room for knowledge creation and to follow up important angles of the interview than structured or entirely unstructured interviews do (Brinkmann, 2014). The interviewer has a greater chance of "becoming visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself, rather than hiding behind a preset interview guide" (Brinkmann, 2014: 286). Semi-structured interviews, as Daymon and Holloway (2002) find, aim at giving information from the past and present, when the subjects can express their feelings and thoughts freely. Semi-structured interviews are a more flexible tool and thus, enable the interviewer to understand the perspectives of interviewees better, which may help to reveal new phenomena (Keyton, 2006). New topics might be brought up from the outside the questionnaire but the interviewer has to be sharp enough to notice what information is left outside or taken outside the pre-planned questions (Patton, 2002). In general, interviews as a method are respondent dependent as the interviewee might deliberately tend to try to please the researcher, might omit or embellish important information or give "socially desirable" answers (Fontana and Frey, 2003).

Semi-structured interviews are conducted to serve the researcher's goal of producing knowledge (Brinkmann, 2014). The method enables the researcher to understand how the life world of participants is experienced, which opens possibilities to formulate scientific theories about it. In this dissertation, the life world is the organisations and the decision-making environment. Although the interviews collect experiences and acts in the world, the interviewer must engage actively in interpreting the described experiences and actions (Brinkmann, 2014).

As a summary, the semi-structured interviews are structured through the interviewer's purpose of finding knowledge, which revolves around the descriptions of the interviewees. The descriptions are about the interviewees' experienced life world, which needs to be interpreted. Qualitative interviewing is very project and researcher dependent and the selected method always contains advantages and disadvantages. The collected knowledge should not be proceeded without proper theorising (Brinkmann, 2014).

For Parts 3 a, b and c of this dissertation 19 PR professionals were invited to in-depth interviews. Based on willingness and availability 12 professionals were eventually interviewed between December 2013 and May 2014. According to Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), 12 interviews would be enough for most research purposes which aim to understand common perceptions and experiences among a group of fairly homogeneous individuals. It has also been argued that six could be sufficient (Morse, 1994) and that six participants can uncover 80 percent of cases and twelve participants around 90 percent (Nielsen and Landauer, 1993). The interviews created rich data as the interviewees were willing to provide detailed answers.

3.3.2 Systematic literature review

A systematic literature review is a flexible research tool for a researcher to develop a conceptual and theoretical framework that could serve various purposes. A literature review is described as a summary and synthesis of relevant literature on a research problem (Sümer, 2011). It is also regarded as "a coherent, integrated, narrative, interpretative criticism that critiques the status of knowledge of a carefully defined topic of the selected relevant existing literature" (Notar and Cole 2010: 3). Literature reviews identify, evaluate, and synthesise the existing body of recorded scientific works (Fink, 2010). The types of review have traditionally been discussed either as "systematic" or "narrative" (Sümer, 2011; Fink, 2010).

A literature review determines what has already been done that relates to the research problem (Notar and Cole, 2010). It should point out the specific procedures and research strategies that could be productive in investigating the research topic. The method also provides a consistent knowledge base, explicit procedures and systematic documentation of the selection criteria (Sümer, 2011). Literature reviews place the results of a study in a historical perspective, which allows the researcher to better understand the research problem and current research trends and developments (Notar and Cole, 2010).

Well-formulated research questions guide the researcher to come up with the suitable keywords to gather the available literature (Sümer, 2011). Relevant keywords also ensure that the researcher selects the relevant scientific works for the final sample. However, it is critically important to select only the most relevant articles or scientific works for the review to ensure quality over quantity (Notar and Cole, 2010). And yet, at the same time, the literature review should be comprehensive and selective (Sümer, 2011).

In this dissertation, the literature review is used in Part 2a to investigate the body of knowledge related to the contribution of PR to organisational decision making. The aim is to give a comprehensive picture of knowledge, set the studied phenomenon into a wider perspective and to reason why the specific perspective should be studied. Even though executed in a systematic and detailed manner, the literature review in this dissertation mostly follows the pattern of a narrative review by presenting the findings conceptually.

3.3.3 Thematic content analysis

Content analysis is a research tool, which is used to find the presence of certain words or concepts within texts (Krippendorff, 1989). He argues, it might be one of the most important research techniques in social sciences. In this dissertation, content analysis is used to analyse the data of all three parts. Content analysis as a method has a long tradition in communication related studies and it was originally developed to analyse the messages of the mass media (Prior, 2014; Krippendorff, 1989). Content analysis is defined as “an approach to the analysis of documents and texts, that seek to quantify content in terms of pre-determined categories” (Bryman, 2008: 274). Content analysis is a technique which makes replicable and valid inferences from data to their context (Krippendorff, 1989). For this work, the method is relevant as it allows the researcher to test the concept of Luhmann’s system theory and autopoiesis.

Content analysis is not a data collection method and, thus, it has to be integrated into a larger scale of research design which also includes a systematic data collection method (Prior, 2014). It can be used to analyse interview data independently in various settings or combined with another analysis method. It can also be used in exploratory studies or as a means of verification (Prior, 2014). Content analysis can allow researchers to include their own context for inquiry and present new social-scientific constructs (Krippendorff, 1989). In this dissertation, thematic analysis was chosen. Thematic analysis can identify and report patterns and themes within data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). They state that it can organise and describe data sets in rich detail, and usually follows a series of structured steps. Drawing on the steps listed by Braun and Clarke (2006: 87), the procedure was visualised in Figure 3.

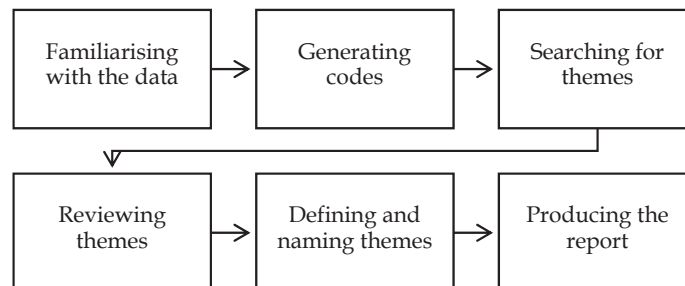


FIGURE 3 Thematic analysis

The method of thematic analysis still has its limitations and weaknesses. If statistically significant findings are required, the method doesn't usually support enough units for quantitative analysis (Krippendorff, 1989). Another limitation is the replicability requirement as the method often leaves a lot of room for unstable and ambiguous interpretations. The third limitation is related to the contribution to social theory since the findings might not be generalisable much beyond the given data (Krippendorff, 1989).

3.3.4 Data collection methods, data description and analysis methods

Table 6 describes the data collection methods, description of the data and analysis methods of each study thoroughly.

TABLE 6 Description of methodology for each study

| | |
|---|---|
| <i>Part 1. Preliminary empirical work:</i> | |
| 1. Decision making in organisations – a study within one organisation | |
| Data collection methods | Interviews: individual interviews with the managers of the automation engineering department at Metso Paper. Survey: an online survey addressed to the employees of the department, using Mr. Interview software. |
| Description of data | The qualitative part consisted of five interviews with four team leaders and the head of the department. The questionnaire comprised of 14 questions and the interviews lasted up to one hour. The total amount of data comprised five hours recorded discussions. The questionnaire for the employees was mostly quantitative and was targeted at all employees of the same department. Overall, 36 out of 74 employees participated. This questionnaire consisted mainly of structured questions, with a few open questions concerning communication related to decision making. |
| Analysis methods | The interview results were transcribed and qualitatively analysed by grouping and combining responses according to the questions of the questionnaire. After this, the questions were grouped according to the research questions and the answers were combined together. The questions were analysed together by forming different theme groups. The quantitative survey data were analysed with SPSS statistical analysis software by using means, ranges, numbers of respondents and deviations. |
| <i>Part 2. Insights gained in academic articles and reports:</i> | |
| 2a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making – in the literature | |
| Data collection methods | Systematic review of the literature in peer-reviewed journals from 1 January 2002 to 31 October 2012. Three major databases were selected: EBSCOhost, Web of Science and ProQuest. |
| Description of data | The final sample consisted of 38 scientific articles from 26 different peer reviewed scientific journals. The inclusion criterion for the final sample was that the articles had to have a clear connection with organisational decision making and public relations or related concepts. |
| Analysis methods | Each of the 38 papers were read thoroughly. The main findings and conclusions of each article were transferred to a data extraction table and |

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| | <p>additional notes were made. Thematic analysis was conducted and yielded four key themes which served as a coding scheme for further qualitative analysis.</p> <p>(1) Participation of PR professionals in organisational decision making (2) Facilitation of organisational decision-making processes by PR professionals (3) Internal and external communication on organisational decisions by PR professionals (4) PR professionals as advisors on ethics, crisis communication, social responsibility and public affairs</p> <p>In addition to the four themes, current trends in the literature on PR and organisational decision making were noted.</p> <p>Each article was primarily and secondarily coded by the themes discussed.</p> |
| 2b. Role of PR professionals in organisational decision making – in academic reports | |
| Data collection methods | Secondary analysis of European Communicator Monitor (ECM) reports published online |
| Description of data | The data consisted of all published ECM reports from 2007 to 2016. ECM is the largest transnational study on the communication profession worldwide, conducted annually. In the latest edition, more than 2,700 communication professionals from 43 countries participated. |
| Analysis methods | The 10 published ECM reports were read thoroughly. The main findings of each report that related to decision making were transferred to a data extraction table. Relevant numerical data from every year were collected and illustrated by a graph. Thematic analysis of the findings was conducted. |
| 2c. Role of PR professionals in decision making – in crisis situations | |
| Data collection methods | Analysis of the CBRN Communication Scorecard |
| Description of data | The data of the CBRN Communication Scorecard consisted of the finished tool and its detailed description. |
| Analysis methods | The content of the CBRN Communication Scorecard tool and the description were read thoroughly and analysed critically when related to decision making. The role of PR function and professionals were then analysed according to all the phases of a crisis. |
| <i>Part 3. Empirical work concerning perceptions of professionals:</i> 3a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making – expert views 3b. Tasks of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views 3c. Skills and competencies of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views | |
| Data collection methods | Qualitative interviews |
| Description of data | 12 in-depth interviews of PR professionals were conducted in person and in Finnish by the author. The interviews lasted from 30 to 70 minutes. The interviews took place from December 2013 to May 2014. All the interviews were audio recorded and they followed a semi-structured question protocol with additional questions asked during the interviews. The total amount of recorded discussions comprised over eight hours. The data was later transcribed which resulted in over 90 pages of data/material/something. Furthermore, an additional |

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| | background information form was filled before the interviews, which contained information about the gender, work experience in the field of PR, the size of the organisation and the size of the PR department. |
| Analysis methods | <p>Thematic content analysis was conducted. First, the data were familiarised with by listening to the interviews, transcribing, reading and making notes. The data of all the interviews were transcribed and managed in Atlas.ti software to facilitate the coding and the further management of the data.</p> <p>The second step was to systematically generate the initial codes without any pre-existing codes. The codes were created based on the content of the interviewees' quotations. Individual quotations were coded with as many codes as was seen necessary. The main purpose of the coding was to identify the roles, tasks and skills the interviewees expressed during the interviews.</p> <p>In the third phase, the codes were reviewed and clear patterns were searched by analysing the relationship of the codes. During this process, the codes were collated and grouped into larger entities, which later were named as themes. The themes were divided into categories as roles, tasks and skills in organisational decision making based on the research questions. A short description for every theme in every category was written.</p> <p>As the fourth step, the existing themes (and their descriptions) were reviewed for every category. The level and connections of various themes were analysed. During this process, some themes formed the main themes and some were merged to other themes.</p> <p>In the fifth phase, the names of every theme in every category (roles, tasks, skills) were reviewed and refined. Final descriptions were then compared with those given in dictionaries and scientific works of reference.</p> <p>Finally, a scholarly report with related literature and research questions was produced for every category (roles, tasks, skills).</p> |

In Part 1, in preliminary empirical work, the study was conducted as a case study concerning one focal organisation, the automation engineering department of Metso Paper. The methods consisted of in-depth interviews and an online questionnaire to the employees. The data consisted of over five hours of interviews. The online questionnaire contained mostly structured questions with some open questions to clarify communication related to decision making. The interviews were content analysed and the quantitative data of the online questionnaire were analysed by SPSS statistical analysis software using means, ranges, numbers of respondents and deviations.

Part 2 included three independent studies and consisted of a systematic literature review, a secondary analysis of European Communicator Monitor (ECM) reports and an analysis of the CBRN Communication Scorecard. The first study (2a) was a systematic literature review using three major research databases: EBSCOhost, Web of Science and ProQuest. After several scanning

phases to find related articles, the main findings and conclusions of each article in the final sample were transferred to a data extraction table. After this, additional notes were made and thematic analysis was conducted. The second study (2b) utilised the data of ECM reports from 2007 to 2016. Each of the 10 published reports were read thoroughly. All mentions related to decision making, business strategies or organisational management were transferred to a data extraction table and further scrutinised through thematic analysis. Relevant numerical data from every year were collected and illustrated by a graph. The third study (2c) was a small additional study that reviewed the data of the CBRN Communication Scorecard. All performance indicators of the scorecard tool and its description were read thoroughly and analysed critically. The role of the PR professionals was then analysed according to the crisis phases.

Part 3 investigated the Finnish PR professionals' perceptions of their contribution to organisational decision making. In-depth interviews were conducted in person and in Finnish. All the interviews were audio recorded and followed a semi-structured question protocol with additional open and background questions. The data were scanned through, read and notes were made. Then the data were transcribed, and managed and coded using Atlas.ti software. The codes were created based on the content of the interviewees' quotations. The main purpose of the coding was to identify the roles, tasks and capabilities the interviewees expressed during the interviews. Then the codes were reviewed to find clear patterns. Next, the codes were collated and grouped into larger entities which later were labelled themes. The themes were divided into roles, tasks and capabilities based on the research questions. Every theme in every category got a short description. Then the themes (and their description) were critically reviewed for every category. The level and connections of various themes were analysed and some themes were merged into other themes to form larger and clearer categories. Next, the names of every theme in every category (roles, tasks, capabilities) were reviewed and refined. Final descriptions were then compared with those given in dictionaries and scientific works of reference.

4 CENTRAL FINDINGS

The purpose of this dissertation was to clarify PR's contribution to organisational decision making and problem solving. In the bigger picture, the purpose of this thesis was to contribute to the conceptual and empirical understanding in order to clarify the means how PR could, as part of a system, help organisations to respond and adapt to the changes in organisational environment. This chapter presents a synthesis of the findings of the studies.

Table 7 provides the first, brief, overview of the main results of the studies and how these may relate to Luhmann's views. The next sections will further explain and elaborate on the findings.

TABLE 7 Brief overview of the results of the studies

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|--|
| <p><i>Part 1. Preliminary empirical work:</i></p> <p>1. Decision making in organisations - a study within one organisation</p> <p>In this preliminary study (reported in paper I) the findings suggest that in an engineer based organisation decision making and related communication are heavily based on information and facts. These formed the most important decision premise and decision communication was the backbone of internal communication. The findings supported Luhmann's view, that decisions are connected to following decisions.</p> |
| <p><i>Part 2. Insights gained in academic articles and reports:</i></p> <p>2a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making - in the literature</p> <p>The reviewed literature shows four different roles of PR professionals that contribute to decision-making processes (reported in paper II). The findings draw a link into several of Luhmann's perspectives. The various roles that PR professionals have during decision-making processes serve the interaction with the environment, making sense of it and creating meaning for internal operations.</p> <p>2b. Role of PR professionals in organisational decision making - in academic reports</p> <p>While the advisory influence has remained nearly on the same level throughout the reported period, the executive influence has slightly increased over the years, with the executive influence being highest in non-profit organisations and joint stock companies. The influence correlates with role-taking, hierarchical position and years of practice of professionals. PR profes-</p> |

sionals consider their most important activity to be working with executives to deliver insights for decision making and enhancing organisational listening.

2c. Role of PR professionals in decision making – in crisis situations

The analysis shows how PR contributes to decision making in the four different phases of crises (reported in paper III). This relates to Luhmann's conclusions that when a system tries to stabilise itself, it encounters new problems and increased contingency in decision making.

Part 3. Empirical work on perceptions of professionals:

3a. Roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making – expert views

Here the concept of roles in decision making was tested empirically (reported in paper IV). The results show a rich, constantly developing picture of PR practices and the diversity of the roles in decision making in Finnish organisations. They also underline that in organisations roles related to decision making form complex behaviours and relationships. The roles found open possibilities to observe these behaviours and relationships between system components. The findings also indicate that systems need a function that can recognise if the environment is changed and give meaningful input for their autopoietic reproduction.

3b. Tasks of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views

This study concentrated on the concept of tasks in decision making. The results indicate that PR professionals are expected to perform different tasks in different phases of a decision-making process and work simultaneously on several tasks (reported in paper V). The findings underline the input-throughput-output perspective, which emphasises the various phases of decision-making processes in which PR professionals adapt to the changing environment, and contribute to the transparency and visibility of decision making in social systems.

3c. Skills and competencies of PR professionals concerning decision making – expert views

This part focused on the capabilities of PR professionals needed in order to contribute to decision making. The outcomes reveal that PR professionals appreciate the deeper understanding of business and organisation management over technical skills and personal attributes. It was suggested that individual PR professionals need to identify and review their capabilities related to decision-making processes in order to develop a vision on what makes his or her contribution valuable to organisational decision making (reported in paper VI). The findings clarify the components of PR professionals' capabilities that are crucial to form a solid personal premise for decision-making processes.

In the following sections, the findings of this dissertation are summarised and discussed in greater detail.

4.1 Part 1 - Preliminary empirical work

Part 1, as a preliminary case study, focused on decision communication in an engineer-based organisation. A mixed method research was conducted in an engineer-based organisation, a local department of technology and services supplier Metso Paper in October 2008 and February 2009. The findings comprise the results of manager interviews and an employee survey. The research

question was: How are decisions communicated in the automation engineering department of Metso Paper? The qualitative findings resulted in three main themes, as shown in Table 8. The table focuses on those findings of the study most relevant to this dissertation.

TABLE 8 Summary of the results from the preliminary study

| Theme | Main findings |
|---|---|
| Communication of decisions to employees | Best channels to communicate decisions are face-to-face, meetings and email, where memos can be further delivered. The urgency of a message defines the chosen channel. Ongoing decision-making processes are often discussed via non-official communication channels. The attitude of the employees affects how decisions are accepted. |
| Communicating decisions to managers | Employees' decisions are communicated to managers mostly face-to-face or by email. Employees' decisions are not monitored frequently but only when particular information is needed. Feedback is received often via non-official channels, e.g. while being among employees. |
| Managers as decision makers and communicators | Managers acknowledged their roles as decision makers more as information gatherers and processors than authoritative leaders. Managers do not explain decisions as the decision making was mainly based on facts. Managers felt that their role as a decision maker and a communicator is to take decision making to a direction that eases and helps the further decision making of employees. |

The overall findings from the study revealed that when the daily work is full of decisions the boundaries of decisions disappear in the everyday action and communication. Only big and important decisions were acknowledged as decisions and, in those cases, they always included a change and a process of information. The results indicated that the decision-making process is strongly based on information and facts, whereas the flow of information and messages build the most important decision premise. Managers feed alternatives for decision making and try to ease and guide the employees' decision making. The responsibility for communicating decisions is widely given to employees, but the process was not guided. Employees decide how decisions are communicated vertically and horizontally inside their organisational unit and the channel is often chosen by the urgency of the message. The outcomes of the exploratory case study indicated that decisions can be seen as the guiding force of organisations and as a feed for internal communication. Communication of decisions can be considered the backbone of internal communication, which could benefit the whole organisation.

4.2 Part 2 - Insights gained in academic articles and reports

Part 2 concentrated on the contribution of PR to decision-making processes. The purpose of the studies was to clarify the contribution of PR professionals to organisational decision making and it consisted of three separate studies.

Findings Study 2a – literature review

The first study of Part 2 (Study 2a) was the systematic literature review. The focus of the search was on how the contribution of PR to decision making was seen in peer-reviewed journals from 2002 to 2012. The main findings of the thematic analysis were divided into key themes that are presented in Table 9. In the table, the themes 1-4 present the contribution of PR professionals, whereas theme 5 comprises the current research trends identified in the literature review.

TABLE 9 Results from Study 2a – literature review

| Theme | Main findings concerning the professional |
|--|---|
| (1) Participation of PR professionals in organisational decision making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impacts decision-making processes acting as a catalyst for managerial decision making. • Enhances the understanding of the communicative aspects of decisions. |
| (2) Facilitation of organisational decision-making processes by PR professionals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Arranges the communication process by supporting management. • Steers the internal and external dialogue with stakeholders and management. |
| (3) Internal and external communication on organisational decisions by PR professionals | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accountable disseminator of decisions by acting as the voice of decisions. • Interpreter of decisions to internal and external stakeholders. |
| (4) PR professionals as advisors on ethics, crisis communication, social responsibility and public affairs | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Counsellor on corporate social responsibility, recognises issues and guides decision making. • Advocate of ethical decision making and communication by identifying informational needs and interests. • Supports crisis management and public affairs by disseminating and managing information. |
| (5) Current trends in the literature on PR and organisational decision making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PR contributing to organisational decision making is an important topic for future research. • PR is heading towards a more managerial approach and scholars argue that PR should take an active part in organisational decision making. |

Overall, the analysis revealed that PR as a function of organisations is viewed as an important part of organisational decision making. The four themes showed, that by participating, PR professionals are expected to impact decision making and enhance the understanding of the communicative aspects of processes. Additionally, in facilitating the process, professionals provide advice and manage the communication process during decision making. They also ar-

range dialogue between the organisation and its internal and external stakeholders. Moreover, by disseminating, professionals communicate decisions and serve as accountable disseminators. They also add richness to the information and materialise the outcomes of decisions for organisational publics. Finally, by advising, they advise on decisions related to corporate ethics, crisis communication, social responsibility and public affairs. All the various roles and aspects discussed in the literature related to how PR contributes to decision making were summarised into four PR roles, as illustrated in Figure 4.

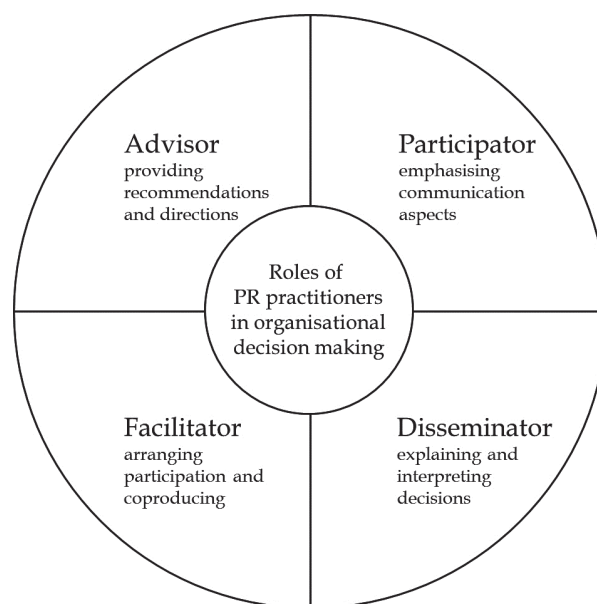


FIGURE 4 The wheel model of PR roles in organisational decision making

The roles found in the literature review were more complex than the dichotomy suggested in early literature. They would later be further detailed in Study 3a. The results of the review also revealed current research trends. The topic of PR's contribution to organisational decision making increasingly gets attention in research, as PR is acknowledged to be heading towards a managerial approach.

Findings Study 2b – reports

The second study of part 2 (Study 2b) consisted of a secondary analysis of the reports of the European Communicator Monitor from 2007 to 2016 (ECM, 2016). This analysis was added here to the studies reported in papers to clarify if such already available data clarified the contribution of PR professionals to decision making and autopoiesis of organisations.

Since 2007, the reports have acknowledged that PR professionals face challenges in linking their function to business strategies. This topic has constantly been measured from 2007 to 2016 and among professionals, it was perceived

either as the first or second most important issue during the time span. Professionals have also been struggling to combine advancing communication strategies by establishing value links to the strategy of their organisation. But still, the reports indicate that professionals have achieved a relevant status in organisations and are able to influence the management by providing recommendations. Based on the data, a table was constructed to show the influence of PR professionals on strategic management as measured in all yearly reports from 2008 to 2013 (see Figure 5). It should be noted that the reports are based on surveys for professionals and represent the viewpoint of the PR professionals.

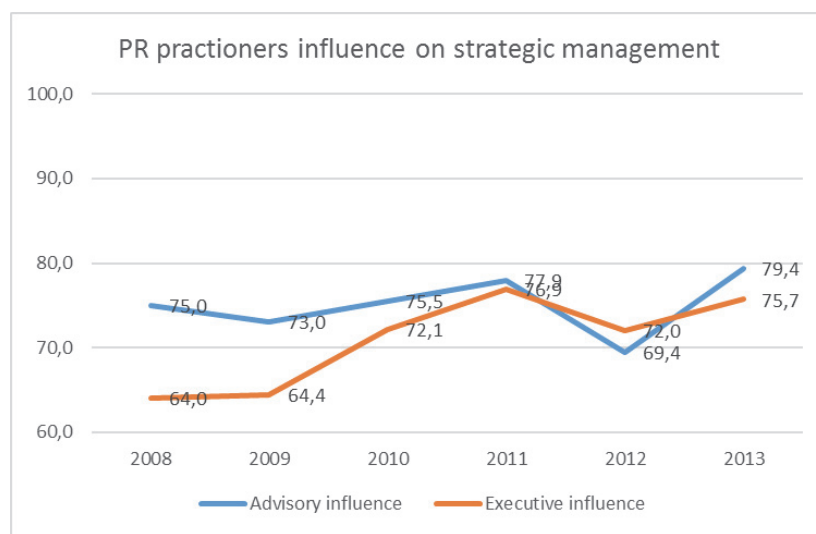


FIGURE 5 PR professionals' influence on strategic management

The graph shows the developments in PR professionals effect on strategic management concerning the advisory influence and executive influence. While the advisory influence has remained nearly on the same level throughout the time period, the executive influence has slightly increased over the years. At the start of the time period, the European professionals were less influential than their counterparts in the United States. The final rating from the year 2013 indicates that executive influence is the highest in non-profit organisations and joint stock companies. The 2009 report emphasised that the influence correlates with role-taking, hierarchical position and years of practice. Especially the professionals in Northern Europe were more influential than the other European colleagues. The age and professional or academic education is not a significant factor in influence. The 2010 report emphasised that professionals use their influence to stimulate shared decision making. The contribution to organisational objectives and decision making was stronger when professionals were acting as "strategic facilitators", a role which was acknowledged to be more common in Northern Europe than elsewhere. The 2012 report found that the lack of understanding within top management and the difficulties of professionals in proving their

impact on organisational goals are the main barriers for further professionalisation of the PR function.

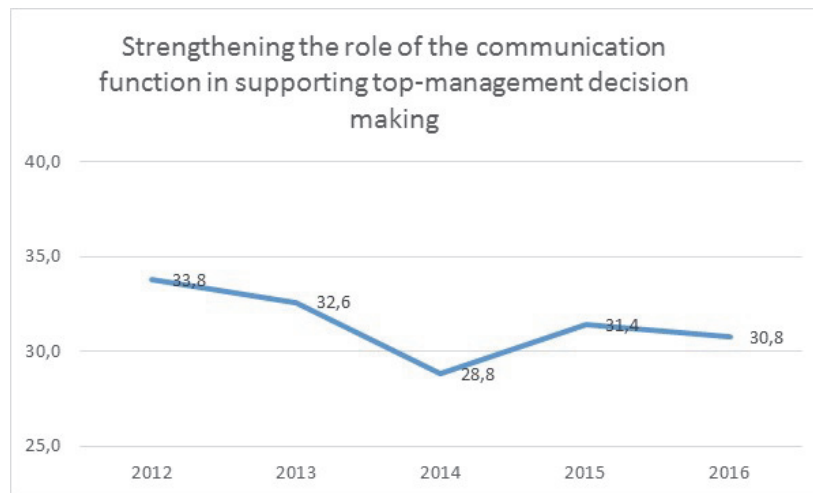


FIGURE 6 Communication function's support to top-management

In 2012, the reports started to measure PR's support to top-management decision making (Figure 6). This issue arose from the intention to strengthen the role of the communication function in helping organisations to make strategic decisions. Especially in non-profit organisations, strengthening the role in decision making was on the top of the priority list. The same report acknowledged that PR professionals in Europe lack possibilities to develop their management and business knowledge. The 2014 report pointed out that professionals are striving for a strategic position at the decision-making table in order to become a part of the strategic management of an organisation. However, the report of 2015 emphasised that the majority of PR's activities contributing to business goals are not monitored or measured. This makes the contribution of PR activities hard to explain to top decision-makers. The report from 2016 indicated that 71,9 percent of PR professionals consider their most important activity working with executives to be delivering insights for decision making. 60,9 percent expressed that PR is enabling decision makers and 56,1 percent enables staff to see the communicative dimensions of decisions. The report also emphasised that PR professionals use almost one day per week (18,8 percent of weekly working time) monitoring the social environment, organisational goals, studying business and social research reports and debating business strategies with top management.

Some clear indications to autopoiesis in ECM reports were discussed from the perspectives of scanning and monitoring activities. Overall, professionals consider their role to be most important in organisational listening as this serves organisational or business goals. PR professionals emphasise transparency in dynamic operational environments to the top management. They take care of

continuously monitoring public issues and stakeholder expectations, and develop possible scenarios with the top decision makers. These constant changes in organisational environment also reconceptualise and reorganise what professionals do on a daily basis. Professionals use their role with stakeholders to provide organisational information and to explain the context and next steps for and on behalf of the organisation.

Findings Study 2c – crisis situations

The third conducted study of Part 2 (Study 2c) concentrated on an analysis and review of the contribution of PR professionals to decision making and management in crisis situations. To clarify how professionals contribute, a Communication Scorecard tool for crisis management was analysed based on the four phases of crisis: preparedness, detection, response and recovery (see Table 10). Its content was reviewed with the insights gained in the literature in mind, especially in Study 2a. The four phases formed a useful tool to evaluate decision-making processes during crises and emergency exercises.

TABLE 10 Summary of the findings of study 2c – crisis situations

| Contribution of PR to decision making and management in crisis | |
|--|--|
| <p>Improving preparedness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • environmental and stakeholder monitoring and data gathering • reviewing existing communication plans • reviewing the transparency of decision making • (re)defining the crisis actor network • acknowledging the information needs, and the ways how media and stakeholders work • reviewing the roles of crisis communicators • identifying information seeking and receiving channels of stakeholders • identifying trustworthy styles of communication. | <p>Enhancing detection and warning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeding important information to the decision-making table • clarifying the reactions of stakeholders to decision makers • ensuring and coordinating the cooperative decision making in the crisis actor network • monitoring the effects of decisions and analysing the behaviour of stakeholders and the media • clarifying misinterpreted and correcting wrong information • ensuring the transparency and clarity of decision making and emphasising responsibilities and actions • disseminating transparent and clear information. |

| | |
|--|---|
| <p>Cooperating and assisting in the crisis response</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensuring that information needs are acknowledged and shared in the response network • explaining the basis and possible consequences of decisions • monitoring and addressing rumours, questions and misinterpretations of publics • acting as a spokesperson of decisions or supporting managerial spokespersons • supporting and assisting public's communication of ongoing risks. | <p>Supporting and facilitating recovery and evaluation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitoring the social environment, gathering information and identifying matters hampering the crisis recovery in decision making • ensuring and supporting participative decision making by promoting understanding of options • advising on and supporting the involvement of publics in decision making • facilitating public groups to express feelings and give feedback about crisis decision making • evaluating the communication related to decision making and facilitating post-crisis learning • reflecting on the actions of the crisis response network and communication professionals. |
|--|---|

Overall, the findings revealed that PR professionals play an important and versatile role in decision making in crises and that their activities are wide-ranging. In the preparedness phase, the contribution of professionals focuses on identifying, monitoring and evaluating changes in the environment and in stakeholder expectations, and enhancing preparedness and related decision-making processes. In the detection phase, professionals facilitate the information flow internally and externally and enhance the understanding of information and decision outcomes. In the response phase, professionals concentrate on supporting the decision making in the response network and strengthening cooperation and information exchange. Finally, in the recovery phase, professionals facilitate the recovery process and the evaluation of earlier decision making in crisis situations by supporting reflection and learning.

4.3 Part 3 - Empirical work on perceptions of professionals

Part 3 concentrated on further investigating the contribution of PR professionals by clarifying the roles, tasks and skills of PR professionals in a practical context. Together with the theoretical framework the findings of Part 3 constructed a connection between PR professionals' roles, tasks and capabilities in decision-making processes. The findings of the categories mentioned were published in three independent papers.

Findings Study 3a - Roles

The study that was first published of Part 3 (Study 3a) focused on roles. The findings provided a detailed picture that showed the diversity of the roles oc-

cupied by PR professionals in decision making. The empirical findings revealed combinations of roles by which PR professionals contribute to organisational decision-making processes. This formed six different role groups: Strategic partner, Strategic liaison, Facilitator, Expert, Implementer and Disseminator (see Figure 7).



FIGURE 7 The roles of PR professionals in organisational decision making

The *strategic partner* influences the board and has power to promote decisions to a favourable direction. The *strategic liaison* emphasises the strategic role of communication and manages interaction between the board and the stakeholders. The *facilitator* scans the environment for issues and plans and prepares ongoing and impending decision making and communication processes. The *expert*, by using advising power, supports decision makers' communication and challenges their views. The *implementer*, without access to actual decision making, concentrates on the process of implementation of decisions, for example, arranging internal change processes. The *disseminator* explains and communicates the outcomes of decisions to internal and external stakeholders.

Overall, the findings (Figure 7) revealed that PR professionals perform a combination of roles in decision-making processes. These role combinations differ over time, during the different decision-making phases. The interviews clarified that the roles do not follow the manager and technician dichotomy described earlier in the literature, and that it is the nature of decision making that demands professionals to utilise multiple roles. That more roles are combined indicates that decision making can serve multiple purposes that call for differ-

ent roles. The findings show that combining roles is natural for PR professionals, as the applicability of a role in their view relates to the immediate situation or issue at hand.

Findings Study 3b - Tasks

In the second study of Part 3 (Study 3b), the results on PR professional's tasks further indicated the diverse responsibilities that professionals have during organisational decision-making processes. The respondents described their participation by naming overall nine different distinguished tasks, mentioned 135 times in total during the interviews. The respondents also stated explicitly to have multiple tasks related to decision-making processes (Figure 8).

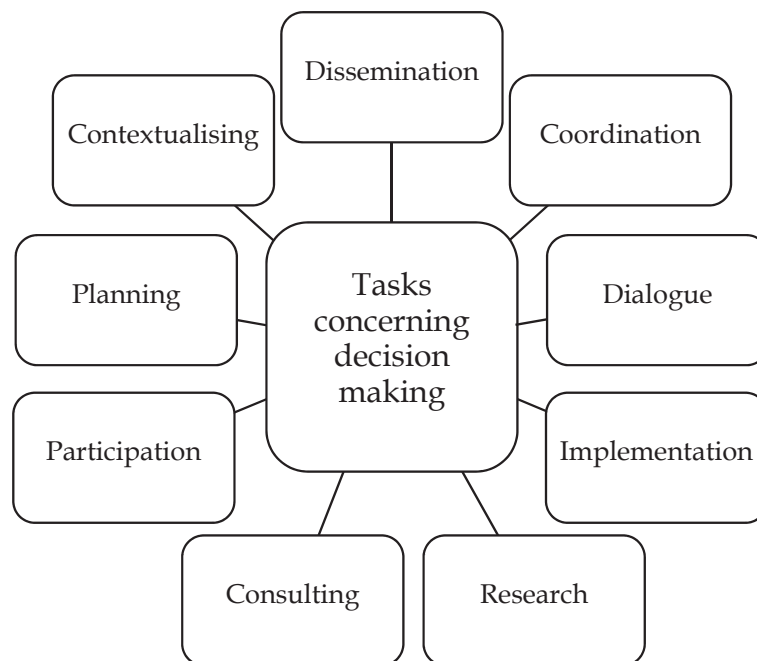


FIGURE 8 Categories of tasks concerning organisational decision making

The task categories can be explained as follows.

- Dissemination: disseminating, writing and publishing information about a process of decision making or its outcome, using various communication channels and by communicating with news media.
- Coordination: coordinating actions and content about decision making with other PR professionals and the board, coordinating core messages as well as guiding the discussion within an organisation and contributing to the decision-making process by producing and managing information in electronic databases and virtual working spaces.

- Dialogue: promoting two-way communication in decision-making processes by arranging dialogue with stakeholders, and pointing out the communicative dimensions, issues and the flow of information, and promoting openness of decision making by creating a more communicative environment by contributing to discussion, document sharing and collaborative communication tools.
- Implementation: implementing decisions by communicating, arranging meetings, clarifying the focus and facts of decisions, supporting the superior-subordinate level communication and operationalising the decisions implementing change by creating timetables and materials, the form of messages, suitable channels and appropriate communicative actions.
- Research: monitoring of stakeholder views to identify issues concerning decision-making processes, also called intelligence, and analysing the pros and cons of decision making related to stakeholders as well as the aspects of communicative actions of decisions.
- Consulting: consulting, advising, sparring and preparing related material for the board to promote decision-making processes.
- Participation: participating in board and management meetings on different levels to ensure access and input to information, influencing the decision-making process by strategy and vision creation, and contributing to the communication process of superiors about decisions and to public sessions or online events with stakeholders in order to discuss the decision-making process or decisions.
- Planning: planning and developing internal and external communication processes to bring strategic decision making to the operational level.
- Contextualising: clarifying the core elements in the topic, building the communicative context around the facts and forming the tone of communication about decision-making processes for daily operations of the organisation.

The task categories found can be further analysed from a system theory perspective. All the nine different task categories were positioned into a process model with input, throughput and output phases to demonstrate their contribution to a decision-making process (see Figure 9). The placement was based on the descriptions of categories after the categories had been created based on the different mentions of tasks and content in the participants' quotations.

The findings indicate that the majority of PR professionals' tasks contributing to organisational decision making are related to the throughput phase, the processing phase, but there are also tasks related to the input and the output phase.

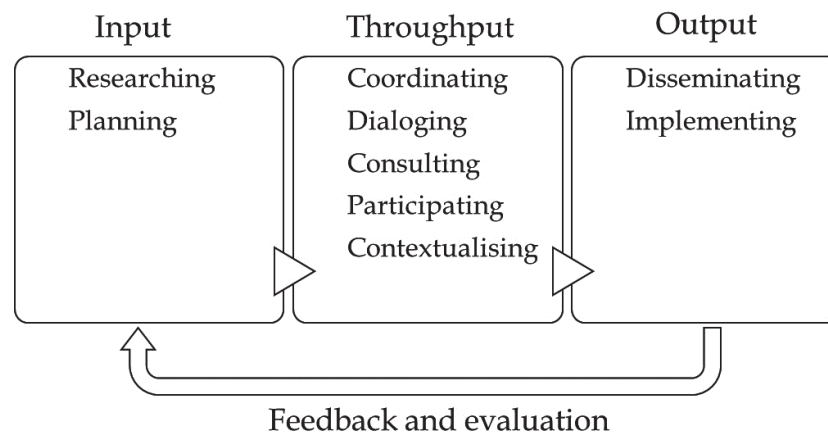


FIGURE 9 The tasks of PR professionals following a process model

When considering decision making as a phased process, the PR tasks are to a certain extent related to the input for this process and to some extent they enhance the throughput and support the output. In the input phase, PR professionals' tasks are related to scanning the environment for useful information and planning communicative actions. In the throughput phase, the internal communication processes emphasise coordination of communicative actions, participation in decision making, promoting dialogue between organisation and stakeholders, consulting decision makers and contextualising communicative content and actions. In the output phase, decisions are implemented by supporting further internal and external communications and appropriate communicative actions. Furthermore, the outcomes of decisions are disseminated by using various communication channels or news media.

The model, like any, provides a simplified picture, as in reality there are overlaps because tasks may not so strictly fit one phase only. The model should not be interpreted linearly as the different phases may not have clear boundaries and as decisions on different topics may be in different phases. The model primarily aims at clarifying different kinds of tasks concerning decision processes.

Findings Part 3c - Capabilities

The findings of the third and final study (3c) of PR professionals' capabilities in decision making further introduced the skills, competencies and personal attributes of PR professionals in decision-making processes in Finnish organisations. The interviews resulted in overall 24 mentions of skills, 30 competencies and 19 personal attributes used. In addition, the findings showed overall 11 mentions of skills, 17 competencies and 6 personal attributes that the interviewees wanted to further develop in relation to decision making. The capabilities that the interviewees wanted to develop indicated individual differences in experience and were not different than what the interviewees collectively had

mentioned as their current capabilities used. Thus, the results were combined in one overview, shown in Figure 10. The empirical findings illustrate that PR professionals first and foremost appreciate a deep understanding of business and organisation management.

| Skills | Competencies | Personal attributes |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text writing and content creation • Advanced use of social media and web communication • Information processing related to decision-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business understanding • Target group and stakeholder oriented thinking • Understanding the key points and seeing the big picture • Understanding the media and publicity • Understanding what is most essential to communicate concerning decision-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being focused on interaction • Tolerance to criticism • Critical thinking • Listening to understand different points of view |

FIGURE 10 The key capabilities enabling decision-making contribution

Figure 10 summarises the most mentioned capabilities that enable PR to contribute to decision making. The foundation is formed by general communication and information processing skills related to decision making and these in turn form the basis for the work of PR professionals. A broad knowledge and understanding of the business and organisational environment is emphasised in the competencies. Moreover, the deeper understanding of the processes related to communication, the expectations of publics and the communicative content of complex processes are highlighted. The personal attributes indicate that the expertise of PR professionals in decision-making contribution is partially built on personal attributes such as being focused on interaction and being tolerant of criticism but still able to think critically.

The capabilities summarised in Figure 10 indicate that the contribution of PR professionals, as expected, goes far beyond general communication skills. The large number of competencies reported underlines the professionals' need for a deep understanding of the organisational environment, the communicative expectations and the needs for interaction with key publics. General skills enable professionals to contribute on the operational level and to the output phase of decision making. However, competencies together with personal attributes enable professionals to act more strategically during the whole decision-making process and contribute to all of the phases (input, throughput and output) with greater impact.

Looking back on the results of the different studies comprising Part 3, it is notable that, indeed, concerning their contribution to organisational decision making, the PR professionals interviewed mentioned certain roles and execute

certain tasks, using certain capabilities. Together these clarify the way in which they, concretely, contribute to organisational decision making (see Figure 11).

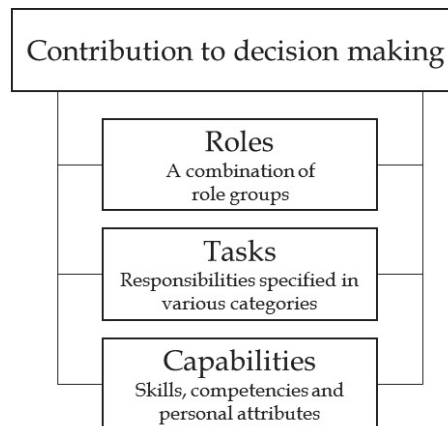


FIGURE 11 The foundation of organisational decision-making contribution

In Figure 11, the three blocks of contribution together form the basis for the contribution to organisational decision-making processes. The capabilities are the basis for the execution of various tasks and roles. The tasks presented in the nine specific categories form the operational level of the PR contribution. The six role groups that PR professionals enact during various phases of decision making form the strategic basis for the contribution of PR to organisational decision making.

The range of roles shows that combining roles is natural to PR professionals and the applicability of a certain role relates to the immediate situation or issue at hand. Professionals may prefer certain roles, but often also need to fulfil new roles in new or ambiguous situations. The responsibilities specified indicate that the PR professionals contribute to decision making by various tasks in different phases of decision making processes. They also combine tasks based on the situation or issue at hand.

5 DISCUSSION

This dissertation focused on the contribution of PR to organisational decision making and the autopoiesis of social systems. It has brought together different theoretical approaches of system theory, organisational decision making and PR. It clarified the contribution of PR professionals by investigating their roles, tasks and capabilities related to organisational decision making. This dissertation provided findings from multiple studies to broaden the picture of PR professionals in organisational decision making. In this chapter, the results are further discussed. After this a model on how PR contributes to the autopoiesis of organisations is proposed. Finally, the research limitations are discussed.

5.1 Summary of the research and findings

The research work began with the preliminary study, Part 1. It increased the understanding of organisational decisions and decision-making processes. It also contributed to the theoretical discussion of the decisions related to communication. This study also clarified that the Luhmannian system theory perspective is challenging and a complicated research line as the perspective is abstract and not backed up by empirical data. This helped streamline the focus of the dissertation and the aim of the research was moved from the lower level general decision making to strategic organisational decision making and to the contribution of the PR function.

In the next phase, in Part 2, the aim was to clarify the contribution of PR professionals to organisational decision making based on literature. The studies reported results from a systematic literature review of scientific articles, identified trends, selected findings from the European Communicator Monitor reports and finally, reviewed and analysed a crisis communication scorecard tool to bring more insights into the roles of PR professionals. Overall, the findings of Part 2 indicated that PR professionals are expected to impact decision making and enhance understanding of the communicative aspects of the processes. PR

as a function is given responsibility to provide advice and manage the communication process during organisational decision making and problem solving. It also showed that the influence of PR professionals on organisational decision and strategy making varies according to the changes occurring in the social environment. PR professionals' most important function relates to monitoring and coping with the changing environments of organisations. They also have a crucial role in crisis decision making and cooperation.

Part 3, the field research phase, consisted of collecting data by interviewing PR professionals face to face. The chosen method, face-to-face interviews, turned out to be rich and rewarding. The discussions followed a semi-structured interview protocol, but all the interviewees were encouraged to freely discuss their experiences about decision making and their contribution to it. The discussions frequently went beyond the original questions of interview protocol and the interviewees used many organisation related examples. Some were willing to, in a detail manner, open the decision-making process, structure of their organisation and general responsibilities of individual organisational actors. This provided interesting data for further analysis and the data were analysed from different perspectives and thus resulted in three empirical papers. Qualitative interviews were also a means to clarify what the research was about as for many professionals discussing about roles, tasks and capabilities related to decision making were a rather novel way to think about their work.

5.2 Comparing the results with earlier insights

When comparing the main findings with the earlier insights from the literature (discussed in the theoretical framework in Chapter 2), some main lines become visible.

The results of the interviews showed that professionals perform a combination of roles that differ depending on the situation. Professionals have to be flexible and adjust their roles and tasks to what their organisation needs. This also calls for tuning in on organisational strategy making and understanding the business as emphasised by the respondents.

This very diverse picture of different combinations of roles in decision making is not explained by dichotomies suggested in the theory on general PR roles (e.g. Dozier and Broom, 2006). However, that the roles are specific for a situation is supported by strategy literature that underlines situation-specific strategies. The strategies and the diversity of decisions in organisations call for different combinations of professional roles and tasks. As organisations react differently to uncertainties in their environment, this explains the occurrence of different roles and task combinations in PR contributing to decision making. The decision-making process was described as steps (Simon, 1960) or stages (Mintzberg et al., 1976) which are dynamic and include many feedback loops (Luthans, 1989). In the light of the results presented, the roles and tasks found confirm these insights. The roles and tasks of PR professionals support clear

feedback loops. They form the basis for the interpretation process and are connected to the model of interpreting the external environment (Weick, 2001).

Talking about decision-making processes was challenging to several interviewees. The interviewees concentrated mainly on the operational level of roles and tasks in decision making and hardly addressed the political or power dimensions of decisions and decision-making processes. As noted in Chapter 2, decisions in organisations have multiple roles (Brunsson, 1990), are infused politics (March, 1991), and their outcomes may have a foremost symbolic meaning (Stone, 2002). The interviewees did not elaborate on such matters, indicating that the PR professionals do not problematise this or might not fully recognise the power and political perspectives of organisational decision making. Interviewees that were more actively involved in decision making, mentioned more challenges in this direction, whereas others seemed to be less aware of the political dimensions of their roles and tasks concerning organisational decision-making processes in their organisations. This element could get more attention in relation to the capabilities needed to contribute to organisational decision-making processes. The PR function in organisations is often implemented as a strategic function (Huebner et al., 2008) which links different decisions and actions. This premise might not facilitate PR professionals' sensitivity to political or power dimensions. Professionals might focus on rationalising the communicative aspects of decisions or bypass any political dimensions when presenting decision processes as rational, as Baralou, Wolf and Meissner (2012) argue.

The insights presented earlier considered PR as a reflexive social expert system or as a reflective functional system practice (Holmström, 2007; Ihlen and Verhoeven, 2014). However, the combination of roles and tasks indicate that this dichotomy might not apply to the rich field of organisational decisions. Different decisions might need professionals or organisations to act either reflexively or reflectively as organisations might take different stances in various decision-making topics.

The next section elaborates on PR's contribution to decision making and autopoiesis.

5.3 The autopoiesis contribution model

In the theoretical framework, this dissertation has argued that PR functions as a subsystem of an organisation. By enacting certain roles and utilising certain tasks, the PR professionals span the boundaries of the organisation and interact with the environment. When bringing these theoretical insights together with the insights gained from the empirical outcomes, a model of PR's contribution to autopoiesis can be proposed (Figure 11).

The traditional PR role models concentrated on explaining the roles or tasks of PR professionals from the perspective of communicative processes, focusing on the actions of an individual PR professional. They only partly address communication processes related to decision making, while contemporary research on

PR contribution to decision making has been scarce. The proposed model, inspired by the Luhmannian perspective of autopoiesis, goes beyond this in describing PR as a reflective function for organisations and as a function that contributes to the strategic decision making of organisations. The proposed contribution model emphasises the internal operations of a system towards autopoiesis and enables PR to better understand the contingency of the environment. Based on the findings of the PR professionals' roles and tasks together with the theoretical framework for this research, Figure 12 presents a theoretical model of PR's contribution to autopoiesis. The model takes into account how contingent or uncertain the environment of an organisation is, and if it is considered either predominantly predictable or unpredictable. The model follows the insights of Daft and Weick (2001) in acknowledging the process of organisational decision making as an interpretation of the environment, and Miles et al. (1978) in acknowledging an organisational perspective towards the environment, both being crucial aspects in the process of supporting the self-production of the system, autopoiesis. The model also acknowledges PR's stance to autopoiesis, or how active or passive PR is in helping the organisation to reproduce itself. The dichotomy between active and passive also relates to how actively PR seeks information from the environment and makes interpretations of it. The model acknowledges that PR's contribution to decision making is related to the level of enactment with the environment.

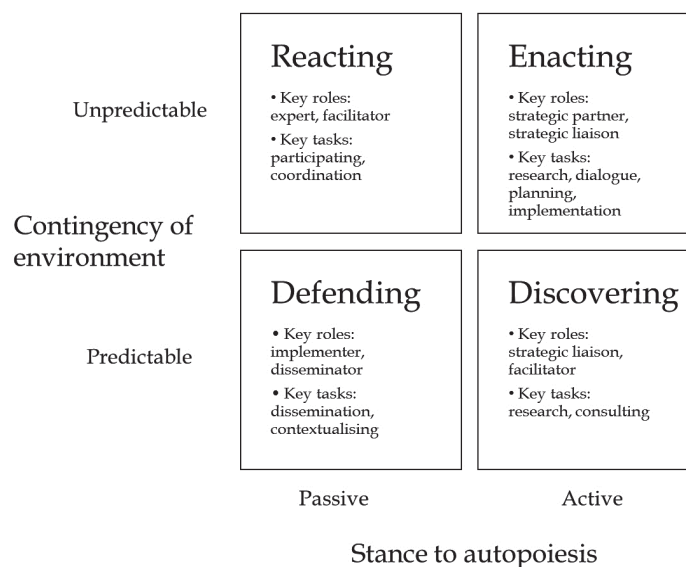


FIGURE 12 PR's level of enactment in decision-making contribution

In the *reacting* mode, PR considers the environment unpredictable but acts passively and until it is needed to contribute to organisational decision making on

a participative basis. Instead of providing actively important information, PR concentrates mainly on supporting and coordinating decision-making processes on the tactical level. PR advises the decision makers in selecting the suitable course of actions and communications from various alternatives. PR also maintains and coordinates the technical aspects of communication and the decision-making process. Autopoiesis is supported on operational and tactical level but mainly on tactical level.

In the *enacting* mode, PR is active and finds the organisational environment as unpredictable. PR actively seeks and gathers information, constructs the picture of the environment and tries new behaviours by establishing active dialogue and planning together with stakeholders. PR is an active partner on the strategic level of decision making and by enacting the strategic roles supports the organisation in learning and experimenting with possible solutions. PR's tasks support decision making thoroughly in decision-making processes. PR plans and implements the new solutions actively. The roles and tasks support autopoiesis throughout the organisation on strategic, tactical and operational level.

In the *defending* mode, PR has a passive attitude to the predictable environment. PR is not actively learning from the environment and is not gathering information for organisational decision making. PR concentrates on managing internal and external communication and implementing the outcomes of decisions. PR contributes to autopoiesis mainly through operational level routines for dissemination and contextualising.

In the *discovering* mode, PR acts actively in order to contribute to decision making in a predominantly predictable environment, which it monitors actively. Rather than being adventurous, PR searches information and solutions which are suitable for organisational decision making from the start. The tasks combine contributions on both strategic and tactical level. On the strategic level, PR tries to establish dialogue with the decision makers and stakeholders who are actively monitored. The PR function cooperates with the dominant coalition, evaluates information and consults decision makers on the various aspects of decisions and possible outcomes. Here autopoiesis is mainly supported on the strategic and tactical level.

In the model, the active contribution is related to open systems, which encourage organisations to respond to changes in the environment. The autopoiesis of organisations, in these cases, is supported by their environment and publics. In these modes, PR professionals are expected to be an active part of the internal dominant coalition of organisations. They seek mutually supported adaptations, which will benefit the organisation and the environment. In the passive approach, the reactive contribution is related to closed systems. PR is not expected to be an active part of the dominant coalition and is not considered to have any effect on the changes in the environment and thus, in such cases, the organisations do not consider autopoiesis important.

The model describes the strategic approach of PR to the autopoiesis of organisations. Any model will eventually be an interpretation of complex organ-

ised activity and cannot simultaneously be simple, general and accurate. However, the literature presented in this dissertation and the findings of empirical studies support the general framework of the model. This model is proposed for future testing to explore PR's contribution to the autopoiesis of organisations.

5.4 Research limitations

This doctoral thesis dealt with organisational decision making and the contribution of PR professionals to it. The methods used are largely based on a qualitative theoretical framework. For next, the research process is evaluated especially in terms of its credibility and transparency. The approach of this dissertation was interpretive. The researcher's role during the process was to be an active interpreter of various meanings acknowledged from the literature and empirical data. The choices and interpretations made during the research have shaped the research process along the way. The theoretical foundation of this dissertation was formed by system theory and autopoiesis.

For Part 3, 12 professionals were interviewed in depth. This provided rich data. Although the number of interviewees was limited (see also section 3.3.1), it was noticed that similar topics and themes began to reappear in the discussions and more interviews might not bring a significant amount of new information. The research used additional data based on a systematic literature review, on secondary analysis of quantitative reports about the profession and related to a crisis communication project. Together this helped to build an overall view of PR professionals' contribution to organisational decision making and to the autopoiesis of organisations.

The data collected from the interviews in Part 3 were content analysed and reported in three papers. All the interviews were conducted and further analysed in the Finnish language. Later, the analysed data were translated into English. It should be noticed that the empirical parts of this dissertation were conducted in Finland, which has its own societal and cultural background. Furthermore, Finnish PR professionals possess their own values, interests and cultural background. For example, the report 2009 of the European Communication Monitor showed that Northern European professionals generally seemed to be more influential than other European colleagues.

The interviewees were well positioned to assess their experiences in organisational decision making. The steps taken and choices made during the different phases of the analysis have been reported as detailed as possible. Examples of how the data were analysed have been given to provide additional transparency on the research process.

The interviews conducted showed that the topic was experienced as novel but important. The semi-structured protocol was a useful tool for data collection and the further clarified questions and open discussion after each question added to this. During the interviews, it turned out that the free discussion on

the questionnaire's topic provided more in-depth information than strictly following the protocol.

As a final limitation, it can be mentioned that PR professionals were interviewed to provide their perception of the topic. This limitation is quite common in the field as, for example, the European Communication Monitor also has PR professionals as interviewees. Future research could include the perspective of general managers.

The lack of previous research on the topic meant that the work had to build on an exploratory theoretical framework. It also caused that, while the data were being analysed, various kinds of meaning were created simultaneously.

In the future, the introduced model should be tested and further evaluated as our understanding and theoretical base of PR's contribution to autopoiesis and decision making evolves.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The aim of this thesis was to contribute to the theoretical and empirical understanding of PR's contribution to organisational decision making and the autopoiesis of organisations. The conclusions from this dissertation are drawn in this chapter. To begin, the main insights of this research are presented. Next, the insights gained into decision making and PR practice are summarised. After this, the theoretical contribution of the research is discussed and the propositions for further studies are given. The thesis ends with concluding remarks of research evaluation.

6.1 Main insights

This dissertation focused on the contribution of PR to organisational decision making and the autopoiesis of social systems. The findings and theoretical framework of this dissertation acknowledge PR as the subsystem of organisations through which the management of organisations responds to and influences the environment of the organisation. The findings of this work propose that PR as a central subsystem is needed to help organisations to adapt internally, too. Organisations must develop mechanisms to cope with internal improbabilities and inadequacies in order to reduce their own complexity (Luhmann, 1995). Decision making and the outcomes create new challenges and changes in organisations.

Organisations, being human-based systems, have a special character which can be used to reflect organisational identities, processes and activities (Morgan, 1986). Luhmann (1995), along with similar lines, proposed that systems may have specific elements, so called catalytic agents, which take care of the conditioning of the system by regulating the relations of the system's elements. The findings from this dissertation acknowledge PR as this kind of special organisational character or catalytic agent which contributes to autopoiesis.

From the outcome of this work, it can be concluded that PR should not be considered to only contribute to top-level decision making. The roles and tasks of PR indicate that PR contributes to decision making in the whole organisation. Autopoiesis in organisations is self-production. In an organisational context, autopoiesis is a compilation of actions. PR performs several tasks related to decision making and is partly self-producing the organisation and, thus, PR can be considered to be an important part of the autopoiesis itself.

From the research that has been conducted, it is possible to conclude that PR functions as a subsystem which not just enacts a boundary spanning role but much more. Its contribution to decision making can be considered to include responsive, managing and adapting perspectives. PR is not just gathering, interpreting and feeding information to decision making, but it is counselling, managing the process, and implementing and disseminating its outcomes.

This dissertation has shown that PR contributes to organisational decision making on three levels: operational, tactical and strategic. The autopoiesis of organisations is also supported on all of these levels. The operational level concentrates on implementing decisions and disseminating the outcomes. On the tactical level, PR concentrates on gathering information, and taking care of the related internal communication processes. On the strategic level, PR produces input from the environment of the organisation and gives strategically important recommendations for further actions. The higher the level is, the more value PR adds to decision making, and the more likely it is that PR as a function is included in the strategy making of the organisation.

6.2 Contribution to organisational decision making and PR practice

In this dissertation, the academic knowledge from various fields has been adapted to the research data from practice. This way the work has built generalisations and concepts of how PR professionals contribute to organisational decision making. Based on these foundations, this work has built a conceptual model of contribution to decision and strategy making and to the autopoiesis of organisations. This kind of model could support critical thinking and offer new assets for practice. It could also facilitate, as Cornelissen (2000) proposes, a better understanding of organisations in their environment. He emphasises that this can be done by offering "indirect, long-term generalisations and particular concepts used as knowledge base for policy" (Cornelissen, 2000: 322).

The contribution of this dissertation to practice lies in connecting diverse theoretical knowledge from the management, sociological and PR fields to practical information from Finnish professionals. It serves the benefit of the PR field as a whole as PR professionals are eager to develop more context-based working theories rather than just relying on scientific research (Grunig, 1992). The findings and models proposed in this dissertation could provide an explorable

framework for day-to-day situations in various types of organisations. Although the concept of autopoiesis is rather unknown in practice, the purpose of this study has been to conceptualise its nature to practical settings. In day-to-day situations, in organisations, the nature of problems might be beyond generalised theories and the solutions must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations. In these situations, professionals could benefit from being more prepared and equipped with autopoiesis-related knowledge.

As a practical input of this thesis, a final model on PR contributing to organisational decision making was suggested as a new, intersecting function of public relations. This model can have strategic value by acknowledging the diversity of PR roles and tasks, adding depth and bridging the gap between the public relations and organisational decision and strategy making. Overall, this work suggests that when the contribution of PR is better understood, it offers a valuable resource for organisational decision and strategy making and helps organisations to better perceive the environment and the views of the stakeholders. This could benefit organisations in the future when applying a learning-oriented approach to operate and design the role of the organisation within a larger environment.

6.3 Contribution to research

The aim of this research was to contribute to theory development concerning PR contribution to organisational decision making and the autopoiesis of organisations. Academic research is mainly conducted to increase academic understanding and building theories (Cornelissen, 2000). The purpose of this study has also been to strengthen the theoretical foundation of PR's contribution to organisational decision making. The main input of this dissertation is how it clarifies the roles, tasks and capabilities of professionals and the nature of the contribution of PR to organisational decision making. It also adds new knowledge to the current understanding of the autopoiesis of organisations and the expectations of PR at a conceptual level.

This work complements the autopoietic organisation theory by broadening the understanding of decision making, PR as a function and the input of individual professionals. The core of this dissertation has been the contribution of PR to organisational decision making. It has added practical implications to the autopoietic organisation theory and showed that PR contributes to autopoiesis on the operational, tactical and strategic level. The autopoietic organisation theory lacks appropriate concepts of organisational knowledge, organisational learning and organisational memory (Blaschke, 2008). Based on the theoretical concept and practical findings of this dissertation, this research gap could now be further addressed in future research, as the findings of this work acknowledge PR as a subsystem and significant part of the autopoiesis of organisations.

This dissertation connected several individual studies with their own research questions. It addressed the research gap of contribution to decision making on theoretical and practical levels. The findings of this dissertation provided insights into the development of PR professionals' roles, tasks and capabilities in organisational decision making. The findings from practice provided fresh insights into how Finnish professionals contribute to organisational decision making. The specifications of roles, tasks and capabilities provided a clearer picture of professionals' contribution on the operational, tactical and strategic level. These findings can be utilised in PR practice and further research to improve the communicative value that PR creates for decision-making processes.

The enactment model presented in the discussion chapter (see Figure 12) proposes an answer to the research gap regarding how PR as a function contributes to decision making and to the reproduction of organisations. This model could be further utilised to make PR a more principal part of strategy making and strongly link the communication of organisations to their business strategy.

Furthermore, this dissertation has supported the decision-making research by clarifying the PR contribution. It has opened new opportunities for further studies in the field of PR and theorised the PR contribution to organisational decision making and autopoietic organisations.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

This dissertation emphasised the importance of acknowledging the contribution of PR and PR professionals to decision-making processes and to the autopoiesis of organisations. It summarised the general roles of professionals based on over 30 years of research tradition, while introducing new empirical findings based on literature search and in-depth interviews that focused on decision making. The dissertation also introduced the tasks through which the professionals in their organisations contribute to a decision-making process in different phases. Finally, it investigated the skills, competencies and personal attributes of professionals in decision making. Overall, the research gave a possibility to examine and evaluate the reality and practice of PR professionals in organisational decision-making settings.

This dissertation is based on a combination of theoretical perspectives and qualitative studies. The explored theoretical basis and empirical findings are brought together in models of roles, tasks and capabilities. To further test and complement these models and the contribution of PR professionals, the next step could be to implement long-term quantitative studies. The findings and models proposed in this work could be further studied in larger settings or investigated in case studies. As found during the research process, discussing their contribution to decision making was a rather novel concept for the PR professionals. It might be necessary to study and clarify more closely why many professionals do not consider this topic a core part of their work, albeit the Eu-

ropean Communicator Monitor reports year after year show that supporting management's decision making is one of the most important parts of the work.

Organisations make decisions for various reasons (Brunsson, 1990) and it would be beneficial to investigate what difference this makes for the contribution of PR professionals. This could give better insights into the behaviour of organisations and benefit the understanding of larger systems. From the management perspective, it would also be beneficial to investigate and clarify what the top decision makers are expecting from PR professionals in decision-making processes. As the current change of communicative environment around organisations is rapid, this could give a better picture of what professionals should be able to do and of the value they add. This could also deepen the understanding of decision-making processes.

Each of the papers of this dissertation identified several topics that could be studied further. When reviewing the papers in a bigger picture, several research lines could be established for future studies. The first paper acknowledged that only big decisions are considered decisions and that these create expectations within organisations. It would be beneficial to study the level of expectations for internal communication and PR in various decision types. In addition, various decision premises were discussed in this paper. Further studies could look in a more detailed manner into what PR professionals consider to be the most important decision premises.

The second paper reviewed scientific literature and concentrated on discussing roles and contribution. By identifying several roles, it simultaneously raised a question of what kind of roles the management and decision makers are expecting from PR professionals. The findings of the paper acknowledged that contribution to decision making is a rather young concept. Further studies should also address contribution from various perspectives in order to further clarify what is expected from the PR's decision-making contribution.

The third paper focused on professionals' roles in decision-making processes, as addressed in a few earlier publications. Once again when discussing roles, also the other side of the coin, i.e. what is expected from those various roles, should be addressed. This article also identified the concept of communicative value. This concept could be further explored in the future to clarify what it contains for decision making, decision makers and PR professionals.

The fourth paper investigated the tasks of PR professionals in contributing to decision making and acknowledged tasks to be closely related to the bridging activity of PR. It would be beneficial to further address what is expected from the tasks and from the bridging to be as efficient as possible. This could also help professionals' efforts to become more a strategic partner to top management and decision makers.

The fifth paper discussed the capabilities of PR professionals in decision-making contribution. The paper acknowledged several competencies to be crucial in the contribution. This could be further addressed from the management point of view to clarify what capabilities professionals are expected to possess

to be more influential and to become as strategic partners in top strategy-making.

Overall, this dissertation opens possibilities to study decision making and autopoiesis further from the PR perspective. Information and interpretation processes operated by PR could be further investigated based on the decision-making perspectives presented in the theoretical framework. As decisions have several functions in organisations, it would be beneficial to study how PR as a support system copes with uncertainties in the environment and enables autopoiesis.

Moreover, decision making and PR's role related to it could be studied further from power and political perspectives. This could give more insight into how professionals strengthen their power and political influence on different levels of contribution (strategic, tactical or operational). Additionally, it would be interesting to know how professionals perceive the political dimension of decision making on the different levels that they contribute to. This may help PR professionals to recognise the political dimensions of organisational decision making and be aware of them in cases where it relates to their roles and tasks.

6.5 Evaluation of the research process

This dissertation mainly used qualitative research methods because the aim was to create a deep theoretical and practical understanding of the research topic. The selected methods also complemented each other and provided more a diverse picture of the phenomenon.

The research process was versatile and it progressed partly very slowly and but occasionally it took big leaps forward. The initial start was challenging as the phenomenon of decision making is wide and multidimensional. Various aspects of it have been studied from numerous points of view over the decades. It was initially challenging to narrow down the focus and choose what would be included or excluded from the research. Still, during the early phases of the research, some intended subtopics were removed. The reason for this was mostly the richer interview data which had been planned to be reported in fewer papers than it eventually was done. Dividing the findings in separate papers helped to clarify the focus of each paper and helped to include a stronger theoretical foundation.

As the research process is always a learning process, some novice mistakes were made. During the analysing phase of the professionals' interview data too detailed theme groups were initially created, too cautious an approach was chosen when looking at the big picture of the findings and details were too much focused on. The reason for this was that the interviews were conducted in Finnish but the findings were reported in English.

The interview method turned out to be a fruitful way to study this topic as it gave much more detailed information than originally was expected. Face to face interviews also were a trustful way to approach PR professionals as many

interviewees were first very careful to discuss the topic, which many considered as a sensitive matter. During the interviews, it turned out that the interviewees had a lot to tell about their contribution to decision-making processes. The interview protocol was tested before the interviews and based on this experience the questions allowed plentiful room for fruitful discussions.

Based on the findings of this dissertation, it can be concluded that PR professionals are able to reflect on the identities, practices and processes of their organisations which contribute to autopoiesis. By concentrating on enhancing the involvement of PR in organisational decision making, the autopoiesis of organisations could be better understood.

YHTEENVETO

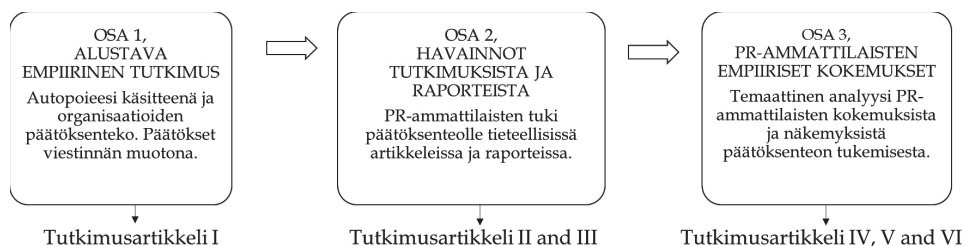
PR-ammattilaisten tuki organisaation päätöksenteolle ja järjestelmän itseuudistumiselle – Luhmannilaisen järjestelmäajattelun näkökulmasta

1 Johdanto

Organisaatiot luovat edellytyksiä useille prosesseille. Viestintä ja päätöksenteko ovat merkittävä osa organisaatiota ja ne käsitetään monimutkaisiksi, sosiaalisiksi prosesseiksi (Scott ja Davis, 2015). Päätösten tekeminen ja strategian suunnittelu ovat organisaation toimivan johdon tehtäviä. Heillä on valta suunnitella ja kehittää organisaation toimintaa (White ja Dozier, 1992).

Organisaatioiden ympäristö koostuu yleisöistä sekä toisista organisaatioista, jotka vaikuttavat toimintaympäristöön sekä tiettyyn pisteeseen asti vaikuttavat organisaation toimintaan (Jahansoozi, 2006). Tämä synnyttää organisaatioissa epävarmuutta ja haasteita (White ja Mazur, 1995). Viestinnän ammattilaisten tulisi olla osa organisaation johtoryhmää ja strategisena kumppanina tukea organisaation menestystä (Dozier, Grunig, ja Grunig, 1995). Viestinnän ammattilaisten tuki organisaation strategiselle päätöksenteolle on perinteisesti ymmärretty pitävän sisällään muun muassa informaation keräämistä ja sen tulkitsemista sekä yhteydenpitoa tärkeisiin sidosryhmiin (Gregory, 2008).

Tämä työ pyrkii selventämään yhteisviestinnän eli PR:n (Public Relations) ja viestintäammattilaisten (jäljempänä PR-ammattilaisten) tukea organisaatioiden päätöksenteolle ja organisaatioiden itseuudistumiselle, autopoiesille. Tutkimus rakentuu monitieteellisen viitekehyksen pohjalle, jonka perustana ovat päätöksentekoon, järjestelmäajatteluun sekä saksalaisen Niklas Luhmannin autopoiesiin eli organisaatioiden itseuudistumiseen liittyvät teoriat. PR-ammattilaisen käytännönläheisinä teorioina tarkastellaan viestintäammattilaisten roolia, tehtäviä ja taitoja päätöksenteossa. Teoreettista kokonaisuutta täydentää kolmen käytännön läheisen osatutkimuksen kokonaisuus. Niissä tarkastellaan PR-ammattilaisten konkreettista tukea organisaatioiden päätöksenteolle ja itseuudistumiselle, autopoiesille. Kaikissa kolmessa tutkimuksessa on ollut oma fokuksensa (Kuvio 13).



KUVIO 13 Tutkimusprosessi

Alustava empiirinen vaihe, osa 1, keskittyi selvittämään itseuudistumista sekä päätöksiä viestinnän muotona ja niiden merkitystä organisaatioille sekä PR-ammattilaisille. Osa 2 selvitti aiempien tutkimusten ja tieteellisten raporttien kautta PR-ammattilaisten roolia päätöksenteossa. Viimeisessä osiossa, osa 3, laadullisilla haastatteluilla kerättiin tietoa ja käytännön kokemuksia PR-ammattilaisten tuesta organisaatioiden päätöksenteossa roolien, tehtävien sekä vaadittavien taitojen osalta.

2 Teorettinen viitekehys

Organisaatioiden ympäristö koostuu muutoksista ja epävarmuustekijöistä. Kuten kaikki järjestelmät, myös organisaatiot, ovat jatkuvassa kanssakäymisessä ympäristönsä kanssa (Morgan, 1986). Muutokset ja epävarmuustekijät tunnustetaan haasteina, joihin organisaation täytyy reagoida. Tämän tutkimuksen teoreettisen kivijalan muodostavat organisaation päätöksenteko ja systeemi- eli järjestelmäteoria. Niiden perustalle rakentuvat teoriat organisaatioiden auto-poiesista eli itseuudistumisesta, toiminnan merkityksellistämällä (jäljempänä sensemaking) voimaansaattamisesta (jäljempänä enactment), joiden avulla tarkastellaan, kuinka organisaatiot havainnoivat ja tunnistavat ympäristöään sekä operoivat sen kanssa. PR-ammattilaisten rooleja, tehtäviä sekä osaamista ja taitoja käsitteleviä teorioita käsitellään päätöksenteon näkökulmasta.

Päätöksenteko ja järjestelmäteoria

Organisaatiot ovat sosiaalisista suhteista rakentuvia ja itse rajansa määritteleviä järjestelmiä (Aldrich, 1999). Ne koostuvat yksilöiden ja ryhmien koordinoitua toiminnasta, jota ohjaa toimijoiden erilainen tietämys ja kiinnostuksen kohteet. Organisaatiot eivät ole itseriittoisia vaan ovat riippuvaisia tietynlaisesta fyysisestä, teknologisesta ja sosiaalisesta ympäristöstä, joihin heidän täytyy sopeutua (Scott ja Davis, 2015). Organisaatiot ovat vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristönsä toisten järjestelmien kanssa. Tämän vuorovaikutuksen tekijöitä ovat organisaatioon tuleva informaatio (input) sekä ympäristöön tuotettu informaatio (output) (Heylighen, 1998). Erottautumalla ympäristöstään järjestelmät pyrkivät vähentämään sen monimutkaisuutta (Holmström, 1998). Avoimet järjestelmät ovat vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristön kanssa, kun taas suljetut järjestelmät toimivat eristyksissä. Järjestelmäajattelun avulla voidaan tarkastella organisaatioiden käyttäytymistä ja niiden suhdetta ympäristönsä kanssa (Witmer, 2006). Päätöksenteossa organisaatiot integroivat yhteen yksittäisten jäsentensä tietoisesta ja tarkoituksellisen panoksen (Barnard, 1938). Päätöksentekoon 2000-luvulla vaikuttavat vahvasti muun muassa informaatioympäristö (Luhmann, 2005), tiedonvälitys sekä henkilöstö ja sidosryhmät (Michel, 2007). Organisaatioiden päätöksenteko pyrkii luomaan strategiaa ja suuntaa toiminnalle.

Autopoiesi eli itseuudistuminen

Itseuudistumisessa järjestelmät nähdään sopeutumassa ympäristöönsä samalla, kun järjestelmä toimii osittain suljettuna ja itseensä viittaavana (Pieccka, 2006). Itseensä viittaaminen korostaa järjestelmän selviytymisen ratkaisevana tekijänä sen oman identiteetin säilyttämistä ja ylläpitämistä. Itseuudistumisessa ympäristö nähdään olevan organisaation identiteetin heijastuma. Tämä teoria tarjoaa analyttisen kehyksen, jonka avulla voidaan kuvata järjestelmän syntymistä ja ylläpitämistä (Hernes, 2008). Luhmannin itseuudistumisen teoriassa viestintä nähdään muodostuvan informaatiosta, ilmaisusta ja ymmärryksestä (mm. Seidl 2004, Hernes, 2008). Informaatio kertoo, mitä sanoma koskee, ilmaisu on muoto, joka tuotetaan yhdessä lähettäjän aikomusten kanssa, ja ymmärrys on se merkitys, jonka viestintä lopulta tuottaa (Mingers, 2002).

Viestinnän avulla itseuudistumisen prosessi tuottaa organisaatiolle kuvauksia ympäröivästä todellisuudesta. Itseuudistumisen avulla muutosta voidaan tarkastella ja hoitaa. Itseuudistuminen voidaan myös käsittää tapana, jolla organisaatio näkee ja ajattelee itsestään sekä kuinka se suhtautuu ympäristöönsä (Morgan, 1986). PR-ammattilaisten toimintaympäristö pitää sisällään poliittisia, kulttuurillisia, sosiaalisia ja taloudellisia ulottuvuuksia (Baskin ja Aronoff, 1988) sekä muiden järjestelmien tekemiä päätöksiä. Organisaatiot uusiutuvat ja muuttuvat jatkuvasti toistuvien, itsesuuntautuvien viestintäprosessien, esimerkiksi päätöksentekoprosessien avulla (Luhmann 1995).

Sensemaking ja enactment -teoriat

Sensemaking-teoria (jäljempänä metodologia) tarjoaa tavan ymmärtää organisaation yleisöjen toimintaa, jotta parempia ja tehokkaampia tapoja viestiä voitaisiin kehittää (Walker, 2006). Organisaatioissa yksilöt kokevat haastavaksi ymmärtää muuttuvan ympäristön ongelmia ja kokevat jatkuvaa tiedontarvetta tulkitessaan ympäristöä (Dervin, 1992). Käytännössä sensemaking-metodologia on ympäristön oppimista ja poisoppimista, ja lopullinen ymmärrys ympäristöstä on aina riippuvainen asiayhteydestä ja yksittäisistä tilanteista. Ymmärrys taas on riippuvainen siitä, millaista tietoa ja informaatiota on tarjolla sekä kuinka nämä tulkitaan. Sensemaking-metodologia mahdollistaa tarkastella tilanteita ilman keskittymistä kiinteisiin tai muuttumattomiin olosuhteisiin, ja se mahdollistaa vuorovaikutteisen lähestymistavan ymmärtää ja tulkita ympäristöä (Walker, 2006). Organisaatioissa kaikki eivät havainnoi ympäristöä ja sen muutoksia samalla tavalla.

Enactment-teoria on tärkeä osa päätöksentekoprosessia. Siinä tuotetaan aktiivisesti informaatiota ympäristöstä ja valitaan, mikä informaatio on lopulta oleellista ja merkityksellistä tulkintojen tekemiselle. Yksittäiset ihmiset merkityksellistävät ympäristöä eri lailla, joka voi johtaa siihen, että organisaation ympäristön muutoksista on useita tulkintoja (Pfeffer ja Salancik, 2013). Päätöksentekijöiden on jatkuvasti tulkittava tietoa ympäristöstä, mutta organisaatioissa niiden omien käytäntöjen ja päätösten täytyy käydä vielä läpi organisaation oma tulkitsemisprosessi.

PR:n ja PR-ammattilaisten tuki

Luhmannilaisittain päätöksenteko ja siihen liittyvät prosessit nähdään tarpeelliseksi tehdä näkyväksi (Luhmann, 2000). Tämä tapahtuu hallinnoimalla niitä käytännön työssä sekä viestimällä tavoitteet ja päämäärät niin, että niillä voidaan vastata organisaation sisäisten ja ulkoisten sidosryhmien odotuksiin (Nassehi, 2005). Tukeakseen päätöksentekoprosessia, organisaation ylimmän johdon tulisi olla tietoinen niistä mahdollisuuksista ja tavoista, joilla PR-ammattilaiset voivat tukea päätöksentekoa (Bowen, 2009). Tukea päätöksenteolle voidaan tarkastella yksittäisten prosessien ja erilaisten panostusten ja tuotoksien näkökulmasta (Pearson, 1990) tai järjestelmäajattelun mukaisesti PR:n toimintänäkökulmasta (Baskin ja Aronoff, 1988).

PR-ammattilaiset kommunikoivat sisäisten ja ulkoisten yleisöjen kanssa luodakseen jatkumon organisaation tavoitteiden ja sosiaalisten odotusten kanssa. Päätöksenteossa PR-ammattilaisten odotetaan muun muassa auttavan organisaatioita ymmärtämään organisaatioiden ympäristöä (White ja Mazur, 1995), merkityksellistämään sitä (Cheney et al., 2004) sekä ennakoimaan ja ehkäisemään mahdollisia ongelmia (Fawkes, 2004), ja mahdollistamaan organisaation mukautumisen ympäristön muutoksiin (Jensen, 2002; Cutlip, Center ja Broom, 2006).

3 Tutkimusasetelma ja -menetelmät

Tässä työssä käytetään Luhmannin funktionaalista tutkimusmenetelmää. Se on havainnoiva tutkimusmetodi (Knudsen, 2010), joka selvittää eroja tutkimusongelman ja mahdollisten ratkaisujen välillä. Tutkimusongelma rakentuu teoreettiselle pohjalle ja lopulliset ratkaisut haetaan selventämällä erilaisia tutkimusaineistosta nousevia johtopäätöksiä (Luhmann, 1991). Päätöksentekoprosessi aiheuttaa organisaatioissa niin sanottuja sokeita pisteitä. Ulkopuolisen tutkijan tekemät havainnot prosessista voivat auttaa PR:ää alana sekä PR-ammattilaisia tarjoamaan paremmin valistuneita havaintoja organisaationsa käytännöistä (Baralou et al., 2012). Näin voidaan paremmin tukea strategista sisältöä, prosesseja sekä organisaatioiden omia konteksteja (Vos, 2005).

Tämä tutkimus keskittyy PR-ammattilaisten tukeen organisaation päätöksenteossa ja itseuudistumisessa eli autopoieesissa. Se tarkastelee PR-ammattilaisten rooleja, tehtäviä ja taitoja. Jokaisella tutkimuksella on omat tutkimuskysymyksensä ja -menetelmänsä, joita tukee monitieteellinen teoreettinen viitekehys. Tässä tutkimuksessa on pääsääntöisesti käytetty laadullista ja sisällön tulkitaan keskittyvää tutkimusmenetelmää. Työ koostuu kolme eri tutkimusosista (Taulukko 11).

TAULUKKO 11 Tutkimusosiot ja tutkimuskysymykset

| Tutkimus | Tutkimuskysymykset |
|---|---|
| <i>Osa 1. Alustava empiirinen tutkimus:</i> 1. Päätöksenteko organisaatiossa – case-tutkimus yhdessä organisaatiossa | RQ 1: Mitä on päätösviestintä? RQ 2: Mikä on sen merkitys organisaatioille ja viestinnälle? |
| <i>Osa 2. Havainnot tutkimuksista ja raporteista:</i> 2a. PR-ammattilaisen rooli organisaation päätöksenteossa - kirjallisuustutkimus 2b. PR-ammattilaisen rooli organisaation päätöksenteossa – katsaus akateemisiin raporteihin 2c. PR-ammattilaisten rooli kriiseihin liittyvässä päätöksenteossa | RQ 1: Kuinka aiempien tieteellisten tutkimusten mukaan PR-ammattilaiset tukevat organisaatioiden päätöksentekoa? RQ 2: Millaisia tutkimustrendejä tästä aiheesta on tunnistettavissa? RQ: Kuinka PR-ammattilaisten roolia organisaation päätöksenteossa on kuvattu ammatin liittyvissä kvantitatiivisissa raporteissa? RQ: Kuinka PR-ammattilaiset toimivat kriiseihin liittyvässä päätöksenteossa sekä kriisin eri vaiheissa? |
| <i>Osa 3. Ammattilaisten käytännön kokemukset:</i> 3a. PR-ammattilaisen roolit organisaation päätöksenteossa 3b. PR-ammattilaisen tehtävät organisaation päätöksenteossa 3c. PR-ammattilaisen taidot ja kompetenssit organisaation päätöksenteossa | RQ: Kuinka PR-ammattilaiset tukevat osallistuvat organisaation päätöksentekoa Suomessa? RQ: Kuinka PR-ammattilaisten viestintätehtävät tukevat organisaation päätöksentekoa? RQ: Millaista osaamista ja taitoja PR-ammattilaiset tarvitsevat voidakseen osallistua organisaation päätöksentekoon? |

Alustava empiirinen tutkimus selvitti päätöksentekoa ja päätösviestintää insinööripohjaisessa organisaatiossa 2008-2009. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli lisätä ymmärrystä organisaatioiden päätöksenteosta ja siihen liittyvästä sisäistä viestinnästä.

Työn toinen osio koostuu kolmesta pienestä, itsenäisestä tutkimuksesta. Ensimmäinen näistä oli systemaattinen kirjallisuustutkimus ja se selvitti kuinka tieteellisissä artikkeleissa vuosina 2002-2012 on käsitelty PR-ammattilaisten osallistumista päätöksentekoon. Tutkimuksen tarkoitus oli laajentaa tietämystä PR-ammattilaisten tuesta ja osallisuudesta päätöksenteossa. Toinen kolmesta pienemmästä tutkimuksesta tarkasteli PR-ammattilaisten osallistumista päätöksentekoon ja strategian suunnitteluun European Communication Monitor -raporteissa. Kolmas tutkimus koostui PR-ammattilaisten kriisiviestintään kehitetyn CBRN Communication Scorecard - ohjeistuksen tarkastelusta ja arvioinnista. Ohjeistuksesta arvioitiin PR-ammattilaisten osallistumista kriisitilanteiden päätöksentekoon ja viestinnän hoitoon.

Viimeinen, kolmas osio, selvitti PR-ammattilaisten tukea päätöksentekoprosesseille. Se keskittyi selvittämään, kuinka viestintäpäälliköt ja tiedottajat

kokevat roolinsa (3a), tehtävänsä (3b) sekä osaamisensa (3c) organisaation päätöksenteossa ja kuinka he tuovat siihen viestinnällistä arvoa. Tässä osiossa haastateltiin kasvotusten 12:ta PR-ammattilaista joulukuun 2013 ja toukokuun 2014 välisenä aikana. Litteroidut haastattelut teemoitettiin sisällönanalysilla ja julkaistiin kolmena eri tutkimusartikkelina.

4 Tulokset

Tämä työ tarkentaa PR-ammattilaisten tukea organisaation päätöksenteolle. Tarkoitus on tukea käsitteellisellä ja empiirisellä tasolla, kuinka PR-ammattilaiset ja PR järjestelmän alajärjestelmänä voivat auttaa organisaatiota vastaamaan ja mukautumaan organisaation ympäristön muutoksiin. Yhteenvedo kolmen eri tutkimusosion tuloksista on esitelty taulukossa 12.

TAULUKKO 12 Yhteenvedo tutkimustuloksista

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| <p><i>Osa 1. Alustava empiirinen tutkimus:</i></p> <p>1. Päätöksenteko organisaatiossa - case tutkimus yhdessä organisaatiossa</p> <p>Tämän alustavan tutkimuksen tulokset (tutkimuspaperi I) osoittivat, että insinööripohjaisessa työyhteisössä organisaation päätöksenteko ja siihen liittyvä viestintä pohjautuu vahvasti faktapohjaiseen tietoon. Faktapohjainen tieto on päätöksenteon tärkein lähtökohta ja koko organisaation viestinnän selkäranka. Tulokset myös tukivat Luhmannin näkemystä, että aiemmat päätökset kytkeytyvät toisiinsa muodostaen organisaatiossa päätöksenteon ketjun.</p> |
| <p><i>Osa 2. Havainnot tutkimuksista ja raporteista:</i></p> <p>2a. PR-ammattilaisen rooli organisaation päätöksenteossa - kirjallisuustutkimus</p> <p>Kirjallisuustutkimuksen tulokset osoittivat neljä erilaista PR-ammattilaisen roolia, jotka tukevat päätöksentekoprosesseja (tutkimuspaperi II). Tuloksista ilmenee selvä linkki Luhmannilaiseen näkökulmaan, että päätöksenteon aikaiset roolit palvelevat organisaation vuorovaikutusta sen ympäristön kanssa järjeistämällä sitä ja luomalla merkityksiä organisaation sisäisille prosesseille.</p> <p>2b. PR-ammattilaisen rooli organisaation päätöksenteossa - katsaus akateemisiin raportteihin</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat (väitöskirjan sisäinen tutkimusjulkaisu), että PR-ammattilaisten vaikutusvalta päätöksenteossa on kasvanut erityisesti voittoa tavoittelemattomissa organisaatioissa sekä osakeyhtiöissä. Vaikutusvalta korreloi otetun aseman, hierarkkisen aseman sekä työkokemuksen mukaan. Tulosten mukaan PR-ammattilaiset pitävät tärkeimpinä tehtävinään tuottaa tietoa päätöksentekoon sekä mahdollistaa organisaation sisäistä kuuntelua.</p> <p>2c. PR-ammattilaisten rooli kriiseihin liittyvässä päätöksenteossa</p> <p>Analyysi osoitti, että PR-ammattilaiset tukevat kriisien päätöksentekoa neljässä eri vaiheessa: valmistautumisessa, havaitsemisessa ja ennakoimisessa, yhteistyössä ja vastaamisessa sekä elpymisessä ja arvioinnissa (tutkimuspaperi III). Analyysin tulokset tukevat Luhmannin näkemystä siitä, että organisaatioiden pyrkiessä vakauttamaan toimintaansa ne kohtaavat uusia ongelmia ja epävarmuustekijöitä päätöksenteossa.</p> |

Osa 3. Ammattilaisten käytännön kokemukset:

3a. PR-ammattilaisen roolit organisaation päätöksenteossa

Suomalaisten PR-ammattilaisten kokemukset rooleistaan päätöksenteossa osoittivat rikkaan ja alati kehittyvän profession (tutkimuspaperi IV). Tulokset osoittivat myös, että organisaatioissa erilaiset roolit muodostavat monimutkaisia käyttäytymismalleja ja suhteita. Erilaiset roolit avaavat mahdollisuuden tutkia tarkemmin näitä käyttäytymismalleja ja suhteita. Tuloksista ilmenee myös, että organisaatiot tarvitsevat erikseen määritellyn toiminnon, joka pystyy tunnistamaan muutoksia ympäristössä ja antamaan merkityksellistä sisältöä organisaation itseuudistumiseen.

3b. PR-ammattilaisen tehtävät organisaation päätöksenteossa

Tulokset osoittivat, että PR-ammattilaisten odotetaan tukevan päätöksentekoa tehtävillään eri päätöksentekovaiheissa sekä monilla eri tehtävillään yhtä aikaa (tutkimuspaperi V). Kokonaisuudessaan tulokset tukevat niin sanottua input-throughput-output -mallia, joka korostaa päätöksenteon monia eri vaiheita. Näiden avulla PR-ammattilaiset mukautuvat muuttuvaan organisaatioympäristöön ja tukevat sosiaalisten järjestelmien päätöksentekoa tekemällä siitä havaittavaa ja läpinäkyvää.

3c. PR-ammattilaisen taidot ja kompetenssit organisaation päätöksenteossa

Tulokset osoittivat (tutkimuspaperi VI), että päätöksenteon tukemisessa PR-ammattilaiset arvostavat syvempää liiketoiminta- ja johtamistaitoja enemmän kuin teknisiä viestintätaitoja. Tulosten perusteella voidaan sanoa, että yksittäiset PR-ammattilaisten on syytä tunnustaa ja arvioida omaa osaamistaan luodakseen itselleen selkeän kuvan, miten hän pystyy parhaiten tukemaan päätöksentekoprosesseja. Tulokset osoittivat myös, että PR-ammattilaisten osaaminen ja taidot ovat merkittävä henkilökohtainen päätöksentekoprosessien edellytys.

5 Keskustelu

Tässä työssä tuotiin yhteen erilaisia teorianäkemyksiä sisältäen systeemiteoriaa, organisaation päätöksentekoa ja yhteisöviestintää. Työ selvensi PR-ammattilaisten tukea päätöksenteolle tarkastelemalla heidän roolejaan, tehtäviään sekä tukeen tarvittavia taitoja ja kykyjä. Tutkimustulokset laajensivat kuvaa PR-ammattilaisista osana organisaation päätöksentekoa. Haastattelujen tulokset osoittivat PR-ammattilaisten yhdistelevän päätöksenteon tuessa useita erilaisia rooleja, jotka vaihtelevat tilanteiden mukaan. Ammattilaisten täytyy olla entistä joustavampia ja mukautettava sekä roolejaan että tehtäviään organisaation vaatimusten mukaan. Tämä vaatii myös osallistumista organisaation strategian suunnitteluun sekä ymmärrystä liiketoimintaympäristöstä.

PR-ammattilaisten monipuolista yhdistelmää erilaisia rooleja päätöksenteon tuessa ei ole huomioitu aikaisemmissa roolijaotteluissa (mm. Dozier ja Broom, 2006). Päätöksenteon aikaisempi tutkimus sekä organisatoristen päätösten monipuolisuus tukevat PR-ammattilaisten monipuolista rooli- ja tehtäväkenttää. Tämä selittyy sillä, että organisaatiot reagoivat jatkuvasti toimintaympäristönsä muutoksiin. Päätöksenteko sisältää useita vaiheita (Simon, 1960; Mintzberg et al., 1976) sekä viestintä- ja informaatioketjuja (Luthans, 1989). Ny-

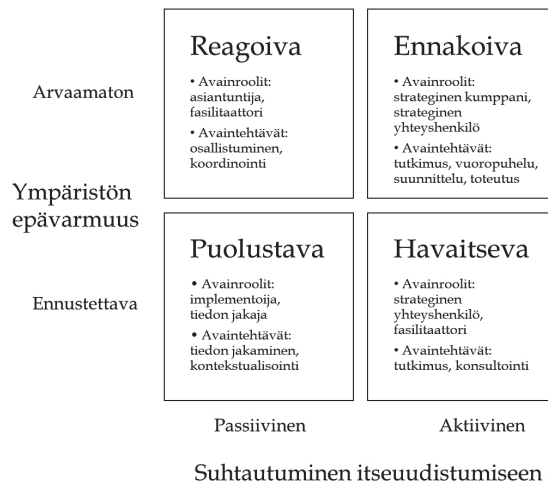
ky-yhteiskunnassa toimivien PR-ammattilaisten roolit ja tehtävät tukevat näitä aikaisempia löydöksiä. Roolit ja tehtävät luovat perustan tulkitsemisprosessille ja ovat liitoksissa ulkoisen toimintaympäristön tulkitsemiselle (Weick, 2001).

Haastattelut osoittivat, että päätöksenteosta keskusteleminen ei PR-ammattilaisille ole yksinkertaista. Heidän omat kokemuksensa keskittyivät pitkälti operatiivisen tason rooleihin ja tehtäviin. Haastattelut myös osoittivat, että PR-ammattilaiset eivät työssään tuo riittävästi esille päätöksentekoon sisällytetyjä poliittisia elementtejä tai päätösten symbolisia merkityksiä. Syynä tähän voi olla, että PR-ammattilaiset eivät täysin tunnista valtaan ja politiikkaan liittyviä tekijöitä organisaatioiden päätöksenteossa. PR-ammattilaisen työ usein on toimia päätökset ja operatiivisen toiminnan yhteen liittävä tekijänä. Tämä voi osaltaan eriyttää PR-ammattilaiset päätöksenteon poliittisista ja valtaan liittyvistä tekijöistä. He keskittyvätkin rationalisoimaan ja järjeistämään päätöksiin liittyvät viestinnälliset tekijät.

Aiemmissa itseuudistumiseen liittyvissä tutkimuksissa PR toimintona on nähty joko refleksiivisenä tai reflektiivisenä osana organisaatiota (Holmström, 2007; Ihlen ja Verhoeven, 2014). Tämä tutkimus osoitti, että aiempi jaottelu ei täysin sovellu organisaatioiden päätöksentekoon. Eri päätökset vaativat PR-ammattilaisilta tai organisaatioilta joko toimia refleksiivisesti tai reflektiivisesti, kun organisaatio asennoituvat päätöksentekoon.

Teoreettinen viitekehys kuvaili, kuinka PR toimintona toimii organisaation alajärjestelmänä. Rooleillaan ja tehtävillään PR-ammattilaiset laajentavat organisaation rajoja ja toimivat vuorovaikutuksessa ympäristön kanssa. Yhdessä tutkimuksen tulosten ja teoreettisen viitekehäyksen kanssa voidaan ehdottaa mallia, kuinka PR-ammattilaiset tukevat päätöksenteon kautta organisaation itseuudistumista. Perinteiset viestinnän mallit kuvaavat, kuinka PR-ammattilaisten roolit tai tehtävät ovat osa viestintäprosesseja. Aikaisemmat mallit ovat myös keskittyneet usein yksittäisiin ammattilaisiin. Ne eivät yleisesti käsittele päätöksenteon tukea, eikä päätöksentekoon liittyvä nykyinen viestinnän tutkimus ole yleistä. Oheinen malli, perustuen Luhmannin näkemykseen itseuudistumisesta, laajentaa näkemystä PR:stä organisaation reflektiivisenä järjestelmänä toimijaksi, joka tukee organisaatioiden strategista päätöksentekoa. Malli painottaa organisaation sisäisiä toimintoja järjestelmän itseuudistumisessa ja mahdollistaa PR:n osana organisaatiota ymmärtää moniulotteisemmin ympäristön epävarmuustekijöihin liittyviä tekijöitä.

Malli noudattaa Daftin ja Weickin (2001) sekä Milesin (1978) näkemyksiä päätöksentekoprosessien olevan osa toimintaympäristön tulkintaa. Malli tunnistaa myös PR:n aktiivisuuden tai passiivisuuden organisaation itseuudistumiselle. Aktiivisuuden ja passiivisuuden jako kuvaa, kuinka aktiivisesti PR etsii tietoa ympäristöstä ja tulkitsee sitä (Kuvio 14).



KUVIO 14 PR-ammattilaisen osallistuminen päätöksenteon tukemiseen

Reagoivassa tilassa PR-ammattilaiset pitävät organisaation ympäristöä arvaamattomana, mutta toimivat silti vasta, kun heidän tukeaan tarvitaan päätöksenteossa. PR-ammattilaiset tukevat päätöksentekoa tällöin pääasiallisesti taktisella tasolla tukien ja koordinoien teknisesti käynnissä olevia päätöksentekoprosesseja. Itseuudistumista tuetaan operatiivisella, mutta erityisesti taktisella tasolla.

Ennakoivassa tilassa PR-ammattilaiset ovat aktiivisia, vaikka tunnistavat organisaatioympäristön arvaamattomaksi. He pyrkivät aktiivisesti etsimään ja löytämään tietoa, rakentamaan kuvaa ympäristöstä sekä soveltamaan sidosryhmien kanssa erilaisia toimintatapoja aktiivisen vuoropuhelun ja suunnittelun kautta. PR-ammattilaiset nähdään strategisina kumppaneina päätöksenteossa ja rooliensa kautta edesauttavat oppimista ja ratkaisujen kokeilua. Roolit ja tehtävät tukevat itseuudistumista organisaation läpi strategisella, taktisella ja operatiivisella tasolla.

Puolustavassa tilassa PR-ammattilaisilla on passiivinen asenne ennustettavaa ympäristöä kohtaa. He eivät aktiivisesti pyri oppimaan ympäristöstään eivätkä ennalta tue päätöksentekoa keräämällä tietoa. PR-ammattilaiset keskittyvät hallinnoimaan organisaation viestintää ja viemään käytäntöön päätösten tuloksia. He tukevat itseuudistumista pääasiallisesti vain operatiivisen tason rutiineilla viestimällä päätöksistä ja sitomalla ne kulloiseen asiayhteyteen.

Havaitsevassa tilassa PR-ammattilaiset toimivat aktiivisesti tukeakseen päätöksentekoa. Organisaation ympäristö on ennustettava ja sitä seurataan aktiivisesti. PR-ammattilaiset keräävät tietoa ja ratkaisuehdotuksia organisaation päätöksenteon käyttöön. Tehtävät tukevat päätöksentekoa ja näin ollen itseuudistumista sekä taktisella että strategisella tasolla.

Tässä mallissa aktiivinen suhtautuminen itseuudistumiseen liittyy avoimiin järjestelmiin, joka rohkaisee organisaatioita vastaamaan ympäristön muutoksiin. Tällaisissa tapauksissa organisaatioiden yleisöt ja ympäristö tukevat sen itseuudistumista. PR-ammattilaisten odotetaan aktiivisessa itseuudistumisessa

olevan tärkeä osa päätöksentekoa ja johtoryhmän tukea. Sekä organisaation johto että PR-ammattilaiset etsivät sekä ympäristöä että organisaatiota tukevia ja hyödyttäviä muutoksia. Passiivisessa suhtautumisessa itseuudistumiseen reaktiivinen päätöksenteon tuki on sidoksissa sulkeutuneisiin järjestelmiin. PR-ammattilaisten ei odoteta olevan aktiivinen osa strategista johtoa, eikä sillä odoteta olevan vaikutusta organisaation toimintaympäristöön. Näin ollen tällaiset organisaatiot eivät koe itseuudistumista tärkeänä.

6 Johtopäätökset

Tämä tutkimus osoittaa, että PR keskeisenä organisaation järjestelmänä tarvitaan auttamaan organisaatioita sisäisessä sopeutumisessa. Organisaatioiden on kyettävä kehittämään mekanismeja selvittääkseen epätodennäköisistä tilanteista ja omista puutteistaan vähentääkseen toimintansa monimutkaisuutta tai sekavuutta (Luhmann, 1995). Juuri päätöksenteko ja sen tulokset luovat uusia haasteita ja muutoksia organisaatioissa.

PR ja PR-ammattilaiset eivät tue ainoastaan organisaation ylimmän johdon päätöksentekoa. PR-ammattilaisten erilaiset roolit ja tehtävät ovat selkeä merkki koko organisaation tukemisesta päätöksenteossa. Autopioeesi eli itseuudistuminen on organisaation sisälle erilaisten tehtävien muodostama kokonaisuus. PR-ammattilaiset työskentelevät yhtä aikaa useissa päätöksentekoa tukevissa tehtävissä ja ovat osaltaan tukemassa organisaation uusiutumista. Näin PR organisaation osana on merkittävässä roolissa itseuudistumisessa.

Tutkimuksen myötä voidaan todeta, että PR:n merkitys järjestelmän osana on suurempi kuin sen perinteinen näkemys organisaation rajoja laajentavana toimijana. PR:n tuki päätöksenteolle sisältää reagoivia, hallinnoivia sekä mukauttavia tehtäviä. PR osana päätöksentekoa ei ainoastaan kerää tietoa, tulkitse ja viesti eteenpäin sitä, vaan toimii prosessissa neuvonantajana, hallinnoijana ja käytäntöön panijana sekä välittäjänä.

Tutkimus osoittaa, että PR tukee organisaation päätöksentekoa ja itseuudistumista kolmella tasolla: operatiivisella, taktisella ja strategisella tasolla. Operatiivisella tasolla PR vie päätöksiä käytäntöön ja välittää tietoa päätöksistä. Taktisella tasolla PR kerää informaatiota ja huolehtii päätöksentekoon liittyvistä sisäisistä prosesseista. Strategisella tasolla PR kerää tietoa organisaation toimintaympäristöstä ja antaa strategisesti tärkeitä neuvoja päätöksentekijöille. Mitä korkeampi PR:n tuki on päätöksenteolle, sitä enemmän sen tuella on viestinnällistä arvoa. Sen myötä on myös todennäköisempää, että PR on sisällytetty organisaation johtoryhmään ja strategian valmisteluun.

Tämän työn käsitteellinen malli tarjoaa PR-ammattilaisille työkalun, jonka kautta he voivat paremmin ymmärtää ja ennakoida ilmiötä organisaatioissaan. Malli hyödyttää PR-ammattilaisia tarjoamalla mahdollisia suosituksia ja ratkaisuja käytäntöön. Sillä on myös strategista arvoa PR-ammattilaisille, jotka haluavat tiedostaa rooliensa monimuotoisuuden päätöksenteon tuessa. Tämä lisää päivittäiseen työhön syvyyttä ja voi kuroa umpeen eroa viestinnän ja organisaati-

tion päätöksenteon välillä. Kun viestinnän tuki päätöksenteolle ymmärretään paremmin ja yksityiskohtaisemmin, antaa PR organisaatiolle merkittävän resurssin päätöksentekoon ja strategian suunnitteluun. Se mahdollistaa organisaatioiden paremmin havainnoida toimintaympäristöään ja sen yleisöjen sekä tärkeiden sidosryhmien näkemyksiä. Tämä voi hyödyttää organisaatioita toimimaan ennakoivasti ja suunnittelemaan toimintaansa osana suurempaa toimintaympäristöä.

Organisaatioiden itseuudistumiseen liittyvistä teorioista puuttuu käsitteistö organisaatioiden tiedolle, oppimiselle ja muistille (Blaschke, 2008). Tämän työn teoreettinen anti ja käytännönläheiset tutkimustulokset PR:n merkityksestä alajärjestelmänä sekä osana itseuudistumismekanismeja mahdollistavat tulevaisuudessa näiden puutteiden paremman tutkimuksen. Työn esittelemä malli tarjoaa mahdollisuuden ymmärtää, kuinka PR osa organisaatiota tukee päätöksentekoa ja itseuudistumista. Tämän mallin avulla voidaan PR:stä tehdä kiinteä osa organisaatioiden strategian suunnittelua ja linkittää viestintä kiinteäksi osaksi liiketoimintastrategiaa.

Tämä työ mahdollistaa tutkia jatkossa päätöksentekoa ja organisaatioiden itseuudistumista PR:n näkökulmasta. Informaatiota ja sen tulkitsemisprosesseja voidaan tutkia lisää päätöksenteon näkökulmasta. Koska päätöksillä on useita tehtäviä organisaatioissa, niin myös PR:ään vaikuttavia toimintaympäristön epävarmuustilanteita voidaan jatkossa tutkia itseuudistumisen näkökulmasta. Työ tiivistää arvokasta päätöksenteon, sosiologian ja yhteisöviestinnän alojen teoreettista tietoa yhdistäen sen suomalaisten PR-ammattilaisten käytännön kokemuksiin.

PR-ammattilaiset pystyvät reflektoimaan omaa identiteettiään, käytännön työtään ja prosessejaan osana organisaatiotaan ja sen itseuudistumista. Mahdollistamalla PR-ammattilaisille paremmat mahdollisuudet osallistua päätöksentekoon, voidaan entistä paremmin oppia ymmärtämään organisaatioiden itseuudistumiseen vaikuttavia mekanismeja ja tekijöitä.

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APPENDIX 1 The interview protocol (in Finnish)

Haastattelurunko suomeksi.

| Aihe tai tutkimuskysymys | Haastattelukysymys |
|--|--|
| Taustakysymykset | |
| 1. Haastateltavan asema ja työkokemus | - Sukupuoli (mies/nainen) - Asema organisaatiossa tai työtehtävä - Työkokemus vuosina |
| 2. Organisaation ja viestintäosaston tyyppi | - Organisaation koko (työntekijöiden määrä) - Viestinnän paikka organisaation kokonaiskuvas- sa (haastateltavan kuvailemana) |
| 3. Muut taustatiedot | - Haastateltavan oma-aloitteisesti nauhalle kerto- mat |
| Viestintäammattilaisen roolit ja tehtävät | |
| 4. Organisaation päätöksentekoon perehty- minen (lämmittelykysymys) | - Mitä organisaation päätöksenteko on mielestäsi sinun organisaatiossasi? |
| 5. Rooli päätöksentekoprosessissa | - Mikä on roolisi, kun organisaatio tekee sitä kos- kevia päätöksiä? - Oletko yleensä osana päätöksentekoprosessia vai sen ulkopuolella? |
| 6. Tehtävät päätöksenteon tuessa | - Kuinka olet tukemassa tai edistämässä organi- saation päätöksentekoa viestinnällisin keinoin? - Osaisitko luetella työtehtäviä tai töiden sisältöjä, joilla tuet päätöksentekoa? |
| Viestintäammattilaisen taidot ja kompetenssi sekä päätöksenteon teemat ja yhteistyö | |
| 7. Henkilökohtaiset taidot päätöksenteon tuessa | - Millaisia taitoja tarvitset, että pystyt tukemaan tai auttamaan päätöksentekoprosesseja? - Millaisia taitoja mielestäsi tarvitsisit, joita sinulla ei ole juuri nyt? |
| 8. Päätöksenteon teemat ja yhteistyö | - Onko mielestäsi olemassa jotain erityisiä päätök- senteon teemoja, joissa roolisi ja osaamisesi vies- tinnän ammattilaisena on erityisesti tarpeen? - Kuinka teillä toimii yhteistyö organisaation vies- tintähenkilöstön kesken päätöksentekoprosesseis- sa? |
| 9. Avoin keskustelu | - Onko jotain sellaista asiaa tai teemaa, johon ha- luaisit vielä palata? - Onko jotain mitä haluaisit vielä lisätä tai kysyä? - Haluaisitko kertoa vielä jotain käytännön esi- merkkejä päätöksentekotilanteista? |

APPENDIX 2 Example code list

Example of a code list used for thematic analysis in Study 3b, as used in the phase: searching for and reviewing themes before creating final categories and descriptions (code descriptions are removed from this example)

| Nro | Code family (in Finnish) | Total | Codes included (amount) | Final name |
|-----|----------------------------------|-------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | Työ: tiedottaminen | 16 | Informing 11, Communication (web) 1 Communication (magazine) 3 Financial communication 1 | Dissemination |
| 2 | Työ: konsultointi | 13 | Consulting 2, private discussions 3, expertise 4, inspiring 1, sparring 1, cooperation 1, preparing 1 | Consulting & cooperation |
| 3 | Työ: viestinnän edistäminen | 12 | promotion of communications 10, campaigning 2 | Communication promotion |
| 4 | Työ: suunnittelu | 11 | planning 9, development 2 | Planning & development |
| 5 | Työ: sisäinen viestintä | 9 | internal communication 7, supporting 2 | Internal supporting |
| 6 | Työ: analysointi | 8 | Analysing 5, impact evaluation 3 | Analysing & evaluation |
| 7 | Työ: intranet | 7 | intranet 4, electronic tools 3 | Electronic communications |
| 8 | Työ: viestinnän linjaaminen | 7 | guiding communications 2, management 2, content management 2, mutual discussions 1 | Communication management |
| 9 | Työ: operationalisointi | 6 | operationalization 5, change promotion 1 | Operationalizing |
| 10 | Työ: johtoryhmään osallistuminen | 6 | board meeting participation 4, content creation 1, strategy creation 1 | Board participation |
| 11 | Työ: keskustelun luominen | 6 | conversation creating 3, transparency promotion 3 | Transparency promotion |
| 12 | Työ: palautteen kerääminen | 6 | gathering feedback 2, monitoring 1, background work 2 reporting 1 | Monitoring |
| 13 | Työ: koordinointi | 5 | Coordination 5 | Coordination |
| 14 | Työ: kontekstiin sitominen | 5 | Contextualization 4, meaning creation 1 | Contextualization |
| 15 | Työ: mediaviestintä | 5 | media communication 4, spinning 1 | Media communication |
| 16 | Työ: julkinen osallistuminen | 3 | public participation 3 | Public participation |
| 17 | Työ: materiaalityönto | 3 | material production 3 | Material production |
| 18 | Työ: sisäinen osallistuminen | 3 | internal participation 3 | Internal participation |
| 19 | Työ: ymmärryksen luonti | 3 | creation of understanding 3 | Creating understanding |
| | yhteensä | 133 | | |

ORIGINAL PAPERS

I

ORGANISATIONAL DECISION MAKING: THE LUHMANNI- AN DECISION COMMUNICATION PERSPECTIVE

by

Markus Mykkänen & Kaja Tampere, 2014

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Organizational Decision Making: The Luhmannian Decision Communication Perspective

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Abstract

Studies of organizational communication around decision-making and decision communication have largely concerned how decisions should be made and promoted. Less efforts have focused on how decisions should be communicated inside organizations and how they influence organizational effectiveness and performance. This study examined decision communication in an engineer-based organization 2008–2009. Key findings demonstrate that effective decision communication can be considered as the backbone of organizational communication, which can benefit the whole organization from the top management to lower levels. This paper also discusses the concept of decision communication generally and from theoretical point of view. Decision communication can be seen as a very special part of organizational communication. Additionally, it can also be seen as the guiding force of organizational effectiveness. Organizations need to make decision-making processes visible. From the organizational communication perspective this means holding decisions' meetings, certain rites and documents. Organizations as systems need a rational type of order to follow the decision-making process. The public relations or communication management workers' (specifically internal relations management) role in organizations has traditionally been to communicate the goals and objectives of current decisions at hand.

Keywords: Decision making; Organizational communication; Decision communication; Niklas Luhmann

Introduction

Changes in the communication technology and communication environments has led companies and communities to focus on increasing the information retrieval about the surrounding environment. Increased scanning of environments has challenged organizational decision-making and communication (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001). When more and more employees are considered “knowledge workers”, and even more have access to information, the decision-making related communication faces a lot of challenges. Relying only on traditional forms of communication in post-decisional communication is not effective anymore because organizations have to reflect on their environment and suit the communication according to the environment (Eisenberg et al., 2001).

Decision communication's role in organizations can be considered much more important and significant than just communicating the outcomes of every decision. Based on Niklas Luhmann's organization theory (2003), decision communication can be seen as the force around which organizations are formed. Decisions are confirmed through decision communication and transformed for new premises for organizational decisions.

Studies of organizational decision making during the last decades have very much focused on how decisions should be made. Theories often discuss decision-making as intentional, consequential action where the most suitable solution is chosen and implemented. Less studies have focused on how to discuss decision-making from its communicative point of view. Organizations as goal-oriented systems (Simon, 1958) have largely based their decision-making on finding effective patterns of activity directed towards the goals. Recently more scientific literature (Ashcraft et al., 2009; Putnam & Nicotera, 2008; Wehmeier & Winkler, 2013) in organization studies, have drawn on the idea that not just decisions, but also communication constitutes organization, often abbreviated to CCO (Schoeneborn, 2011).

What constitutes organizational performance are decisions and communication. No matter how great the strategy is, it will not succeed without these two elements. Organizational decision-making is based on communication (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn and Ganesh, 2004). Many organizations struggle with decision-making and even more organizations have difficulties with effective communication. Organizations' challenge is not just making good decisions. They need to execute and implement them successfully as well. The dynamics of communication are hidden in between communicative events, as organizations as social systems produce both their problems and functional solutions using their own resources (Nassehi, 2005).

2. Literature Review

The emergence of modern society has meant a number of changes in the whole society and in the forms of communication. The increased complexity of communication has challenged the organizational decision-making and strategic internal communication as well. Increased complexity has also meant that organizations and communication management have to put more effort into organizing life within organizations.

This paper introduces theories and literature related to decision communication. Several scholars of decision communication (Luhmann, 2003; Andersen, 2003a; 2003b; Nassehi, 2005; Seidl & Becker, 2006; Williams & Clampitt, 2007; Knudsen, 2005; Schoeneborn, 2011) have theorized the significance of how decision communication guides organizations, and especially internal communication. Organizations as systems have a need for communicative action and organizations live in communicative rationality. Decision-making is a social action and needs communication. Decision-making inside organizations is strategic action and oriented towards successful problem solving (Habermas, 1998). Communication facilitates coordinated social action. As Leeper (1996) argues, communication is needed in decision-making and as an organizational process. This eventually leads to an understanding among organization's publics. Organizations are certain places or "decision machines" where different forms of decisions get concentrated and where the history of decision-making and routines arises (Nassehi, 2005). According to Jönhill (2003), the membership of an organization, the formulated program and defined goals and the appointed staff are all established through decisions. The existence and the form of the organization are based on decisions. Organizations cannot stop making decisions, because they would cease to exist as an organization. From Luhmannian point of view, the decisions are a special medium of communication and organizations requires decision communication.

3. Theoretical Background of Decision Communication

Decision communication's foundation lies within the theory about social systems of communication by Niklas Luhmann. Luhmann's fundamental idea was that social systems as organizations are meaning-creating systems that consist of communication (Andersen, 2003b), and social systems observe them independently through communication. The fundamental social event in organizations is defined as communication. Communication is used to observe the organizational environment and decisions can be observed as a form of communication. The sociality of organizations consists only of communication and the fundamental social event is defined as communication and not as action (Andersen, 2003b). Luhmann described system of communication as autopoietic, which means that systems consists only self-producing elements. Originally elaborated by Maturana (1981), autopoietic systems have permanent structure and they are capable of completing the decisions that make them up through the decisions that make them up. Communication is used by social systems to create themselves and it take place within the social system. Social system constructs its own perception of itself and its environment through communication.

Luhmann (2005) emphasizes that decision communications are not produced by human beings but by the social system, the organization. Luhmann sees decisions as the elements of organization and "compact communications", which communicate their own contingency. Luhmann also theorizes (2005) that decision communication is the only form of communication that contributes to the autopoiesis of organisation.

Luhmann (2005) says that inside organizations decision communication is always integrated into a process of connecting decisions – the actual autopoiesis. According to him, decision communication can be seen as uncertainty absorption, originally introduced by Simon & March (1958). In their concept no decision can rely on complete information and some uncertainty always remain. Uncertainty absorption takes place between the connection of decisions. All information is transformed into the selection of one alternative over the other ones. Now decision absorbs the uncertainty and decision communication informs about the selected and rejected alternatives (Seidl, 2005).

Seidl (2005) theorizes that decisions are "complete" when subsequent decision is connected to it. Analogies from different communication actions can be found: communication is completed once another communication connects to it by defining its meaning retrospectively.

Decision communication in organizations is to observe decisions through the perspective of communication (Andersen, 2003b). He argues that organizations are formed around decision communication and decisions are confirmed through decision communication and are transformed for new premises for decisions. Knudsen (2005) argues that in Luhmannian systems theory, social systems are seen consisting of communication. Decisions are but one type of communication (Knudsen, 2005).

Communication in social systems is improbable. Organizations consist of recursively connected elements. Not as actors or individuals. Communication is only really communication if communicative events are understood and "used as the basis for connecting with further behaviours." Communication is communication only when communicative events consecutively connect each other (Knudsen, 2005).

Decisions are basic elements of organization and organization is thus defined as a network of recursively connected decisions. Organizations simply consist of decisions referring to other decisions. Without this connection there is no organization (Knudsen, 2005). Andersen (2003b) proposes that decisions should be seen as a communication processes that creates social expectations and divides them and the world to fixed and open contingency.

Communication, which addresses these social expectations, can be considered as decision communication as Andersen (2003b) argues. According to him, decisions fulfil the present expectations among the members of organization, but the same they create new ones what to expect from the future. Our fundamental proposal is that that the effectiveness of decision communication can and should be measured by how well these social expectations are addressed. Organizations' basic need is to make the decision making process visible to its' members. This is the main problem of every organization as social systems as Nassehi (2005) presents. Inside organizations the communication usually gains a life of its own. Luhmann (1996) reminds that when this happens, it cannot be reduced by the participants part-takers of communication.

3.1 The Concept of Decision Communication

Decision communication consists usually messages from made decisions. This messages or selections, as Luhmann calls them, are the unity of three selections: information, form of communication and understanding. As Andersen (2003b) interprets Luhmann's theory, communication is as flow of selected messages, which are linked retrospectively to prior communication. A modern concept of organizational goals is to improve organizational efficiency and effectiveness. It is necessary to develop democratic decision-making and communication. Hatch (2008) speaks about the communicative rationality of organizations. Decision communication can be seen as a part of this rationality.

Decision communication, as well all communication, shares the same features as it is always facing backwards. Decision communication is much about implementing decisions, following up and getting feedback how decisions are accepted and what kind of effect they have made. Harrison & March (1988) say that the post-decisional information has been used to clarify the outcomes and values of the selected alternative. Decision communication is traditionally meant to communicate how decisions' criteria are met or satisfied. But in Luhmannian perspective (2003) it can be also considered to use in decision making related communication, where it have significant role. For instance, scanning issues from the environment, gathering information and introducing alternatives. It can be also considered the process of selecting the best alternative. If decision communication is considered as decision-related communication, the whole decision making process could be considered as decision communication.

Luhmann's (2005) fundamental idea was that organizations decide by themselves, which is considered as a decision. This applies to decision communication as well. Organization themselves define how much communication every decision needs. As a matter of fact, they also decide what is decision communication in their organization. As combined organization itself decide how much effort they give for decision communication for every decision making process. Nassehi (2005) states that only communication can understand what has been communicated. When decisions are seen as a process of communication, decision communication is needed to understand what has been communicated earlier. Organizations continue themselves by connecting decisions to previous decisions. Decision communication combines the chain of decisions.

Luhmann (2005) also states that the nature of decision communication changes when the time to make a decision occurs. If decision communication is seen as communication, which leads to a decision, then the post-decisional information of decision communication differs from pre-decisional communication. Decision communication uses information about the world and environment of organization. But the information is different what is used in subsequent decision communication.

Based on these views, the nature of decision communication can be seen as very fragile. According to Seidl & Becker (2006), it is even more fragile than the ordinary communication, because it not just communicates selected alternative but indirectly the rejected options as well. To be successful, decision communication needs to have particular communicative provisions, which are referred to as deparadoxifications (Seidl & Becker, 2006). This means that the paradoxical form of decision communications is hidden after the decision in ensuing communications.

3.2 The Strategic Role of Decision Communication

Organizations' decision-making is based on processing information (Cheney et. Al, 2004). But does decision communication have strategic value for organizations? Organizations have need for specific information and feedback. But this means that organizations have to be willing and able to communicate efficiently internally. As White, Vane & Stafford (2010) view that strategic internal communication brings benefits not only to the employee satisfaction and productivity, but it also benefits company's external efforts.

Decision communication's role can be seen from the strategic point of view as well. Moorcroft (2003) sees that employees want to know where organization is heading and what are its goals. Decision communication can be considered as the force, which creates a buy-in for organization's goals and strategies.

Traditionally managers and other members of dominant coalition have had a significant impact how decisions have been communicated inside organizations. As White et al. (2010) argue, dominant coalition consists of different class of employees who have more power and influence in to decision-making process. By using this power they also can influence the communication and acceptance of organizational goals.

White et al. (2010) find that the most important source of communication for the publics of organization is the top of the organization. This applies to decision communication as well. Hearing the outcomes from top management empowers the employees and gives the sense that they are receiving full information about decisions. March (1988) emphasizes that decisions can be more decentralized and of better quality when everyone understands where the company is headed. Effective decision communication could offer more coherence, so every individual and each part of the company will be better able to drive purposefully toward a common goal that is clear, communicated and understood by everyone.

Communication in organizations is needed to measure the effectiveness of decisions (Hitt et al., 2006) as well. Especially upward communication from subordinates to supervisors is needed to receive feedback about how previously made decisions are working. Tampere (2010) continues that decisions also determine how organizations behave and act. Together with organizational identity, decisions and their outcomes modify organizational reputation. This is very much linked to how organizations see their importance and responsibility as decision makers. Holmström (2006) points out that through decisions, organizations also question their identity, responsibility and their role in society.

3.3 Decision is a Medium and Form of Communication

Decision itself is a message and can be considered as a form of communication. Andersen (2003b) proposes that decision is a form of communication takes into account the social expectations of members of organization on three different levels. Temporal expectations are directed to the future, factual expectations directed at the organization, and social expectations directed at the partakers in the communication. In this sense decisions can be seen

telling what to expect from individual tasks and from future decisions. Decisions create social expectations for subsequent decisions as well.

Because decisions themselves are communication, they can be considered also a medium. Inside organizations, employees tend to evaluate different communication channels (White et al., 2010). Decisions always exist in organisational life, but the problem is that employees do not recognize decisions often as such, and they do not think about decisions as decisions. Employees do not always see or understand the connection between decision and communication. It means that some situations in the organizational life, which are connected to decisions, need strategic and planned communication, because through communications we construct connotations and meanings. And in this touch point, the role of strategic internal (organizational) communication arises, and the role of public relations clears as an initiator of decision communication. Or other words, decision communication is one of the most important internal public relations (communication management) functions in the organizational life.

As White et al. (2010) find, managers often neglect information flow because they assume that everybody knows already. They may not recognize the need to convey some pieces of information. That is why organized decision communication has its place in organizations - to ensure that employees receive the information needed through the communication channels, which reach the employees best. Timely, efficiently communicated information prevents rumors, speculations and uncertainty inside organizations and makes organizational internal environment more stable and balanced. And this is the assumption for organizational effectiveness.

Andersen (2003a) emphasizes that a decision's "before" and "after" leaves a mark in a medium that affects the decision, since a decision and organizational communication are codified in accordance with the medium. Decision communication is designed by the organizational culture and the forms of organizational communication. Organizational communication, as well as decision communication, can form several mediums. These mediums can be for instance money or power. When the generalized medium is money, decision communication communicates about the decision "best value for the money". Andersen (2003a) states that decisions cannot be communicated except in the imprinting in a symbolically generalized medium.

3.4 Problems and Benefits of Decision Communication

Traditionally the benefits of internal communication have been better employee satisfaction and productivity. Decision communication can be seen to benefit internal communication as well. But decision communication can focus some special areas of its own. As Moorcroft (2003) finds, effective decision communication can create buy-in for an organization's strategies, goals and identity. This can be used to show how employees contribute to achieving the vision of organization.

To be effective decision communication should focus on communicating the "right amount" of information. Receiving large amount of information is not equal to receiving wanted information. Relationship between wanted and received information in internal communication is strived from information adequacy (Rosenfeld, Richman & May, 2004).

Williams & Clampitt (2007) point out that decision communication has problems as well. They argue that two common reasons for inefficient decision communication exist: failure to clarify responsibilities and the desire to inform quickly after the decision has been made. In the first case, decision-makers often think that their job is simply to make decisions, not to communicate or participate in communication. They assume that someone else will carry out the

communication. Williams & Clampitt (2007) remind that many decision-making models give scant attention to communication of decisions.

In some cases, communication takes place only as restricted messages of the highlights of a decision. Often only the final pieces of information in the form of results are given out without context. The relevant facts, weighted options, and uncertainties surrounding the conclusions and the manner by which the decision was made, are left out of the communication process.

Based on the Luhmannian thinking (Andersen, 2003b), the basic nature of decision communication is considered paradoxical: the more the chosen alternative is communicated as a justified right selection, the less the other options will appear as real alternatives and the decision is considered less as a real decision. The same applies the other way around: the more there is communication about other options, the less the chosen one seems as a justified decision and the less the decision will appear as decided (Seidl & Becker, 2006).

Badly governed communication about decisions can be observed through Tampere's (2008) chaotic asymmetrical communication model (CAC). According to this model, dialogue, as well as feedback to the public, in this case to employees of an organization, is not understood, and therefore the processes of communication are chaotic, asymmetrical, and ungoverned. According to this model, an organization sends its message to a so-called abstract and anonymous public, but it is not received because it is often delivered in technocratic wording and lacks a clearly defined message. This means that decisions are communicated, but the communication does not create any desired understanding about the outcomes of decisions. The flow of information in the CAC model is independent, chaotic, and lives a life of its own. Even when organizations do nothing in the communication and relations fields, messages nevertheless exist. But like White et al. (2010) remind, information is not the same as communication. Information about decisions outcomes is not sufficient when employees get information merely through informal routes.

As Hitt et al. (2006) emphasize, effective communication is crucial for organizations in implementing strategies and decisions need to be interpreted in certain communication before they can be transformed into action (Huebner, Varey, & Wood, 2008). When an organization is communicates effectively about decisions, rumours and gossips are managed better.

4. Methodology

Present article is based on the study of decision communication in an organization. A mixed method research was conducted in October 2008 and February 2009. The research was conducted in an engineer-based organization, a local department of technology and services supplier Metso Paper. During the research, the company employs over 12 000 employees all over the world, and locally 1 900 employees in Finland. The participants of the study worked as automation engineers. In their daily work the employees and managers make e.g. cost accounting for projects and participate in the starting of new paper machinery. They participate in projects on a large scale, from the earliest offers to the final phase of starting a new paper machine. All employees are responsible for the internal communications related processes in their own work. Areas of responsibility and key issues in this work process exist in terms of getting the work done. A significant share of the daily communication occurs at the individual level through meetings with people, so it is important that work-related knowledge and information is shared with others and made decisions are actively acknowledged by every employee. Supervisors provide information on work procedures, offer directions in specific tasks, and communicate issues related to the work environment.

4.1 Research Questions and Data Collection

The research and data sections of this paper discuss the decision communication in an engineer based work organization. The data collection contains two different parts: the results from interviews and a survey. The original data was collected in the fall 2008 and spring 2009. The original aim of the research was to find out and explore how decision-making and – communication processes are planned and realized in an every day work environment among managers and employees in this specific organization. The research question was:

How decision is communicated in the Metso Paper’s automation engineering department?

The purpose was to find out how decisions and their outcomes are communicated in researched organization. The intention is to find out what the main communication channels are and what information is communicated, as well as how the information of decisions flows in the organization.

The first part of the research consisted of in-depth interviews. Four team leaders and the head of the department, overall five managers participated. The interview question form comprised of 14 questions and interviews lasted for one hour. For this paper, only the data from questions regarding communication of decisions and use of information, is used. The interviews were transcribed and answers were grouped and combined together according to the questions. Following this, the questions were grouped according to the research questions and the answers were combined together. When the questions were analyzed together, different theme groups within a question were formed.

The second part of the research was quantitative. A survey, which was conducted online by using Mr. Interview software, was targeted at all employees of the researched organization. Overall 36 out of 74 employees participated. The purpose of the second part of the research was to gather information on how the employees perceive decision-making and decision communication in the department. The questionnaire was a mixture of open questions and structured questions. The questionnaire also included a few questions, which used Wiggio’s Organizational Communication Development (OCD) method. According to Hargie and Tourish (2009), the OCD method helps to translate the goals of an organization to end-results and it addresses several issues, which are not covered by other survey instruments. For this paper only the data from the questions regarding communication of decisions is used.

The quantitative data was analyzed with SPSS statistical analysis software. The quantitative data was analyzed by using means, ranges, numbers of respondents and deviations.

5. Results

The first finding was that the interviewed managers considered the decisions to be usually changes in consensual policies. They consider decisions to be “something bigger” that always include a change. So the decision is usually seen as a change. They found that normal daily routines, existing policies or decisions that have been made earlier, are not decisions.

“Decision is a change in policy and forces us to change the daily routine. Decision tells that we have to take a new direction.” (Manager 1)

“Decision is a bargain of policy and a collective treaty of something. It is always

something big, but do I have to communicate it forward is also something to decide.”
(Manager 2)

Managers also found that the decision can be collective information that leads to a decision. Those who were not sure how to define a decision said that the decisions are normal work and something that is a part of a supervisor’s job. On some level, the decisions are “playing by the rules and guidelines”. One leader found that acting according to norms and regulations is also a decision. Another leader had no words to describe what a decision is, but said that he feels and knows it when a decision is made.

“The decision can be just something that comes to my mind.” (Manager 4)

5.1 The Communication of Decisions to Employees

Interviewed managers found that the best ways to communicate decisions to employees in their organization were scheduled meetings, face-to-face communication and email. The made decisions are revised once in a month in a group meeting, which are also to used to introduce the decisions of company’s board. The whole department gathers together every two months in a department’s meeting. After meetings, the made decisions are communicated with memos by using email. In addition to these meetings, there is also a technical core meeting and a managers own meeting with the department’s leader every week.

Findings suggest that communication is often driven by the urgency of the message. Messages that are in hurry are delivered by using fast communication channels as email or by face-to-face. Messages with lower priority are communicated in meetings.

“Telling something personally is often quicker and easier than sending email. Emailing usually takes more time than walking to a person and talking face-to-face.”
(Manager 1)

Managers found that a major part of communication is done by technical databases and computer-based memos. The instructions for daily work also exist in different databases. If instructions are to change, the new instructions are accepted and commented by a appropriate superior before they get sent out. The memos are sent via email along with comments. Messages concerning all employees of the department are sent via email. An information conference for employees is held only when, for instance, some big organizational reform is planned to go ahead. Almost every manager found that one of the best ways to inform employees about ongoing decision making process is to use non-official communication channels by participating in coffee table conversations during breaks. These conversations are thought of as a little bit problematic. Managers felt that not every subject or decision detail is appropriate for discussion during breaks. Also during these conversations employees are eager to get some information that has not yet been made public.

Managers found that the communication capabilities vary very much among employees and each employee’s attitude towards decisions affects how the decisions are accepted. Superiors said that they wanted to keep their mind open to negative feedback and want to discuss openly if someone has something negative to say about the decision making process.

5.2 Communicating Decisions to Managers

Managers found that they receive very well the information of decisions made by employees. Notable from their behalf was that project designers and project leaders often come to talk and share decision information face-to-face. Email is also often used and the email messages are often commented. If managers want some information via a normally unused channel, this is agreed beforehand in meetings.

“I find it good that decisions are brought to me face-to-face. Matters that have no hurry are handled in group meetings. There we also handle those things people want to complain about.” (Manager 3)

Interviews revealed that managers do not want to monitor excessively the work of project leaders and employees. They have no need to know every decision that is made by team members. For decent knowledge of the situation of projects and its decision, the managers rely on the project databases.

“Project databases include the decision and memos and they can be read from there. The superior doesn’t need the information of decision as much as the project leaders do.” (Manager 4)

Managers acknowledged that it is very common that employees come to talk and give feedback when walking among employees or around the coffee point. They also stated that they keep their doors open every time, so that they are available for discussion.

5.3 Managers as Decision Makers and Communicators

Interviewed managers saw their roles as decision makers to be more as information gatherers and processors, than authoritative leaders. They felt that they draw the lines and weld together the alternatives. The superior is the last person to formulate the decision.

“In an organization where everyone has a certain expertise, the information and knowledge are in the group as a whole. I have to try to act so that I could get out all the needed tacit knowledge for the support of a decision.” (Manager 1)

Managers use consideration when making decisions and they expressed that if needed, the arguments for a certain decision can be found. Interviews suggest that managers would not begin to explain their decisions, because all decision-making in this organization is based on facts. If they do not have enough information to make the decision, they will search for it. On the other hand, they felt that the managerial work would be easier if the strategies from the upper level would be communicated better. Managers expressed that superiors are playing the key part in their organization and are the ones who “live” the strategies to lower level and employees. Managers felt their role as a decision maker and a communicator is to take decision making to a direction that eases and helps the further decision making of employees. The interviews suggest that the employees are more willing to speak out about decisions and discuss when they feel that they are heard. This also helps commit to previously made decisions.

5.4 Wanted and Received Information about Decisions

One of the most important questions of the questionnaire was the question about wanted and received information. In these questions, the respondents estimated how much they want information about certain decision themes and how much they receive it. This is called the information gap.

The gap was measured by asking the following questions: how often do you get information about the following things and how often would you like to have information about the following things? On the scale 1 to 5: one was 'never', and five stood for 'very often'.

| Decision information | N | Needed information | Received information | Gap |
|-------------------------|----|--------------------|----------------------|-------|
| Changes in work | 36 | 4.08 | 3.22 | 0.86 |
| Technical things | 36 | 4.14 | 3.31 | 0.83 |
| Education possibilities | 36 | 3.81 | 3.11 | 0.70 |
| Personnel of department | 36 | 3.53 | 3.19 | 0.41 |
| Running projects | 36 | 3.83 | 3.42 | 0.39 |
| Traveling | 36 | 3.28 | 2.97 | 0.31 |
| Metso as a company | 36 | 3.39 | 3.14 | 0.25 |
| Timetables | 36 | 3.72 | 3.53 | 0.19 |
| Working hours | 36 | 3.28 | 3.17 | 0.11 |
| Department's finance | 36 | 3.28 | 3.36 | -0.08 |

Table 1. Differences between wanted and received information about decisions.

The differences between these two questions were analyzed by subtracting the received information from the wanted information. As table 1 shows, the gap was the biggest in information about decisions, which are related to changes in daily work. The gap was 0.86 and it is remarkable. The mean for wanted information was 4.08. The gap in information about a decisions which are related to technical things and education possibilities was also significant.

The gap in the first was 0.83 and in the latter 0.70. The mean of information related to technical things is high, 4.14. The gap of the information about decisions of personnel was 0.41. Travelling is one part of the work in research organization. The gap in this question was 0.31. The gap between wanted and received information about running projects was 0.39.

Less significant gaps were the gaps for information about decisions which are related to Metso as a company, timetables and working hours. The gaps in order were 0.25, 0.19 and 0.11.

It is significant to notice that there exists one theme where the gap is negative, in other words the employees receive more information than they need. The gap for the department's financial things is -0.08.

This question viewed how much information about decisions flows to employees. The results show that more information about decisions is needed. Especially the themes where the gaps are big should be addressed. In nine fields out of ten, the amount of information about decisions does not cover the need. In terms of communication, the situation is serious where the gap is more than 0.50. Two respondents commented the question by open comment. One felt that the true information of the goals of management should always be given. Now the information is more or less non-specific. Another respondent found that the possibilities to influence the decisions are too low. Now the information comes when the decision is already made.

5.5 Information of Decisions in Different Communication Channels

The questionnaire also inquired about the gap between wanted and received information about decisions in different communication channels. This gap is called the channel gap. The exact questions were:

- (1) Through which communication channels do you get the information about your work best?
- (2) Through which communication channels would you like to have more information about decisions concerning your work?

These questions were used to resolve the best channels to communicate about decisions within research organization. In scale 1 to 5 the 1 was never and 5 was very often.

| Communication channel | N | Wanted information | Received information | Channel gap |
|-----------------------|----|--------------------|----------------------|-------------|
| Core meeting | 36 | 2.69 | 2.00 | 0.69 |
| Personnel magazines | 36 | 2.42 | 2.00 | 0.42 |
| Superior's bulletin | 36 | 3.03 | 2.81 | 0.22 |
| Department meeting | 36 | 3.36 | 3.17 | 0.19 |
| Group meetings | 36 | 3.81 | 3.67 | 0.14 |
| Intranet | 36 | 2.81 | 2.72 | 0.09 |
| Memos | 36 | 3.25 | 3.22 | 0.03 |
| Phone | 36 | 2.89 | 2.86 | 0.03 |
| Email | 36 | 3.94 | 3.92 | 0.02 |

| | | | | |
|-----------|----|------|------|-------|
| Co-worker | 36 | 3.72 | 3.81 | -0.09 |
| Databases | 36 | 3.25 | 3.36 | -0.11 |
| Internet | 36 | 2.64 | 2.86 | -0.22 |

Table 2. Differences between wanted and received information in different channels.

The gap (table 2) was the biggest in the core meeting, 0.69. After this, the second biggest gap was in personnel magazines. The gap is 0.42. These two communication channels had the biggest gap, but the means for wanted information and received information in both are under average. From this point of view they cannot be considered as very significant communication channels.

The gaps in superior announcements, department meetings, group meetings, intranet, memos, phone, and email, are not significant. In each case, a bit more information through these channels is needed. It is notable that email and group meetings have relatively high means for both wanted and received information. The gap is negative in three cases: co-workers, databases and the internet. Two respondents commented the questions. They emphasized that the best channels are superior and the face-to-face conversation.

The results of this question showed that the information sent through different channels are mainly in balance. In the light of means, the three most used communication channels where the information is wanted are in order email, group meetings and co-workers. In 9 cases out of 12, a bit more information through different channels were wanted. Only in one case the gap is significant, in others not. In three cases more information through the channels is received than wanted.

6. Discussion

Findings from the present research show that the daily work is full of decisions and the boundaries of decisions disappear in the everyday action. This means that usually only big and important decisions are truly acknowledged as decisions. As the managers of the researched organization mentioned, the decisions in those cases are usually changes in consensual policies. Interviews revealed that decisions for them are something that always includes a change and which always seems to include a process of information.

The findings show that in an engineer-based organization, the decision-making process is very strongly based on the information and facts. The flow of information and messages build the most important decision premise. In this premise, managers see their role more as information gatherers, rather than decision makers. They feel that they feed alternatives to decision-making and try to ease and guide the employees' decision making. Findings from the organization show that the responsibility of decision communication is widely given to employees. While their work is based on instructions and guidelines, the decision communication is not. Employees' responsibility is to decide what they communicate vertically and horizontally inside their organization, and usually the channel is chosen by the urgency of the message. Greenberg & Baron (2008) presented that employees who have the power to make decisions usually know what is best for their job and effectiveness. This also increases the commitment to decisions.

When viewing the results of this study in the light of Luhmann's theory (2003) about autopoietic organization, we notice that decisions are truly a special form of communication.

Decisions, for instance, can communicate what employees could expect from the future. Decisions are also social events and consist of coordinated actions as Habermas (1998) presented. The work at the research organization is oriented towards successful problem solving. Decisions and decision making are the part of every employee's daily work. Decisions made during daily work create organizational processes inside the organization. As the results and theoretical background in this paper show, processing information and disseminating decisions inside organization can form the backbone of organizational effectiveness.

Theories do not often seem to consider decision communication as a special form of communication management, even some scholars like Andersen (2003b) and Seidl & Becker (2006) have written about it during the last years, although this special form of communication is not much covered in the literature. Decision communication is often seen as a part of normal organizational communication and its fragile nature (Seidl & Becker 2006) is not recognized. In theories, the basic models of decision-making are process-oriented and do not recognize the role of communication enough as a part of decision making. Organization's managers have their informational roles as important nerve centres and have the possibility to develop the decision communication at their workplaces strategically and planned ways.

In the research organization, information and facts form a solid base for decision-making. Moreover, the flow of information and messages build the most important decision premise in this organization. Theories also recognize that in decision-making there are other meaningful factors as well, especially on the individual level.

As theory presented in this paper and collected data shows, decisions are indeed a matter of communication and communication management (Public Relations). Decisions can be seen as the guiding force of organizations and the feed for organizational communication. Effective decision communication can be considered the backbone of organizational communication, which can benefit the whole organization from the top management to lower levels. Organizations may only learn from their experience and practice, and in this process, decision-making and decision communication play a key role.

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II

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS TO ORGANISATIONAL DECISION MAKING: INSIGHTS FROM THE LITERATURE

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The Contribution of Public Relations to Organizational Decision Making: Insights from the Literature

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to clarify the contribution of public relations practitioners to organizational decision making and, in particular, how this has been seen in peer-reviewed journals over the last 10 years. After a literature search, 38 articles originating from 26 different journals were further analyzed using thematic analysis. The period investigated ranged from the start of 2002 to October 2012. In the general literature on the roles of public relations practitioners, their participation in decision-making was most frequently discussed in relation to its impact on decision-making and enhancing managers' understanding of the communicative aspects of decision-making processes. In the specialist literature on corporate social responsibility, the giving of strategic advice, along with ethics, crises and public affairs, was also often addressed. It seems that since 2006, the roles of public relations practitioners in facilitating decision-making processes and in communicating decisions have received more detailed attention. This paper offers a comprehensive picture of the different ways in which public relations practitioners contribute to organizational decision-making processes, showing different combinations of the roles of participator in decision-making, and advisor, facilitator and disseminator of organizational decisions. The identification and description of the roles will help practitioners to reflect on their own roles in organizational decision-making.

Keywords: Public relations, decision making, organizational communication

INTRODUCTION

The overall purpose of this paper is to better understand how public relations (PR) contributes to decision making in organizations by bringing together insights from peer-reviewed papers. Specifically, the aim was to identify the roles of PR practitioners in organizational decision making, and discuss the communicative aspects of the decision-making process and how the PR function relates to this. The data were gathered by means of a systematic literature review of peer-reviewed articles published over the past 10 years. After introducing the topic, the method is explained and the findings are presented. Based on these results, conclusions are drawn on the contribution of public relations practitioners to organizational decision making, and current trends in the literature on the topic are discussed.

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Organizational decision making is strategic action oriented toward successful problem solving (Habermas, 1998). In the literature on decision making, communication and negotiations with stakeholders are often mentioned. Heath (1998, 2002) advocated corporate public policymaking and balancing interests in society. The social environment forms a complex field of forces, in which organizations depend on many parties each with their own objectives and interests (Vos and Schoemaker, 2011). Organizations aim at acquiring legitimacy for their activities, and therefore need to be willing to participate in dialogue with stakeholders and be held accountable for the decisions made (Vos, Schoemaker and Luoma-aho, 2013). In participative decision making organizations can include many issues and give internal and external stakeholder groups a voice (Miller, 2006). According to the business literature, involvement in decision-making processes can take many forms. Stakeholders can be engaged in decision making in different ways and in various roles: they can recommend (consult with people who provide input and propose directions), agree (hold power of veto), provide input (have a voice and be consulted), decide (participate in the actual decision making) or perform (implement) a decision (Rogers and Blenko, 2006).

Decision making has almost universally been defined as choosing between alternatives (Luthans, 1989), while the process of decision making is understood as comprising the phases of identification, development and selection (Mintzberg, Raisinghani & Théorêt, 1976). In the past, decisions were traditionally taken by the leadership and employees were expected to carry them out, whereas in modern organizations decision making is influenced by employees and stakeholders (Mathis, 2007). Moreover, when the participants possess a broad range of knowledge, ideas, skills, and abilities, this is considered to add to the quality of the information available for the decision-making process (Van Knippenberg, De Dreu and Homan, 2004). Thus, organizational decision making is a social process to determine the best mechanism to solve a problem (Vroom & Jago, 1974). Active communication continues throughout the decision-making process (Mintzberg et al., 1976). Initially, the emphasis is on collecting information to identify problems and possible ways to solve them, after which co-creation and negotiation take place, followed by dissemination and evaluation.

The involvement of PR practitioners in decision making has been discussed by scholars ever since Dozier (1986; 1992) argued that "if practitioners are to help organizations adapt to changes in the environment, they must participate in the management decision-making process, not simply implement decisions made by others." Dozier conceptualized the public relations function as one of facilitating communication between management and publics, and so contributing to organizational effectiveness. Since then, PR practitioners have been expected to participate in and influence the organizational decision-making process (Grunig, Grunig and Dozier, 2002; White and Dozier, 1992). In practice, a range of positions exists from press agency in the past to determining an organizations strategic position in the future (Heath, 2004). Although different practitioners may hold different positions on this scale, Carroll (2013) states that they are often not yet seen as formal members of the management team in strategic decision making.

The general roles of PR professionals have been extensively covered in the literature in recent decades (Ruth-McSwain, 2011), often from a normative

perspective, such as exploring what constitutes excellent public relations and how this relates to decision power. Some studies have examined the impact of PR practitioners on decision making, bringing insights from research on organizational power and influence (e.g. Berger, 2005; O'Neil, 2003) and clarifying the conditions under which PR practitioners gain access to the decision-making process (Coombs, 1998; Plowman, 1998; Serini, 1993).

However, few studies have sought to describe more precisely how practitioners contribute to organizational decision making. Attention has mostly been focused on the extent to which PR practitioners may have or not have decision power, rather than on different ways of being involved in organizational decision making. The influence on and participation in decision-making circles of PR practitioners merits further exploration, as suggested by Choi and Choi (2009). Public relations professionals serve many roles for organizations, since, according to Simon (1968), decision making in organizations is heavily based on communication, as the decisional premises – the values that guide decisions – are expressed and received through communication (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn and Ganesh, 2004).

To bring together insights on ways in which PR practitioners are involved in organizational decision making, a systematic review of the literature in peer-reviewed journals published 2002–2012 was undertaken. The following research questions guided the literature review. (RQ1:) How, according to the scientific literature in refereed journals, do public relations practitioners contribute to organizational decision making? (RQ2:) What research trends on this topic are revealed in the literature? The first research question relates to the different ways in which PR practitioners are seen to contribute to organizational decision making, whereas the second research question focuses on changes in the academic literature over time.

METHOD

For this study, a computerized search of relevant scientific articles was carried out in October 2012 and a thematic analysis of the main findings and conclusions conducted over the following months. The search was limited to peer-reviewed articles from 1 January 2002 to 31 October 2012. Three major databases were selected: EBSCOhost, Web of Science and ProQuest. As a first step, several keywords were tested. The final keyword combination for the search was ["decision making" or "policy making"] and ["organizational communication" or "public relations" or "corporate communication*"].

For EBSCO, all the available databases were used, yielding 565 results. Web of Science yielded 76 results and ProQuest 651 results. All the results (n = 1 292) were then transferred to RefWorks. After removing exact and close duplicates, the total number of articles was 1 140. Although the search had included the keywords "organizational communication" or "public relations" or "corporate communication," the initial impression was that the sample contained more non-relevant items than expected, for example, articles on topics related to political decision making and decision making between patients and doctors that were not discussed in an organizational context.

Therefore, further selection had to be done manually, in three phases. In the first phase, based on the abstract and title, all articles not published in English were excluded, as also were articles that clearly had no organizational context. After initial scanning, 346 articles remained. In the second phase, the abstracts and titles of all these articles were read carefully to check that they were in fact scientific articles that had a connection with the keywords. This procedure resulted in 82 articles, of which 70 were available for download. In the third phase, all 70 papers were read through to determine whether they should be included in the final sample. The inclusion criterion was that the articles had a clear connection with organizational decision making and public relations or organizational/corporate communication. As a result, the final sample consisted of 38 articles.

The articles in the final sample were then read through and a thematic analysis was conducted. The main findings and conclusions of each article were transferred to a data extraction table and additional notes made. In the data-extraction table the journals and paper types were noted.

The 38 articles were from 26 different journals. The highest number of articles (6) came from the Journal of Communication Management. The second and third highest numbers came from the Journal of Business Ethics (4) and Journal of Public Relations Research (3). Two articles came from the Public Relations Review. The remaining 19 articles each came from a different journal, e.g. Communication Research, Public Relations Quarterly and Corporate Communications. Of the 38 publications in the sample, 22 were empirical articles. Of these, 18 were based on qualitative research methods and four on quantitative methods. Most of the qualitative data were collected via interviews, while the quantitative data were in all cases collected via surveys.

The data-extraction table also had columns that related to the two research questions. To answer the first research question, each article was given a primary code by the first theme it addressed. An additional code was given when also another theme was addressed. By coding the articles, relevant research themes were identified across the sample of articles. For research question 2, the trends mentioned in the articles were noted, and the developments over time in what the papers addressed when looking at the publication dates of the articles. The themes were deduced from the literature after reading the articles several times, and summarizing the content. The reading focused on identifying different ways in which PR practitioners, according to the articles, contributed to organizational decision making. The thematic analysis yielded the following key themes:

- 1) Participation of PR practitioners in organizational decision making
- 2) Facilitation of organizational decision making processes by PR practitioners
- 3) Internal and external communication on organizational decisions by PR practitioners
- 4) PR practitioners as advisors on ethics, crisis communication, social responsibility and public affairs
- 5) Current trends in the literature on PR and organizational decision making.

Themes 1-4 relate to the first research question, while theme 5 relates to the second research question. In section 3 we take a closer look at how many of the articles in the sample discussed each theme, and how they described the added value of PR for organizational decision making.

FINDINGS

In this section, the main results derived from the sample of articles are presented by the five themes described above.

Participation in organizational decision making

In the general literature on the roles of public relations professionals, decision making was alluded to. In the sample, 14 articles addressed this topic, with more than half (8) reporting empirical research. The articles discussed the general role of public relations professionals and the impact they may have on organizational decision making, depending on the particular roles taken. The role of the PR professional is often identified as one of a technician or manager (Diga & Kelleher, 2009; Benn, Todd and Pendleton, 2010; Desanto and Moss, 2005; Bronn, 2010). A technician traditionally generates communication products that implement policy decisions by others by framing messages (Reber and Berger, 2006) and “materializing” the outcomes of decisions (Ashcraft, Kuhn and Cooren 2009). A manager in turn is considered to belong to the dominant coalition within the organization and as such performs a two-way function when communicating stakeholder views to senior managers and vice versa. The term facilitator is also mentioned as the role of a PR professional (Khanfar, 2007), who is seen as connecting the organization as a whole with public groups.

Impact on decision-making processes

A study by Desanto and Moss (2005) examined what PR managers do in organizations and what managerial behavior in the public relations context entails. Their findings, based on empirical data, suggest that from a PR perspective the key elements of the manager’s role are to make communication policy decisions and act as a catalyst for management decisions. They also argue that the value of the work of PR practitioners is increasingly being recognized by top management, although this does not necessarily mean that PR practitioners get behind the doors where organizational decisions and policies are made. They conclude that some PR practitioners participate in organizational decision making while most continue to have little actual involvement in the process of organizational decision making.

In an interview study, Reber and Berger (2006) also showed that public relations practitioners often lack influence in strategic decision making and struggle to exert influence in situations where vision and strategy come into play. They argue that practitioners must be ready to make use of opportunities to earn respect and the right to participate in the decision making process. Meng, Berger, Gower and Heyman (2012: 33) suggest various influence-related resources and tactics that could increase practitioners’ influence on decision making and conclude, “as an effective public relations leader, one should have a unique understanding of the communication process both inside the organization and with its publics. To be able

to connect the organization to people and society reflects a leader's efforts in communication effectiveness."

Bronn (2010) adopts a normative perspective and argues, in a review of earlier studies, that practitioners should aim at establishing themselves as a participant in strategy formulation, as communication managers are expected to contribute to achieving organizational goals and objectives. This, according to her, includes being involved in executing key strategies. Bronn (2010: 322) also states that the role of PR practitioners includes giving input for organizational decision making: "They are to communicate to other managers the consequences of decisions based on their knowledge of how various stakeholder groups react to certain issues". She refers to a special boundary-spanning role between organization and environment and addresses the problem that practitioners are often harnessed simply to implement decisions made by others.

Enhancing understanding of the communicative aspects of decisions

Khanfar (2007), in a theoretical article with normative elements, argues that PR practitioners have a role in keeping the organization from entropy, adding richness to information, and increasing trust and transparency. Because of the turbulence and the unpredictability of business environments, managers are unable to control the implementation of strategies and plans, which is why he argues that PR practitioners need to enhance mutual understanding by transferring meanings from publics to the organization as a whole and vice-versa in an atmosphere of trust. This also relates to environmental monitoring, following issues and trends.

Public relations is also needed to ensure that the decision makers understand the communicative nature of the decision making process (Jabs, 2005). Her empirical article points out that, although for the decision makers the communicative rules of organizations are usually hidden, these rules nevertheless influence communicative behavior and the choices made. Therefore, they may have unintended consequences for organizational decision-making processes and outcomes. Ashcraft et al. (2009) theorize that organizations are understood to exist by virtue of communication.

Facilitation of organizational decision making processes

Seven articles in the sample addressed this topic and discussed how public relations and its practitioners facilitate organizational decision making.

Arranging the communication process

Organizational leaders create message strategies concerning the outcomes of organizational goals so as to reach strategically important publics (Werder and Holtzhausen, 2009). Communication management is seen as part of organizational decision making and provides support for organizational decision-making processes (Raupp and Hoffjann, 2012; Verhoeven and Zerfass, 2010). This also relates to consulting and coproducing with stakeholders, including business partners. Communication is considered a critical factor in a corporation's value chain, especially in decision-making situations in which several action alternatives are

evaluated (Raupp and Hoffjann, 2012). Verhoeven and Zerfass (2010) emphasize a principle regarding communication management: "it is about maximizing, optimizing, or satisfying the process of meaning creation in order to solve managerial problems." They identify four models of communication management: informational, persuasive, relational and discursive.

Steering the internal and external dialogue

PR practitioners are included in decision making to arrange dialogue between the organization and its employees (Saini and Plowman, 2008) and other stakeholders (Schwarzkopf, 2006). This includes participative decision making. Through such dialogue, these groups can become involved in decision making, e.g. by being invited to express their views, which both motivates them and makes them feel acknowledged. Tourish and Robson (2006) state that PR should ensure that one group's view of reality should not be privileged above that of another group. Schwarzkopf (2006) adds, in his empirical article, that management is often called on to explain how stakeholders' concerns were treated in the decisions made, which calls for managerial and communicative effort. How were the stakeholders' views taken into account and were the stakeholders involved in the decision-making by being invited to join negotiations, having a voice, providing input or being informed?

Internal and external communication on organizational decisions

Four articles addressed the internal and external communication of decisions by PR practitioners. According to these articles they act either as a disseminator or interpreter of decisions.

Accountable disseminators of decisions

Huebner, Varey and Wood (2008) note that PR practitioners are often asked to inform company members and other stakeholders about the outcomes of decision making. They may, according to the empirical article by Rice and Bartlett (2006), broadcast information about decisions and organizational activities via the media and use media coverage as a measure of legitimacy and stakeholder opinions about the organization. Mayr and Siri (2010, 14) acknowledge that organizational decisions need accountable disseminators: "decisions need to be reconstructed, redefined and rearranged in the communication of all organizational units." Mayr and Siri (2010) suggest that decisions need personalizing and staging, both of which are organizational practices that supply organizations with visible decisions.

The analysis by Huebner et al. (2008) shows that the communication processes related to decision making are only partly addressed in the orthodox communication theories. According to the authors, PR practitioners support decision making by acting as the voice of decisions; because an organization itself cannot speak, it needs speakers. As Huebner et al. (2008) argue, such a voice is needed to turn strategic issues into action. In this way, PR is considered a strategic practice of giving a voice to those who have the "license to operate," while ensuring that the speaker's voice is legitimized by the other members of the organization.

Interpreters of decisions

Huebner et al. (2008) also acknowledge that organizational rules and decisions must undergo a process of interpretation. PR practitioners can provide platforms suitable for giving speakers a voice and communicating decisions, and linking organizational decisions and actions together. This includes (1) clarifying the actual (rational or irrational) processes of decision making, (2) facilitating the legitimization of decisions through networking, and (3) describing decisions in the company media (Huebner et al., 2008: 216).

According to Raupp and Hoffjann (2012) the most valuable contribution of PR is to develop and provide an interpretation of decisions and strategies that can be offered to internal and external stakeholders. Outcomes of these interpretations can take the form of self-descriptions (e.g. traditional press releases), dialogue options and recommendations to the management.

Advising on corporate social responsibility, ethics, crises and public affairs

In the literature on social responsibility and similar topics, eleven articles addressed the giving of advice related to decision making. This concerned the topics of social responsibility, ethical decision making, crisis communication and public affairs.

Counselor on corporate social responsibility

The role of public relations for the theme of corporate social responsibility (CSR), also termed corporate citizenship or sustainability, was mentioned as one of an information collector and exchanger, or counselor of management. According to Mathis (2007), public relations is needed in CSR to exchange and collect information. In his empirical paper, he suggests that practitioners create a kind of wide-screen radar for an organization, enabling them to recognize potential upcoming issues, thereby improving relations with all stakeholders through more intensive contacts and more transparent information exchange.

Benn, Todd and Pendleton (2010) see the role of the public relations practitioner in CSR as that of a counselor whose task is to develop the communicative aspects of the organization's activities and not just design external communication activities. They emphasize the importance of guiding and developing the communicative capabilities of employees. Although their data show that PR practitioners are often seen as messengers of the organization and are not expected to contribute to organizational performance, Benn et al. (2010: 420) also conclude, "the professional communicator can play a role in developing the dynamic interaction between senior management and employees across the organization."

Advocates of ethical decision making and communication

PR practitioners may act as ethical advocates or counselors on ethical matters (Place, 2010; Bowen, 2004a; 2004b; Kang, Berger and Shin, 2012). According to Place (2010), the importance of public relations lies in its possibility to strengthen the ethical quality of decision making. She argues that professionals are able to identify the informational needs and interests of those with whom they communicate, and

therefore they are expected to consider the possible harm that may result from communication. The inherent role of the PR practitioner as a counselor or advocate often calls for practitioners to make ethical decisions as members of teams, executive counsels, or client-consultant pairs rather than as isolated decision makers.

Bowen (2004a; 2004b) argues that the communicator has a responsibility to represent the interests of stakeholders within the organization. Stakeholders evaluate organizational decisions from their various vantage points in society. The task of public relations is to expand the boundaries of the organization and incorporate the views of groups outside the organization (Bowen, 2004a; 2004b).

According to Kang et al. (2012), the current research literature fails to clearly address how PR practitioners shape an organization's ethical decisions and actions. Although PR practitioners are generally considered to be bridge builders who bring publics' voices into the internal organizational decision-making process, they are instead often called upon to defend the reputation of their organization. Their data (Kang et al., 2012) suggest that if this bridging role is not taken up, dissent actions are more likely.

Supporting crisis management and public affairs

In crisis communication, PR practitioners were seen as having the role of information managers and advisors supporting crisis management. French and Holden (2012: 210) state that, in the case of bad news and crises, "effective communication skills are essential to creating positive, renewing opportunities at these turning points." The ability of decision makers to cognitively process complex organizational crises is directly affected by whether they frame the crisis as a threat or also see it as a source of opportunities. French and Holden (2012) argue that organizations that focus on appreciating and cultivating positive organizational traits, such as hope, resiliency, and optimism, prior to a crisis may be more successful in garnering employee support during and after a crisis. Streifel, Beebe, Veil and Sellnow (2006) state, that in crises PR practitioners aid organizations by disseminating information as fully and accurately as possible.

The role of PR practitioners also includes decision making related to public affairs. As theorized by Dyer (2003), they engage in information management to influence public opinion about the organization. Fleisher (2002) in turn concludes that PR practitioners use several analytical methods, models or techniques for dealing with public affairs, taking into account that "the most critical public policy positioning intelligence will come from dialogues, conversations and discussions" (Fleisher, 2002: 170).

Current trends in the literature on PR and organizational decision making

Two articles explicitly discussed trends in the research. Based on Delphi studies, they pointed out that the role of public relations in contributing to organizational decision making is an important topic for future research. According to Watson (2008), the contribution of public relations to the strategic decision making, strategy development and efficient operation of organizations has become the most important

research priority amongst academics, practitioners and senior executives of professional and industry bodies.

The other Delphi study, by Wehmeier (2009), studied the views of international public-relations experts, scholars and practitioners on the relationship between theory and practice. The results showed that the field of public relations is heading towards a more managerial approach and that scholars argue that public relations managers need to take part in organizational decision making (Wehmeier, 2009).

We scrutinized the frequency with which the different research themes were addressed over the years. In the sample, participation in decision making, particularly the debate on the impact of PR managers on decision making, and the importance of environmental monitoring and enhancing understanding of communicative aspects in interaction with decision makers, received most attention in the literature on the general roles of PR practitioners (theme 1). In the specialist literature on corporate social responsibility, ethics, crises and public affairs, strategic advice by PR practitioners was also often discussed (theme 4). Moreover, since 2006, studies addressing PR practitioners' role in facilitating decision making processes (theme 2) and communicating decisions (theme 3) have also appeared. A recent trend in the literature seems to be an increase in the scrutiny directed at the roles of facilitator and accountable disseminator. Over the 10 years observed in this study, it seems that, initially, debating the level of impact that PR practitioners have on organizational decision making received the most attention, while later studies have looked in more detail into the different ways in which PR contributes to decision-making processes.

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

By bringing together insights from scientific articles, we were able to specify further in what ways and roles public relations practitioners are involved in organizational decision making. This answered the first research question, as we will further discuss in this chapter. Related to the second research question, we noted developments over time in how the topic was addressed in the literature. Over the 10-year study period, determining the impact that PR practitioners have on decisions seems to have been the main concern during the earlier years, whereas later studies have more closely investigated the different ways in which PR contributes to decision-making processes.

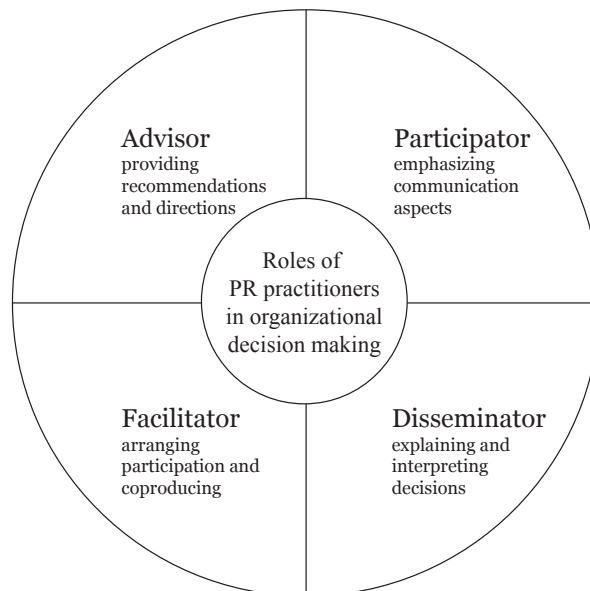
Practitioners are expected to impact decision making and enhance understanding of the communicative aspects of decision-making processes. Moreover, they advise on and manage the communication process, and arrange dialogue between the organization and its internal and external stakeholders. In communicating decisions, they serve as accountable disseminators and add richness to the information, materializing the outcomes of decisions for internal and external publics. Furthermore, they provide advice on corporate ethics, crisis communication, social responsibility and public affairs.

How do the activities of PR practitioners relate to the various decision-making roles, as described by Rogers and Blenko (2006)? In the literature on information technology (IT), for example, the roles of facilitator and analyst have been

emphasized, next to participating in decision making (Belton and Hodgkin, 1999). What roles have been reflected on in the public relations literature? Among the roles related to decision-making, in the literature most attention has been given to *participating* in decision making, though the precise impact of PR practitioners has been much debated, and the impact of PR geared towards underlining the importance of environmental monitoring and educating decision-makers on communicative aspects of decision making. Another much addressed role in the literature is *recommending* (consulting and proposing directions), related to corporate social responsibility, ethics, crises and public affairs. Next to this, *providing input* has been widely discussed although not, as Rogers and Blenko (2006) see this role, giving input as a stakeholder, but rather facilitating the consultation and coproduction process with all of the stakeholders. The latter concerns arranging forms of interaction for participative decision making, also advocated by Gregory, McDaniels and Fields (2001) as 'decision aid', directly involving stakeholders in sense-making and negotiations by value-focused thinking. The role of *agreeing* to decisions made, having veto power, was not mentioned in the literature found for this review. The role of *performing* decisions relates here to implementing public relations activities and, in particular, being an accountable disseminator of organizational decisions by interpreting decisions and explaining them to stakeholders.

The various roles found in the systematic literature review are brought together in a new overview. Figure 1 shows the four clusters identified: advisor (making recommendations and proposing directions), participant (emphasizing communicative aspects of decision making and environmental monitoring), facilitator (arranging participation and coproducing with stakeholders) and disseminator (being accountable when explaining and empathetic when interpreting decisions).

Figure 1. Wheel model of the roles of public relations practitioners in organizational decision making based on the findings.



The four clusters identified each have a very different focus. However, we would like to emphasize that they are not exclusive and not static. Practitioners may use different combinations of roles, which also evolve over time. In any case, the roles mentioned in the wheel model represent important resources for organizational legitimacy, addressing stakeholder views, increasing understanding of communicative aspects of decision making, supporting a balance of interests, and explaining decisions that have been made.

In this paper we gave an overview of the ways in which PR practitioners contribute to organizational decision making, as these emerged from a search of the literature. The roles emphasized by the authors of the articles selected for this study differed. For example, some stressed the impact of PR practitioners on decisions, while others focused on their role in facilitating participative decision-making processes. Altogether, four different roles were identified in the structured literature review: participator, advisor, facilitator and accountable disseminator. Decision power can be seen to exist in an evolving combination of roles depending on personal competences and situational factors.

The range of impact, as well as the combination of different roles, will differ among practitioners. Therefore, we conclude that the findings could give practitioners cause to reflect on their own roles in organizational decision making. Some practitioners may only occupy a limited number of roles and could consider developing other roles as well. By bringing together the roles found in the literature, a more comprehensive picture has been created to show how PR practitioners contribute to organizational decision making. As a single decision may require multiple roles this calls for a broad range of PR skills and abilities. Familiarity with decision-making roles enhances a better understanding of the process as a whole. In this way, PR practitioners are able to contribute to an open and efficient decision making and communication process.

On the meta-level impact of PR on decision making, tentative suggestions can be made on the basis of this review. Possibilities to further develop the impact of PR on decision making may be found, in particular, in the advisor and participant roles, where PR practitioners can work towards creating a better understanding of upcoming issues and conflicting interests, and, building on their boundary-spanning role, support problem-solving that extends involvement to a broader range of stakeholders. These are relatively new challenges for organizations in a rapidly changing environment that are difficult to meet without a strong contribution of communication to the organizational decision-making process.

The systematic search method used in this paper was time-consuming. Although different sets of keywords were tested, it was not possible in the databases to narrow the search down to solely include research on decision or policy making related to public relations or organizational/corporate communication. Consequently, the computerized search provided many results from other areas than those targeted, such as political decision making or medical decision making between the healthcare unit and patients. This had to be corrected by scanning the articles one by one. It also demonstrated that there are no clear or logical boundaries to decision or policy making. However, the systematic search method, even though including hand work,

enabled a perusal of the literature with respect to peer-reviewed articles over the last 10 years.

The analysis of the literature reveals that PR as a function of organizations is viewed as an important part of organizational decision making. By drawing the various studies together, a more complete picture is gained of the different ways in which PR contributes to organizational decision making. However, as much of the literature tends to focus on the general role of PR practitioners in organizations and the extent to which they hold decision power, often from a normative point of view, the precise tasks related to decision making processes sometimes remain obscure. For example, the current research literature does not clearly address how PR practitioners actually contribute to an organization's ethical decisions and actions (Kang et al., 2012).

It seems that since 2006, scholars have begun to pay more attention to the different ways in which PR contributes to decision-making processes, in particular, studies on the facilitation of organizational decision making and communication of decisions. Although some authors have recognized the need for investigation in this area, the results motivate researchers to probe more precisely and concretely into the different and evolving ways in which PR actually contributes to organizational decision making. Further scrutiny would reveal the potential benefits of PR in greater detail.

By scrutinizing how the peer-reviewed literature addresses the different ways in which PR contributes to organizational decision making, four different roles were identified: participator, advisor, facilitator and accountable disseminator. The identification and description of the roles found can help practitioners reflect on their own roles in organizational decision making. Further consideration of these roles may also facilitate a better understanding of what kinds of education, experience, temperament, management orientation and job design can help make PR practitioners respected participants in the dominant coalition of actors within their organizations, and thereby contribute to the quality of the decision-making processes of organizations in their social environment. By contributing more to the organizational decision making processes, PR practitioners will solidify their strategic position. This study also opens possibilities to further explore the tasks related to organizational decision making and the skills needed in contributing to such processes.

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III

CLARIFYING THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATION EXPERTS IN CBRN CRISES

by

Markus Mykkänen & Marita Vos, 2014

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Clarifying the role of communication experts in CBRN terrorism crises

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Clarifying the role of communication experts in CBRN terrorism crises

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The CBRN Communication Scorecard¹ as a strategic tool is designed to improve communication in the various phases of a crisis. The scorecard can assist both in communication planning and preparedness for communication in emergencies. As the scorecard addresses critical factors in the communication of public authorities with stakeholders, it also forms a tool to evaluate decision making processes during emergency exercises. Communication as a facilitator of cooperation within the response network and with various stakeholders is crucial for the successful management of crises.

Together, the scorecard indicators show how communication contributes to crisis management by response organisations and clarify the role of crisis communication experts within response organisations. In the following sections, this is further explained in relation to each of the four crisis phases of preparedness, detection and warning, crisis response, and recovery and evaluation².

1. Improving preparedness

In the CBRN Communication Scorecard, communication is seen as implemented by communication experts, assuming that the roles and competences of communication experts are clarified and developed in contact with response managers. From the decision making point of view, this requires that communication experts take part in strategic crisis management as a competent team with expertise in CBRN issues able to operate and conduct crisis communication. Communication experts in general preparedness can contribute to crisis management and decision making—with more or less decision making power—in several ways³. They should ensure that communication plans and strategies cover a range of crisis scenarios, keeping an open view, as crises typically develop in unexpected directions. They can also monitor the organisational environment and stakeholders on a daily basis. Earlier plans can be updated regularly, as, for example, when new citizen groups emerge that need to be included in crisis planning. Plans should also be updated to match with those of other key participants in the response network.

The responsibilities of communication experts during crises need to be clear. Efficient communication also builds on, and in that sense calls for, transparent decision making in the crisis response network. In turn, communication experts can provide advice to ensure that decision making is transparent enough for the whole response network to cooperate and work efficiently. This contributes to internal communication in the network and enhances the interconnectedness of the different organisations participating in response activities.

¹ This scorecard has been based on a general scorecard developed in 2011 by the University of Jyväskylä, Finland in CrisComScore, an earlier EU-funded project (FP7/2007-2013, n° 217889) <http://www.crisiscommunication.fi/criscomscore/>. In the project CATO the tool was customised to CBRN terrorism crises, utilising various studies. The CATO project, the research leading to these results, has received funding from the European Community's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013) under grant agreement n° 261693. <http://www.cato-project.eu/page/homepage.php?lang=EN>

² Ruggiero, A., Vos, M. and Palttala, P. (2014), *The CBRN Communication Scorecard*. Report project CATO, University of Jyväskylä, Finland. <http://www.crisiscommunication.fi/tec/guides>

³ Reber, B.H. and Berger B.K. (2006), Finding influence: Examining the role of influence in public relations practice. *Journal of Communication Management*, 10(3), 235–249.

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As not all actions can be foreseen in planning scenarios, the quality of the collaboration itself is vital for being able to coproduce response and recovery solutions. This concerns improving preparedness for such collaborative processes and related decision making within response organisations and within the network of the response organisations involved. The network can be seen to include various governmental organisations and non-governmental organisations, but also civil society groups along with private organisations such as critical infrastructure companies. The actors comprising the network should be (re)defined for different levels (local, national, or international) and types of crisis situations. In this way, organisations will be better prepared to respond to crises and will not need to spend so much effort clarifying the communicative actions needed for a particular crisis, as would be where proper preparedness is lacking.

Preparing to arrange communication facilities and information exchange in a timely and an effective manner is regarded one of the most important tasks of communication experts before and during crises. This entails that these experts have a good understanding of the management and communication processes both inside the organisation and with its publics⁴. One important aspect of this is to ensure that the needs of the news media and other stakeholders are recognized when planning, for example, co-located work spaces of risk experts and communication personnel. Next to having access to the situational picture and being included in decision making roles, proximity to the operating centre in crises is crucial to ensure better communication across the response network, news media and public groups. When preparing communication channels, for example, for crisis website and social media use, the role of communication is to enable multichannel communication and other points of interconnection with news media, civil society groups and individual citizens.

Crisis situations call for flexible and timely decision making and communication. Often, crises involve multiple organisations that may need to coordinate activities and that can join a decision making table. Communication experts may bring in information gathered by their monitoring activities and provide advice on, for example, crowd sourcing and expectations of public groups. This also includes the diverse views of the public on, for example, risk perception and trust in authorities, and may relate to ethical decision making and communication⁵. In general, communication experts can have a variety of roles related to decision-making processes. For example, as liaison officers and spokespersons in media relations, website and social media editors, facilitators of meeting points and platforms with civil society actors and individual citizens, and as monitors of communication ongoing in the news and social media. Communication experts also often advise and educate others in the response network in communication with stakeholders when unfamiliar problems are encountered that need creative problem solving.

In the preparedness phase, communication is undertaken that will facilitate smooth operations in the later phases of a crisis. This focuses on building relations and mapping contacts, and arranging procedures and means for the exchange of information. Knowing the key stakeholder groups, risk perceptions and media use is also a crucial part of cooperative decision making in crises. The CBRN scorecard acknowledges that organisations should be able to identify what public groups are involved and how they seek, share and receive risk information. Communication experts in this process can ensure that this information is acknowledged and the views of public groups are taken into account⁶ in decision making as well as in the communication itself during crises.

⁴ Meng, J., Berger B.K., Gower K.K. and Heyman, W.C. (2012), A test of excellent leadership in public relations: Key qualities, valuable sources, and distinctive leadership perceptions. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 24(1), 18–36.

⁵ Kang, J., Berger, B.K. and Shin, H. (2012), Comparative study of American and Korean practitioners' dissent with perceived unethical management decisions. *Public Relations Review*, 38(1), 147–149.

⁶ Saini, S. and Plowman, K. (2008), Effective communications in growing pre-IPO start-ups. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 13(3), 203–232.

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It has been acknowledged that people trust some sources more than others. Communication experts need to monitor and evaluate what sources, media and style of communication are valued as trustworthy regarding risk and crisis management decisions. This facilitates better decisions on communication strategies and, consequently extends the reach of important public groups, which is an important goal⁷. Emergency response organisations also need trusted and credible spokespersons. Managers and politically responsible persons, for example a chief of police, mayor or minister, are often trained for such roles and assisted by communication experts, while in some cases communication experts themselves are also considered a trustworthy and credible spokesperson.

Communication experts are usually assigned to analyse the risk perceptions and the related information needs of public groups. Monitoring provides information on how different citizen groups see risks. Several factors shape perceptions, and hence communication experts' insights concerning different social contexts can bring valuable information to the decision-making table. The monitoring of news media content and social media also helps to evaluate what kind of questions, concerns and misperceptions different groups have. Communication expertise is of value when insights gained from monitoring and crowdsourcing need to be interpreted for decision making by the response organisation. In addition, communication experts are responsible for information dissemination following the decision making, even if others are responsible for the risk data gathering.

The role of online communication and social media has grown not only in crisis response and recovery, but also in preparation for various crises. This involves connecting with public initiatives to promote risk awareness and collaborative educational activities. Preparing for risks also means prioritisation of the risks to be managed. A participative approach to such decision making can include public input.

Bringing public input to the decision-making table is no simple task, but in a democratic society it is important to do so, and send a signal to the public that its voice is heard in risk prioritisation processes. In such processes, knowledge of ways of working and interests of the news media and key journalists is also useful. Similarly, organisations need to be prepared for media relations in later crisis events and be able to connect fast with the news media. One indicator included in the CBRN Communication Scorecard, for example, addresses the need for the media database and channels to be kept up-to-date and maintained by communication experts. The hectic pace and huge scale of some crises hardly allow for establishing and documenting new media relations.

⁷ Werder, K.P. and Holtzhausen, D. (2009), An analysis of the influence of public relations department leadership style on public relations strategy use and effectiveness. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 21(4), 404–427.

2. Enhancing detection and warning

When crisis mode is activated, the response network needs to act fast. As mentioned in one indicator in the CBRN scorecard, “at this point the procedures need to be clear regarding who sets matters in motion and how”. At this point, the communication function also needs to be on high alert. Inside the response organisation, information about the initial organisational measures is now actively shared. Key warning messages are formulated and communicated. As the type of crisis affects who to reach in what ways and via what communication channels, communication experts have to bring this information to the decision-making table and possibly acknowledge that in a particular crisis some communication channels might lack reach, for example owing to power outages. Depending on proposed actions, for example intended evacuations, communication experts can also clarify the possible reactions of different publics and help ensure that diversity is taken into account, along with ethical procedures⁸. From the decision-making point of view, this kind of information might be needed to reach as many of the relevant stakeholders and public groups as possible.

During the detection and warning phase, information received from public groups is important, for example in the case of crowdsourcing. Communication experts can map the different public groups and address their concerns. As, in this phase, coherent and consistent communication is needed, communication experts should also ensure that the interconnections between the actors function so that these criteria can be met; coordination can include, for example, links on the relevant websites, and the use of similar hashtags and retweeting among key response organisations. Specific additional information that certain public groups might need should also be considered in the decision-making process and communicated.

It is also necessary to monitor if the decisions made and instructions issued reached the people involved and met their needs⁹. This can be measured by analyzing the gap between advised and observed behaviour. Media monitoring of the effect of the decisions disseminated is important not only for communication but for the whole response organisation. Monitoring discovers and enables possible misperceptions in the news and social media to be corrected via the organisation’s own channels. It also shows the needs of public groups as these are portrayed in the news and social media. The technical details of a particular CBRN risk may be misunderstood, and hence the decisions made may need clarification or more detailed information may be required.

Spokespeople and mediated communication messages need to avoid jargon and be as clear as possible. At this point, the decision-making process should be made as transparent as possible to demonstrate that the organisation is clear about its own responsibilities, is reliable in its motives and actions, and is disseminating information as fully and accurately as possible¹⁰.

⁸ Place, K. R. (2010), A qualitative examination of public relations practitioner ethical decision making and the deontological theory of ethical issues management. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*, 25(3), 226–245.

⁹ Ruggiero, A. and Vos, M. (2014), Social media monitoring for crisis communication: process, methods and trends in the scientific literature. *Online Journal of Communication and Media Technologies*, 4(1), 103–130.

¹⁰ Streifel, R.A., Beebe, B.L., Veil, S.R., and Sellnow, T.L. (2006), Significant choice and crisis decision making: MeritCare’s public communication in the Fen–Phen Case. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 69(4), 389–397.

3. Cooperating and assisting in the crisis response

During the crisis, information needs to be exchanged among all the groups involved in the response activities. As stated in one of the indicators in the CBRN scorecard, “not just the decisions taken but also the reasons why and how they were communicated should be shared”. From the communication perspective, this means active cooperation with those responsible for decision making. Communication experts can also coordinate their communication activities with those of other organisations and ensure that the communication strategy is in line with the actions of the emergency management.

In crisis response, communication activities should aim to increase understanding of the crisis and related risks in the current situation. However, communication experts should not concentrate solely on “materializing” the decisions of the response network¹¹. From the organisational decision-making standpoint, they should also concentrate on explaining, if possible, the information that the response network has used in making its decisions. This includes relevant uncertainties and possible consequences the response network might encounter. In addition, possible delayed effects can be addressed, as some of the beneficial effects of the measures taken may not be immediately recognizable.

Decisions during the response phase may give rise to questions and misinterpretation among citizens. These need monitoring, and questions and misinterpretations must be addressed as soon as possible. Incorrect rumours should also be addressed. Communication experts in this phase have many different responsibilities and need to use multiple communication channels when communicating with the public groups affected by the crisis, and also with those less directly affected, as the latter may, for example, be in social media interaction with the first group.

Depending on the hazardous substances involved and how they spread, it may be difficult to map target groups. For example, hazardous materials may show up in different places and over a longer period of time. Uncertainty could also prevail for some time about the materials involved, and the cause and consequences of the crisis. In addition, the public may have little knowledge about the substances in question and therefore about how to reduce the risks involved. In some CBRN crises, for example those involving infectious diseases, there may be much pressure on hospitals so that the priorities in the measures taken will need to be carefully explained. Depending on the cause of the threat, there may be a risk of repetition, such as in the case of a terrorism crisis where the perpetrator has not yet been apprehended or because of possible copycat behaviour. All of this needs to be taken into account in the communication with the public¹².

¹¹ Ashcraft, K. L., Kuhn, T. R. and Cooren, F. (2009), Constitutional amendments: “Materializing” organizational communication. *Academy of Management Annals*, 3(1), 1–64.

¹² Ruggiero, A. and Vos, M. (2013), Terrorism communication: characteristics and emerging perspectives in the scientific literature 2002–2011. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*, 21(3), 153–166.

Public groups and news media relations during crises demand immediate or at least timely acknowledgement. Communication services, for example in the case of international communication, often need to be available around the clock, thereby requiring a three-shift rotation of experts in various roles, exchanging insights with each other and with those of a later shift. This calls for a large group of communication experts trained for crisis situations. This need may be met by pooling expertise with similar organisations that are not involved in the crisis. During this stage, communication experts find themselves more often in the role of spokespersons or a voice for relaying the decisions made by the organisation¹³, but mostly they will continue in the task of assisting the managers who function as spokespersons. Public groups and media on the crisis site will also be interested in the progress of the response activities and the decisions related to these and what lies behind them. Communication experts are thus seen as accountable disseminators who can help in this process¹⁴. The response organisation needs to be able to concentrate on saving lives and reducing harm. In communication, not only facts known are made public, but uncertainties in the reality of the situation can also be addressed. People can also be asked to help, for example, by posting photographs of damage on a platform. Or, if the crisis situation continues and new risks evolve, they can assist by sharing signs of ongoing risks.

4. Supporting and facilitating recovery and evaluation

In the recovery phase, other actors may participate in the response network, for example building and insurance companies. Collaboration across the network and the coordination of communication with citizens and other stakeholders needs to be redefined. Communication experts gather information and monitor news and social media to see what matters might be hampering the recovery process. They also promote collaboration and continued attention for recovery activities.

Communication experts need to ensure and support participative decision making on the recovery goals and process. All the public groups that are directly involved should have a broad understanding of what has happened and what options exist for recovery. Public groups want to feel that they and their needs have been acknowledged in the decision making process. In this process, communication experts can advise and support decision makers in arranging how the involved public can have a voice, such as in face-to-face meetings and possibly by supporting media platforms.

Communication experts can also facilitate meeting points and platforms for public groups to express their feelings and provide feedback about the decision making process during and after the crisis. One major activity for learning is evaluation of the communication carried out during the crisis, as addressed in one indicator on the CBRN Communication Scorecard: "Communication in the individual organisation and with other participants in the response network is evaluated". Evaluation of the decision making communication is also needed, both at the organisational and network level. This will facilitate organisational learning for use in future crises and enhance cooperation with other organisations. In this way the effectiveness of decision making also can be improved.

¹³ Huebner, H., Varey, R. and Wood, L. (2008), The significance of communicating in enacting decisions. *Journal of Communication Management*, 12(3), 204–223.

¹⁴ Mayr, K. and Siri, J. (2010), Management as a symbolizing construction? Re-Arranging the understanding of management. *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 11(3), 1–19.

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After the crisis, evaluation and learning can be supported by communication activities. This includes coming to terms with what has happened, the crisis and its consequences, facilitating the learning of lessons and feedback on the mitigation process. This is also the time, within the response network and within each organisation, to analyse look back on the decision making and operational process, and draw conclusions for future events. Some policies and actions based on the decisions made during the crisis might initially have been supported but subsequently criticised. Communication experts can facilitate an open-minded discussion of the organisation's actions¹⁵. This is not easy, as many may be eager to get back to normal life, and prefer to forget rather than reflect on the crisis event.

The response organisation should also be willing to discuss its decision making process with the media if necessary. At this juncture, communication experts should support the organisation and emphasize transparency. Mistakes that have been made need to lead to lessons learned for the future. Sometimes public evaluations are harsh, as crises can have devastating consequences and expectations of authorities may be high. Therefore, the motivation of the responders should also be kept in mind. Communication experts should also critically monitor their own actions during a crisis with an eye to improvements. In sum, communication experts should develop the response organisations' communicative preparedness, response and evaluation processes and not just concentrate on designing external communication activities or disseminating messages¹⁶.

¹⁵ Fleisher, C.S. (2002), Analysis and analytical tools for managing corporate public affairs, *Journal of Public Affairs*, 2(3), 167–172.

¹⁶ Benn, S., Todd, L. and Pendleton, J. (2010), Public relations leadership in corporate social responsibility, *Journal of Business Ethics*, 96(3), 403–423.

IV

COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS AND ORGANISATIONAL DECISION MAKING - A FINNISH STUDY OF PRACTITIONER ROLES

by

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Communication Professionals and Organisational Decision-Making

A Finnish Study of Practitioner Roles

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Traditionally, the debate on communication value and the contribution of communication professionals to organisational decision-making has been linked to diverging roles (managers, technicians). This chapter introduces an alternative view, based on an exploratory, qualitative study of communication professionals in Finland. It focuses on the diverse ways in which these professionals contribute to organisational decision-making. The results show a rich, constantly developing picture of communication practices, which challenges the traditional dichotomy of manager and technician roles.

Introduction

The strategic importance of communication professionals and their participation in the dominant coalition of organisations has been a much discussed theme since the early 1990s.

Decision-making, organising and carrying out activities within and between organisations are becoming increasingly dependent on larger and larger amounts of information (Van Lier, 2013). Communication is used as the basis of decision-making (March, 1988), but has also challenged those processes (Eisenberg & Goodall, 2001). Organisations, as Weick (1979) states, do not just interact with their environments, but they enact them as well. An organisation can be seen as a system that adapts and sustains itself by reducing the uncertainty that it faces on a daily basis.

Communication professionals enact the organisational environment through interaction and meaning creation. Their daily work can be seen as organising, which helps reduce the uncertainty that organisational

members face when they are making decisions that enable the organisation to survive and succeed.

Decision-making in organisations

In modern organisations, decision-making is greatly influenced by the information environment (Luhmann, 2005), the flow of information (Cheney *et al.*, 2004), as well as employees and stakeholders (Michel, 2007). This contrasts with traditional top-down organisational hierarchies, where senior management made decisions and employees were expected to carry them out. Nowadays, employees and stakeholders, such as business partners, possess a broad range of skills and bring new knowledge and ideas to the decision-making table (White & Mazur, 1995). This input potentially improves the quality of the information available (Van Knippenberg *et al.*, 2004).

An essential part of organisational decision-making concerns forming the strategy and future directions of the organisation. Thus, strategic decision-making can be defined as part of the organisational communication process (Brunson, 1982), as a core managerial process (Cooren *et al.*, 2006), as part of organisational discourse and communication (Hendry, 2000) or as actions and social representations (Larouche, 1995). Since the 1980s, scholars like Dozier (1986; 1992), Baskin & Aronoff (1988) and Grunig *et al.* (2002) argue that communication professionals should participate in a more strategic manner in organisational decision-making, instead of merely implementing the decisions made. Thus, communication experts are expected to add communicative value to decision-making processes. Cornelissen (2008) argues that inviting communication professionals at the decision-making table enables inclusion of stakeholder views into the definition of organisational strategies and actions.

Roles of communication professionals

Broom and Smith (1979) were the first to conceptualize the generic roles for public relations practitioners: expert prescribers, communication facilitators, problem solving process facilitators, and communication technicians. Broom and Dozier (1986) identify two major roles, manager and technician. Grunig (2006) argues that the manager role is more influential than the role of the technician. DeSanto and Moss (2005) model the manager role as a policy advisor, a strategic counsellor, a monitor, an evaluator and an issues management expert. Verčič *et al.* (2001) define four roles: managerial, operational, reflective and educational. Nothhaft (2010) suggests three roles: the missionary, the agent of common sense and the buck's stop. These three roles are largely advisory.

In the European context, Tench *et al.* (2009) suggest the role of communication professionals to be more one of “boundary spanning”, binding together the interests of the organisation and its stakeholders. Recently, Swerling *et al.* (2014) argue that during the last decade scholars have advocated a role of communication professionals acting as strategic counsellors, and, following James E. Grunig (2006), emphasise their position as bridges between the top management of the organisation and its stakeholders. Indeed, James E. Grunig (2006) argues that the communication function in organisations has been over-institutionalised as a protective function, whereas a bridging function would be more productive. Bridging creates relations between the organisation and its stakeholders and also helps in managing the behaviour of organisations. Grunig (2006) argues that bridging includes communication activities related to strategic decision-making, by bringing focused and coordinated processes to the decision-making table that help understand the interests of key audiences. Larissa A. Grunig (1992) considers the participation of communication professionals in strategic decision-making processes important; however, the effectiveness depends on the reporting line of professionals in the organisational hierarchy.

This study focuses the discussion on the roles of communication professionals and their contribution to organisational decision-making. In the next section, literature in the field is analysed to clarify existing views on the topic. Next, the methodology of this interview study is described. Finally, the findings are reported and conclusions drawn.

Contribution of communication professionals to decision-making

The European Communication Monitor survey (Zerfass *et al.*, 2014) has frequently shown that the influence of communication professionals on decision-making is greater than their actual participation in those processes. Moreover, there are various ways to contribute to decision-making. More understanding is needed about how the roles of communication professionals affect organisational decision-making and what they contribute to top-level strategies (Steyn & Niemann, 2010).

Zerfass and Franke (2013) argue that communication professionals should not only facilitate operational processes and inform internal and external stakeholders about strategic decisions, but they also need to ensure that communicative implications are integrated as input into the decision-making process. This presents new challenges and requires that the focus moves “from leading communication processes to developing the organisation’s communication skills on all levels” (Hamrefors, 2009: 19), which includes decision-making processes.

Swerling *et al.* (2014) point out that organisational communication is undergoing a major transformation in which transparency and dialogue with stakeholders play key roles. In addition, as Steyn (2007) argues, communication professionals also facilitate the successful implementation of strategic decisions. Organisations need to have a voice, and communication professionals do address that need (Taylor *et al.* 1996). Those individuals who act as speakers, in effect interpret decisions (Kieser, 1998) before they are ready to be transformed into action. The crucial point is whether the organisation's members accept the speaker's voice as legitimately representing the organisation.

Communication professionals primarily contribute to decision-making by enabling dialogues between the organisation and its employees (Saini & Plowman, 2008) and other stakeholders (Schwarzkopf, 2006). Through such dialogues, as Murray and White (2004) note, added value is brought to organisational decision-making and hence to organisational strategies. The main role of communication professionals is to enable the top management to make better quality decisions and improve its communication capabilities. Nevertheless, as Kanihan *et al.* (2013) argue, many communication professionals are not positioned in the organisation in a way that would allow them to serve this purpose effectively. When they are enabled to function at this level, the conditions are created for ethical and high-level communication practices both inside and outside the organisation.

Practitioner roles and decision-making processes

In the last decade, the discussion on communication and decision-making focused on the role of communication professionals (J. E. Grunig, 2006; Swerling *et al.*, 2014; Brønn, 2014). More recently, the discussion has been built around quantitative research (e.g. Swerling *et al.*, 2014; Brønn, 2014; Kanihan *et al.*, 2013), along with some qualitative research (e.g. Smith & Place, 2013; Nothhaft, 2010; Huebner *et al.*, 2008). The strategic contribution of communication professionals to organisations continues to be a much discussed theme in the field, as they are not yet universally acknowledged to be significant partners for organisational success (Brønn, 2014), and practical communication activities, or as Smith and Place (2013: 168) explain, the “inferior role of technician” still overshadows the field.

Brønn (2014) finds, in a Norwegian study, that even where communication professionals are considered to influence the economic success of the organisation, they still may not be structurally invited to the decision-making table. Her survey results showed that communication professionals are generally invited to make suggestions regarding alternative ways of making decisions, but they are not actually involved

in selecting the final decision (Brønn, 2014). Indeed, the author argues that their contribution to decision-making is limited in many organisations. Where they are involved in the decision-making processes from the early stages, communication professionals also have more influence in discussions about communicative actions than strategic planning. Brønn (2014) concludes that even where the professionals feel their role to be at the strategic level, others in the organisation still see them as “message deliverers”.

Edwards (2009) identifies communication professionals as trusted senior advisors, who create social capital through their formal and informal networks. Kanihan *et al.* (2013) state that where communication experts are included in the dominant coalition, they have a possibility go beyond a strategic role and incorporate more ethical and symmetrical communication practices into their work, using their informal dimension of power. Smith and Place (2013: 180) report that communication professionals use their expertise or possible leadership position by giving advice or voicing concerns, as well as serve as “key information disseminators” for the organisation.

Nevertheless, as Diga and Kelleher (2009) state, communication professionals often just carry out the mechanics of generating information products and implement decisions made by others. According to Neill and Drumwright (2012), scholars have long suggested communication professionals to serve organisations as their conscience and enact the role of an ethical counsellor. Dozier and Broom (2006: 146) note the role of managers and technicians “may need constant reinvention through intensive observation of what communicators do in their day-to-day work”.

Method

This exploratory study aims to contribute to understanding how communication professionals in Finland perceive their role in organisational decision-making processes and how they contribute communicative value to these processes. The qualitative method, of conducting expert semi-structured interviews, was chosen because a rich description of the phenomena was sought.

Research question

The research question (RQ) is: *How do communication professionals contribute to organisational decision-making in Finland?* The aim is to find out how practitioners perceive their role in decision-making and contribute to organisational decision-making processes.

Sampling and demographics

The data for this study was collected by interviewing communication professionals (N=12) working in a variety of organisations in Finland. The interviews were conducted from December 2013 to May 2014.

Purposive sampling was applied; participation was based on availability and willingness. Invitations to participate in the research study were emailed to 19 communication professionals whose organisations each had a distinctive communication function and employed at least two communication professionals. The invitees comprised 13 communication directors or managers (of whom 9 agreed to participate) and 6 press officers (of whom 3 agreed to participate). At the beginning of the interviews, all participants were asked to fill in a background information form and to describe their position as a communication professional.

The gender ratio (Female:Male) of the interviewees was 8:4. Their average work experience in the field of organisational communication was 13.8 years, and ranged from 2.5 years to 33 years. The communication departments in which the interviewees worked ranged in size from two to 14 employees, while their organisations varied widely in employees, from just 40 to 27,000. The organisations were mainly located in the central and southern parts of the country, and their type of operations varied widely from industrial companies to municipalities. Only one interviewee per organisation was selected for an interview.

In accordance with the ethical guidelines of Finnish Research Council, anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to all interviewees. An unaffiliated communication professional and an experienced scholar reviewed the interview guidelines.

Interviews and analysis

The author conducted and recorded the semi-structured interviews, which lasted from 30 to 70 minutes. The author transcribed the interviews for further analysis. The level of transcription was basic, i.e. the tone of voice, pauses and fillers were omitted. After the transcription the interview texts were treated to qualitative content analysis using *Atlas.ti*. The content was analysed based on the order of the questions in the interviews, and quotations were coded according to the questions. The codes were divided into three main categories: professional roles, tasks and themes. Each quotation inside a category was also given a more descriptive title based on the content. All the codes within each category were then printed separately and the quotations analysed. This chapter

focuses only on the data pertaining to the roles of the interviewees in organisational decision-making.

Every role referenced by the interviewees was translated, as close as possible to the interviewees' own phrasing. The data were analysed in a data-extraction table with one row for each fragment and columns for the quantities of codes, their descriptions and, finally, the original quotations. The descriptions were then compared with those given in dictionaries and scientific works of reference, and the roles grouped into clusters. Finally, all the roles were critically analysed and merged into larger groups. This process yielded six overall roles.

Findings

In this section, the main results derived from the interviews are presented. First, information on the interviewees' positions in decision-making processes is presented.

Involvement in decision-making processes

All 12 interviewees reported that a communication professional is invited to board meetings; in three organisations this concerned communication together with marketing. Six interviewees stated that their organisation has multiple boards and that communication professionals are invited to all of them. One interviewee, however, reported that communication professionals were invited to the boards at all levels except the top management board.

Four interviewees reported that the communication professional had advisory power on the board, including the right to speak and attend, while eight participants also reported having voting power, which indicates full membership of the board. The inquiry about invitations to board meetings also revealed that when an organisation has different organisational sub boards communication professionals may have varying power and diverging privileges on each of them. Organisations may invite any one of their communication professionals to different sub-boards, or each individual may have a distinctly separate role in the sub-boards. This indicates that in practice communication professionals may have multiple roles in organisational decision-making.

Roles in contributing to organisational decision-making

One question in the semi-structured interview was aimed at eliciting professionals' perceptions of their role in organisational decision-making processes. The interviewees were asked to talk freely and describe their role in as much detail as possible. In fact, they did not mention just one role but gave a more complex picture of how they took this responsibility in practice.

Table 1. Roles of Communication Professionals in Organisational Decision-making

| | Role | References (n) | Definition |
|---|-------------------|-----------------------|---|
| 1 | Strategic partner | 4 | Attending board meetings to strategically help decision makers by providing stakeholder-related information, influencing the board in a favourable direction, and participating in decision-making with voting power. |
| 2 | Strategic liaison | 4 | Influencing decision-makers by emphasising the strategic role of communication, and managing interaction between the organisation and stakeholders about ongoing or future decision-making processes. |
| 3 | Facilitator | 7 | Scanning the organisational environment for issues as input for decision-making, planning and preparing ongoing and impending future decision-making processes and communication processes between decision-makers and stakeholders. |
| 4 | Expert | 8 | Supporting decision-makers by endorsing their communication, challenging their communicative views during the decision-making process, and participating on the board with advisory power. |
| 5 | Implementer | 8 | Managing the communication function, preparing and implementing communication plans concerning decision-making, supporting the execution of decisions within and outside the organisation, but without participation in the decision-making process itself. |
| 6 | Disseminator | 7 | Disseminating and explaining decisions made and the effects aimed at, both internally and externally. |
| | Overall | 38 | |

In total, roles in decision-making were referenced 38 times, identified and coded in the interview transcripts. Initially, this resulted in 18 roles, which were critically analysed for overlaps. The roles that most resembled each other were grouped together, resulting in six final roles, each with its own definition. To ensure that the summarised definitions were clear and well translated, the keywords used were checked in dictionaries and scientific works of reference. Finally, the six roles were

labelled as categories, emphasising keywords often used by the interviewees. Although this was done with care, the names given to the roles should be read together with their definitions (see Table 1).

In the following sections, these roles are presented along with definitions provided by the interviewees. Generally, the interviewees revealed that the idea of discussing the contribution to organisational decision-making in detail was a novel experience. They acknowledged that they were expected to contribute to organisational decision-making, but when asked about their precise roles or position in the decision-making process, not all the interviewees were prepared to point this out and explain how they contributed to decision-making in practice.

Strategic partner

The role of Strategic partner refers to attending board meetings to help decision-makers by providing strategic information that may influence the board in a favourable direction regarding a particular decision, and to participate in the decision-making process by exercising the power to vote. Before grouping and merging the data, this role consisted of the following dimensions: partnering the board (1 mention), lobbying (1) and actively making decisions (2). Being a Strategic partner was described as being included in the core group (the board) where the most important decisions in organisation are made. The board perceived partnering as a strategic task that gives the communication professional access to important information. Lobbying was described as efforts to influence current decisions and move decision-makers in a favourable direction. Active decision-making was described as being part of the core group on the board with equal privileges regarding influence, access to information and decision-making together with the other board members.

Strategic liaison

A Strategic liaison is responsible to decision-makers for the strategic role of communication, organising planned communicative actions, and enabling interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders about ongoing or future decision-making processes. This role combined the dimensions of organising (2), exerting a strategic influence (1) and enabling decision-making (1). Interviewees described 'organising' as related to arranging possibilities for stakeholders to influence the organisational decision-making, by those who are to be affected by the organisation's actions. Communication departments were also described as organising and ensuring that certain communicative activities are planned for the future and are executed on schedule or cancelled if not needed. Strategic influence was related to responsibility for emphasising the strategic aspects and roles of communication, as well as reminding the

board and decision-makers about the importance of communicating decisions. Enabling referred to enabling interaction between the decision-makers and affected stakeholders. Enabling was described as making sure that stakeholders' interests are heard during the process and stakeholders are informed about the outcomes of the decision-making process.

Facilitator

Acting as a Facilitator refers to the responsibility for scanning the organisational environment for issues influencing decision-making processes, and the planning and preparing of ongoing and impending future decision-making processes and communication processes between the decision-makers and stakeholders. The role of the Facilitator comprised three dimensions: preparing (5), planning (1) and monitoring (1). Preparing referred to ongoing decisions and decision-making processes. Communication practitioners participate in planning by ensuring that the communication process is included in the decision-making process, either from the onset or later on. Professionals also prepare reports on the views of stakeholders and employee feedback, and note ideas in the process. Planning pertains to different aspects of organisational communication that are linked to decision-making, but lack a pre-formulated communication plan. Monitoring was described as scanning the organisational environment to identify critical discussion of the organisation, issues that have the potential to become crises, and other issues that need attention in decision-making.

Expert

An Expert was seen as responsible for supporting the organisation's decision-makers by endorsing their communication, challenging their views on communication during the decision-making process, and participating in the board with advisory power. The role of Expert consisted of four dimensions: participating (3), adding expertise (2), commentating (2) and being a sparring partner (1).

Participating included the invitation to attend board meetings with the right to discuss and give one's opinion on different matters, although without the right to vote. The communication professional was expected to attend to learn about the matters being prepared, and answer to questions if board members have something to ask. Adding expertise, which was linked to participation, refers to the communication professional as an expert who can support the board's communication. Commentating was referenced in relation to being active during the decision-making process and commenting on the decisions under discussion during board meetings. The last dimension, acting as a sparring partner, was referenced in the context of challenging the views

concerning communication of the decision makers, sparring with the board and taking a stand.

Implementer

The role of Implementer refers to having responsibility for managing the communication function, preparing and implementing communication-related plans about the organisation's decision-making, but not having a voice in it.

This role comprised three dimensions: implementing decisions (4), having no role in decision-making (3) and acting as a manager of communications (1). The interviewees saw this role as including responsibility for the implementation of decisions made, while not being included in the decision-making process. The implementer was described as being responsible for implementing and executing decisions made, through the use of communicative actions. The dimension of having no role was described as being excluded from the decision-making process while nevertheless being responsible for implementing decisions. The dimension of acting as a manager was described as being responsible for managing the group of communication professionals in executing an agreed communication plan concerning decisions and the decision-making process.

Disseminator

The role of Disseminator refers to being responsible for more technical matters of decision-related communication such as messaging and disseminating information on decisions made and their intended effects internally and externally. This role includes the dimensions of informing (5), communicating (1) and messaging (1). All these dimensions were seen as including the dissemination of information about decision(s) both in the internal and external environment of the organisation.

Comparing the roles of interviewees

Comparing the six roles against the data collected from the interviewees reveals that communication professionals usually enact several roles in organisational decision-making processes. The communication professionals in the sample were found to support the organisation's decision-making processes by acting in up to four different roles (see Table 2).

Table 2: Frequency and Dominance of Organisational Decision-making Roles by interviewees in the case study

| Dominant role(s) per respondent | R1 | R2 | R3 | R4 | R5 | R6 |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Strategic liaison | | 2 | 1 | | 1 | 1 |
| Expert/Disseminator | | | | 2 | | 2 |
| Implementer | | | | 1 | 2 | |
| Facilitator/ Implementer | | | 1 | | 1 | |
| Strategic liaison/ Facilitator | | 1 | 1 | | | |
| Strategic partner/ Implementer | 1 | | | | 1 | |
| Strategic partner/ Disseminator | 1 | | | | | 1 |
| Strategic partner | 2 | | 1 | | | |
| Facilitator | | | 2 | | 1 | 1 |
| Implementer | | | | | 1 | |
| Expert | | | | 3 | | 2 |
| Expert/Implementer | | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | |
| Total (38) | 4 | 4 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 |

Notes: Roles: R1=Strategic partner, R2=Strategic liaison, R3=Facilitator, R4=Expert, R5=Implementer, R6=Disseminator.

In Table 2 the most frequently referenced roles by any single interviewee are highlighted in grey. This illustrates that a communication professional contributes to decision-making in different ways within his or her organisation. According to the interviews, communication professionals are expected to contribute to decision-making in different phases of the process, e.g. providing input for as well as disseminating information on the decisions made. No prevailing combination of roles contributing to decision-making could be identified, as each interviewee's role or combination of roles in relation to decision-making was unique.

Discussion and conclusion

The initial results of this research show the diversity of the roles occupied by communication professionals in decision-making in Finnish organisations. Each interviewee described a different combination of roles by which they contribute to the Organisation's decision-making process. The descriptions provided by the practitioners were condensed into six roles: Strategic partner, Strategic liaison, Facilitator, Expert, Implementer and Disseminator.

The *Strategic partner* holds very much the same position and has the same privileges as other board members. In this role, practitioners contribute to the decision-making process by providing important information, influencing the direction of decisions, and finally helping to make the decision by using their voting power. The *Strategic liaison* role, performed together with the board, involves organising plans for communication and interaction between the organisation and its stakeholders, while at the same time emphasising the strategic role of communication.

The role of *Facilitator* is more neutral, and is motivated by the communication process. This role includes the technical aspects involved in arranging the different communication processes needed throughout the decision-making process. The Expert is seen as having advisory power in the decision-making process and the privilege of challenging the communicative views of top decision makers. The *Expert* often represents the communication function in meetings while the Expert's participation in board meetings is a marker of the status of communication.

The *Implementer* is responsible for the implementation of decisions, by using, and possibly managing, communicative actions. Exclusion from the decision-making process, however, means that the Implementer concentrates on the outcomes of decisions and the later stages of their implementation.

The role of *Disseminator* mostly resembles the role of the technician, which has been established in earlier literature. This role involves the traditional dissemination of information to internal and external stakeholders, and is more concerned with the technical aspects of communication.

The participants in this study did not see themselves in their daily work as part of a decision-making system. However, their contribution to organisational decision-making included multiple roles performed simultaneously. Moreover, the interviewees considered communication to have some power in organisational decision-making. Although not all of the interviewees were personally invited to join the board, many interviewees reported that the communication department or group had advisory or voting power during board meetings. This supports Van Ruler and de Lange (2003), who found that PR departments have some power to influence organisational decision-making.

An analysis of these roles reveals that the way in which communication professionals contribute to decision-making varies according to the different phases of decision-making. The interviewees reported playing different roles throughout the decision-making process and in relation to different situations. This was regardless of their position in the organisation and whether or not they were invited to board

meetings. The results also reveal that in the context of organisational decision-making the Finnish communication professionals interviewed do not follow previous role typologies, such as the dichotomy between technician and manager identified by Broom and Dozier (1986). The interviewees were found to combine different roles, thereby yielding a more complex picture than presented in the literature.

Two of the roles, Strategic partner and Strategic liaison, were focused on own voting power or influencing board decisions. Two roles, Strategic liaison and Facilitator, underline the bridging of interests and views. Two roles, Facilitator and Expert, contribute to the quality of the decision but leave the responsibility of choosing to others. Two roles do not address the decision-making process but instead the execution, Implementer, or dissemination, Disseminator, of the decisions made.

This range of roles shows a rich texture of practice, and perhaps combining roles is natural as the applicability of a role may also relate to the immediate situation or issue at hand. In an ambiguous situation, for example, the bridging of contrasting views may be needed, whereas in a clear situation bringing influence to bear might be a more likely choice of role. Practitioners may have a preference for certain roles, but are also able to develop the competence required to occupy new roles as the need arises. In this sense, the outcomes of this study show communication as a developing, rather than as a static practice.

This exploratory study shows that not all the roles of communication professionals identified relate to decision-making power in the sense of influencing the choice of alternatives. Some roles focus on bridging organisational and stakeholder views, while other roles focus on the choice and execution of communicative actions. The latter supports the findings of Brønn (2014) that the contribution of communication continues to be centred more on the communicative aspects of decisions than on the appraisal of alternative choices for the decision. However, the findings also indicate that Finnish professionals feel that they contribute strongly to the decision-making process through their performance of multiple roles, including taking care of the operational side of decision-making both during the process and after the decision has been made. The latter supports the line of thinking expounded by Zerfass and Franke (2013) who state that involvement of professionals ensures the inclusion of communicative implications in decision-making. This also supports the findings of Verčič *et al.* (2001) about reflective and educational dimensions of the roles of communication professionals. Either way, the roles this study found add to the status of communication professionals, as their contribution to decision-making is distinctly more than being lowly message deliverers.

This study is not by any means an in-depth examination of organisational decision-making and the roles of public relations professionals in the Finnish context. While the study does contribute some interesting findings on the daily work of communication professionals in organisational decision-making, the smallness of the sample suggests further larger sample research to verify the results. A further limitation of the study is that the interviews were translated from Finnish to English.

Following the recommendation of Steyn and Niemann (2010) to explore the relation between communication and decision-making, this study increases understanding of the diverse ways in which communication professionals contribute to organisational decision-making. This paper also supports the notion of Dozier and Broom (2006) that roles are constantly reinvented through observation of one's day-to-day work. Future research could further clarify the implications for practice and the education of public relations and organisational communication.

To complement the contribution of communication professionals to organisational decision-making, it would be important to study their roles further on a quantitative basis and to focus more on examining the tasks of professionals during the actual decision-making process. This study indicates that the contribution of communication professionals, the communicative value they add to organisational decision-making, can take a variety of forms, and that communication professionals are actively in the process of further developing their contribution to organisational decision-making processes.

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V

**CLARIFYING COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS' TASKS
IN SUPPORTING ORGANISATIONAL DECISION MAKING**

by

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Research Article

Clarifying Communication Professionals' Tasks In Contributing To Organizational Decision Making

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ABSTRACT: The purpose of this paper is to discuss the tasks through which communication professionals and public relations contribute to organizational decision making. In-depth interviews were conducted with Finnish public relations professionals about how they contribute to organizational decision making. The findings provide a rich picture of the tasks in relation to this. The results show that public relations professionals contribute to organizational decision-making processes by nine different tasks. Furthermore, the results indicate that during an organizational decision-making process, professionals switch from one task to another over time, and work simultaneously on several tasks. This paper offers a comprehensive representation of the various tasks through which public relations professionals contribute to organizational decision making, and provides a detailed description of the various tasks throughout the phases of a decision-making process. Based on the findings, this paper introduces a contribution model for further investigation of the topic. The model can be used as a referring tool in practice to enhance communicative processes related to organizational strategy and decision making, and in this way the model will also further the bridging function and strategic role of public relations when adapting to a changing environment.

Keywords: Communication professionals, Decision making, Public Relations, Sensemaking, Tasks.

INTRODUCTION

The value of public relations is often considered to be in facilitating how organizations negotiate and adapt to their social environment. Organizations are expected to use strategies and attend their external environment to achieve growth and survival (Pace and Faules, 1994). Public relations is expected to help organizations understand their environments (White and Mazur, 1995), enact them (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn and Ganesh, 2004), anticipate and defuse potential problems (Fawkes, 2004) and adjust and adapt to changes in the environment of the organization (Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2006). This relates to decision making within organizations and, in particular, to what extent stakeholders, the groups vital for the organizations and their existence, are taken into account or included in decision-making processes. The contribution of public relations to organizational decision making, as Dozier (1989) stated, has traditionally been embedded in the process of two-way exchange between the dominant coalition of the organization, i.e. the individuals responsible for strategy and top decisions, and the stakeholders of the organization. Later, Dozier and Broom (1995, p. 22) emphasized that the value of public relations is derived from "public relations' ability to solve problems for the organization".

In scientific and professional literature, as Van Ruler and de Lange (2003, p. 146) underlined, it has been suggested that organizations should have a specific function which aims to facilitate "direct communication and information processes to help achieve organizational goals." This strategic communication management assists the functioning of the organization, provides counselling for the management at all levels in the organization, and effectuates management

decisions (PRSA, 1982). Van Ruler and de Lange (2003) argued that, in order to achieve the goals of an organization, all activities of direct communication and information processes must be included in decision-making processes.

The theoretical foundation of the role of public relations in strategic management and in the contribution to decision-making processes was created in 1984, when Grunig (2006) brought together several middle range theories, including the role of public relations in organizational decision making. The following Excellence study presented the value of public relations to organizations. By providing theoretical and empirical evidence, the Excellence study (Grunig 2006, p. 160) showed that "involvement in strategic management was the critical characteristic of excellent public relations". Excellent public relations requires access to the dominant coalition through representation. Without this kind of empowerment, the effect of the discipline on organizational decision making would be minimal. To be effective, public relations must act in ways that satisfy the management and that, at the same time, solve the problems at hand. This calls for bridging the interests of the stakeholders and the organization.

The focus of this paper is to discuss the tasks through which public relations professionals contribute to organizational decision making. First, the literature is brought together to clarify the environment in which public relations operates and the views of the public relations tasks in the literature are presented. Next, the method of an interview study that explores the tasks of public relations professionals in practice is described. Last, the findings are reported and conclusions drawn.

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Uncertainty of Organizations and Decision Making

Originally Weick (1979) suggested that organizations do not just interact with their environments but rather enact them. He also (2000) suggested that organizations are a collection of people, whose task is to make sense of what is happening around them. They are unique social forms that embody choice, visibility, and irrevocability. An organization is a system that adapts and sustains itself by reducing the uncertainty it faces every day (Luhmann, 1995). The most common problem that organizations face is how to proceed under uncertainty and make effective decisions (White and Mazur, 1995). Hambrick (1981) stated that coping with uncertainty is the basis for demonstrating the value of public relations. Public relations professionals are members of the organization and serve as boundary spanners (Aldrich and Herker, 1977) and enact with their environment through interaction and meaning creation. Their daily work can be seen as organizing, which helps to reduce the uncertainty that organizational members face when they are making decisions that enable an organization to survive and succeed. Public relations professionals can be seen as sensemakers (Berger and Meng, 2014), as they monitor and interpret the world around the organization.

As Weick (2000) put it, sensemakers convert the world around an organization into an intelligible world and try to make it comprehensible in the best way they can. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) emphasized that sensemaking is also clarifying for organizational members how things become an event and what it means for the organization. However, it is important to point out that an indefinite number of possible scenarios can be constructed. This also underlines the problems of active sensemaking: the environment around the organization keeps changing. Weick (2000) proposed that active communicative interaction invokes organizational macro structures and is, as Falkheimer and Heide (2014) argued, a process of constructing and maintaining an organization.

Weick (2000, p. 185) suggested that sensemaking is eventually tied to an individual's activities and to "what the person does is what he eventually knows". The data one collects is, according to Weick (2000), transformed into information in two phases, which were originally developed by Piaget (1962). In this process of transformation, the undifferentiated flow from an organizational environment is first turned into information and broken up as a collection of events. In the second phase, the information and collection of events are transformed into "a network of causal sequences" (Weick, 2000, p. 185-186). The enactment is finalized in a causal map (Weick, 1975), i.e. a perspective into how the events are causally related. Weick concludes that the data transformation into information results in an enacted environment, in other words in self-validated knowledge of the environment of an organization.

Communication in organizations is a form of behavior (Luthans, 1989). Baskin and Aronoff (1988) argued that all behavior is at least potentially communicative and can,

therefore, be examined through systems theory. They pointed out that "systems theory applies directly and appropriately to communication" (ibid, 55). The transfer of information allows systems to work and interact with their environments (Katz and Kahn, 1978; Baskin and Aronoff, 1988; Weick, 1995; Luhmann, 2005) by gathering information and interpreting it. The systems approach is applicable to public relations as well because the environment where public relations operates includes political, cultural, social and economic dimensions as Baskin and Aronoff (1988) argued. Public relations includes individual professionals, the organization they work in and the interactions between the public and organizations the professionals strive to influence.

Baskin and Aronoff (1988, p. 60) pointed out that the "communication within an organization is influenced by information and messages that originate in the organization's environment". Furthermore, how the communication system of an organization is working has a great impact on the actions and decision of the organization.

Public relations professionals' work to contribute to organizational decision making can be considered as a strategic action. Verhoeven, Zerfass and Tench (2011) defined strategic communication as a form of strategic action and public relations professionals take the actors inside and outside the organization as the starting point of communication. They emphasize that public relations roles in decision making enable them to act strategically and link communication to organizational objectives. Verhoeven et al. (2011, p. 100) pointed out that "it is important that strategic communication professionals help to define business strategies of the organization and support business goals by planning and executing communication activities." They also emphasized that evaluating and controlling the effectiveness of communication are also part of this strategic orientation of public relations.

The added value of communication to decision making, as Van Lier (2013) argued, is the understanding of communication and the informative value of the content. He emphasized that systems, e.g. organizations, benefit internally from new information when meanings are assigned to information through sensemaking. The problem organizations face is that too much information is available. Van Lier (2013) concluded that the selectivity of information is part of the communication process of systems.

Public Relations in Strategic Decision Making

In organizations, strategic decision making occurs at enterprise, corporate, business and functional level (e.g. Steyn, 2007; Arcos, 2015). At all these levels, in order to contribute to strategic decision making, public relations needs to be actively involved in the communication that relates to the decision-making process. Public relations professionals, as Huebner, Varey and Wood (2008) suggested, need to establish communicating as an effective management process, rather than apply it just as a supporting process to inform about decisions. In the latter way, as Huebner et al. (2008) added,

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public relations is considered a strategic practice, rather than a management instrument, putting decisions into action. However, public relations can also contribute to decision making in different ways. Ruth-McSwain (2011) argued that public relations possesses decision-making authority throughout the organizational gatekeeping process. At its best, public relations interprets the information with respect to the consequences for organizational strategies and feeds intelligence into the organizational strategy and decision making (Steyn, 2007; Wakefield, 2009).

Brunsson (1982) defined strategic decision making as part of organizational discourse and communication. Later Hendry (2000, p. 964) suggested that in organizations decisions are always manifested in discourse: "the decision which matters is that which is communicated". Although public relations is considered a valuable partner in decision making, as Kanihan et al. (2013) argued, communication professionals are often still not positioned in a way that would allow them to serve the problem-solving purpose effectively. Neill (2013) found that public relations is often competing with marketing at the C-suite level and communication professionals might be included in decision making when the issues are considered to be in their domain. In the European context, as Verhoeven et al. (2011) argued, public relations professionals have developed a "thought structure that links communication to decision making and strategic planning in organizations" (p. 95-96).

The academic discussion on how public relations professionals contribute to organizational decision making has traditionally focused on the public relations roles. The studies on the roles have focused mostly on US practitioners. Moss et al. (2000) argued that the experience US professionals possess may not necessarily be presented similarly in other countries. There is also a significant lack of ethnographic studies of public relations professionals (L'Etang, 2006). Verhoeven et al. (2011) examined the strategic contribution of public relations professionals in a European context. They found that the majority of public relations professionals in Europe contribute to the goals of an organization and to the realization of these goals with communication plans and diverse activities. Much of this work is related to making decision-making processes visible, as Nassehi (2005) argued. Edwards (2009) highlighted that still more studies should focus on the day-to-day lives and the individual level of the public relations activity of professionals.

During the last two decades scholars, such as Leichty and Springston (1996), Porter and Sallot (2003), Moss et al. (2005), Choi (2007) Fieseler, Lutz and Meckel (2015), Johansson and Larsson (2015) and Mykkänen and Vos (2015), have argued that more information is needed to understand public relations professionals' tasks during decision-making processes.

Grunig (2006) argued that public relations and its expertise is needed to scan the environment of an organization as different coalitions are formed for different decisions. In this way the organization gets more possibilities for e.g. ethical decision

making. Grunig (2006) also pointed out that public relations professionals need tools that can be used to show the management what (kind of) reactions strategic publics might have when different decisions were made.

Originally, Dozier and Broom (1995) discussed that public relations professionals who concentrate more on the technical tasks as technicians might still have tactical decision-making power in producing and distributing public relations communications. They argued that public relations practitioners produce and distribute the communications independently. Dozier and Broom (1995) also pointed out that if the important management function of public relations is reduced to the technical tasks of producing communications to implement decisions made by others in the organization, the management function of public relations is not performed.

More recently Fieseler et al. (2015) and Niskala and Hurme (2014) examined the tasks of public relations managers in a Nordic context. Fieseler et al. (2015, p. 77) pointed out that "it is important to reconsider the managerial task components as they are often obscured by the manager vs technician debate and because the profession is still constantly redefining its place in many organizations". Their quantitative research revealed that in the Western European context, public relations practitioners wield a large variety of different tasks. They divided their findings into four categories, which they later classified as roles: Diagnosis is about helping circulate information and stakeholder demands. Coaching shows alternative approaches to management for solving communication problems and encouraging management participation. Liaison factor covers activities e.g. maintaining media contacts and producing communication content. Execution factor is responsible for identifying communication problems and acting upon them.

Johansson and Larsson (2015) stated that in organizations, public relations professionals are expected to have a wider scale of duties than many other professional groups. Niskala and Hurme (2014) found public relations professionals to perceive their own tasks and objectives to be more oriented towards society by disseminating information and managing relationships with the key stakeholders. They also argued that public relations professionals identify their tasks primarily related to bond- and trust-building, contributing to the financial and political goals of an organization, and upholding transparency with the social environment of an organization.

METHODOLOGY

This study aims to create a better understanding of what the contributing tasks of public relations professionals are in organizational decision making in Finland. A qualitative method was chosen because a rich description of the phenomena based on the interviewees' experience was sought. As Daymon and Holloway (2002) argued, this method provides meaningful information based on people's point of view and experiences. Interviews can give information from the past and present, and enable the interviewer to better understand the perspectives of the interviewees, which may

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reveal new phenomena (Keyton 2006).

Research Question

The research question is as follows: How do Finnish public relations professionals see their tasks in contributing to organizational decision making?

The focus was on clarifying the different kinds of tasks related to organizational decision-making processes.

Data and Analysis

The data used in this paper has been extracted from a larger dataset that was collected to provide a presentative insight of public relations professionals' contribution to organizational decision making (see Mykkänen and Vos, 2015). The research data for the study was collected during the time period from December 2013 to May 2014 by interviewing 12 public relations practitioners. Overall 19 participants mainly from the central and southern part of Finland were invited to participate in thematic semi-structured interviews. Before the interviews, the final interview protocol was critically reviewed by one independent public relations professional and one experienced scholar.

Participation in the interviews was based on availability and willingness. The participants mostly worked in the role of a communication manager or a director, as nine managers out of 13 expressed their willingness to participate. In addition, six senior press officers were asked to participate, three of whom expressed their availability for the study. Overall 12 public relations professionals from different organizations were interviewed. Six organizations were from the private sector, five from the public sector, and one was a non-governmental organization.

Anonymity and confidentiality were promised and ensured to all the participants. Only one interviewee per organization was selected for the interview. Another criterion for the participants was that the organization should have a distinguished public relations function and it should employ at least two public relations professionals. The audio-recorded interviews were conducted in person by the author and they lasted from 30 to 70 minutes. In total, over eight hours of discussions were recorded. The whole content of the conversations was transcribed for further analysis but the different tones of voice, pauses, and filler words were left out. The data contained over 90 pages of transcribed material.

The transcribed data was then transferred to Atlas.ti, a qualitative analysis software for content analysis. The content was analyzed based on the order of the questions in the questionnaire. The interviewees' quotations were coded according to the questions asked. The codes were divided into main code families for professionals' roles, tasks and capabilities related to decision making. In this paper, the data of codes regarding tasks is presented (see also Mykkänen and Vos, 2015).

Every task mentioned in the interviews was recorded and described. Then their description was checked against an

encyclopedia, and practical combinations for the tasks were made. Finally, all the tasks were critically analyzed and merged into nine final categories. In the next chapter, the findings are presented. The findings of this study are based on the content of the interviewees' quotations.

Background Information

All the participants were asked to fill in a background information form at the beginning of the interview. In this form, they described their position as a public relations professional. From the 12 participants, four were males and eight were females. The reported average work experience in the field of organizational communication was 13.8 years. The public relations departments in which the interviewees worked ranged from 2 to 14 employees in size. Their organizations also varied in size, from just 40 to 27 000 employees.

All the participants reported that public relations professionals were invited to board meetings; in three organizations, this concerned public relations together with marketing experts. Six interviewees stated that their organization has multiple boards and that public relations professionals are invited to all of them. One interviewee (of a large organization), however, reported that public relations professionals were invited to the boards at all levels except the top board.

Four interviewees reported public relations to have advisory power in the board, including the right to attend and express opinions. Eight participants reported having voting power, which indicates full membership of the board. The participants also reported public relations to be invited into various organizational sub-boards, in which they may have various kinds of privileges and power. This indicates that, in practice, public relations practitioners may have diverse tasks and responsibilities in organizational decision making.

FINDINGS

Tasks in contributing to organizational decision making

One question in the semi-structured interview aimed at bringing out public relations professionals' perceptions of their tasks and duties during organizational decision-making processes. The question was: How do you contribute to decision making in your organization? The interviewees were asked to describe in their own words how they contribute. If needed, the participants were asked to list different tasks contributing to decision-making processes individually. They also were encouraged to add examples.

The participants were encouraged to talk freely about their tasks in organizational decision making. Their answers gave a more complex picture of how they functioned in practice and they did not list just one specific task. In total, 135 mentions of different tasks in contributing to decision making were identified and coded. After this the descriptions that most resembled each other were grouped together into nine categories. Finally, these categories were labelled. Even though this was done with care, the label of categories should be read together with their descriptions (see Table I)

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Table I: The Task Categories of Public Relations Professionals in Contributing to Decision making.

| Total | Task | Summary |
|-------|------------------------|---|
| 21 | Dissemination | Disseminating, writing and publishing information about a decision-making process and/or decisions using various communication channels. Communicating with the media about the decision-making process and the outcomes of decisions. |
| 20 | Coordination | Coordinating and managing the actions and content about decision making with other public relations professionals and the board. Coordinating the role of the public relations function in decision-making processes, e.g. by managing core messages as well as guiding the discussion within an organization. Contributing to the decision-making process by producing and managing the information in electronic databases and virtual working spaces. |
| 18 | Dialogue | Promoting two-way communication in decision-making processes by arranging dialogue with stakeholders, and pointing out the communicative dimensions, issues and the flow of information. Promoting the openness of decision making by creating a more communicative environment by contributing to discussion, document sharing, and collaborative communication tools. |
| 18 | Implementation | Implementing decisions by communicating, arranging meetings, clarifying the focus and facts of decisions and supporting the superior-subordinate level communication. Operationalizing the decisions and implementing change by creating timetables and materials, the form of messages, suitable channels and appropriate communicative actions. |
| 14 | Research | Monitoring of stakeholder views and identifying issues around decision-making processes. Thinking, evaluating, analyzing and reporting on behalf of and to the board of the pros and cons of decision-making process as well as the aspects of the communicative actions of decisions. |
| 13 | Consulting | Consulting, advising, sparring and preparing material for the management and for the board with cooperation to promote decision-making processes. |
| 12 | Participation | Participating in board meetings at different levels to ensure the access to information and to influence the decision-making process through strategy and vision creation. Participating in various meetings within the organization to contribute to the communication process of superiors about decisions and to ensure access to relevant information. To participate in a public or an online event with stakeholders to discuss the decision-making process and/or decisions. |
| 11 | Planning | Planning and developing internal and external communication processes to bring strategic decision making to the operational level. |
| 8 | Contextualizing | Clarifying the core elements in the topic, building a proper communicative context around the facts, and forming the appropriate tone of communication about decision-making processes for daily operations of the organization. |
| 135 | Overall | |

In the following subsections, these categories of tasks are presented more closely with the descriptions provided by the interviewees. Generally, the interviews indicated that the idea of the tasks related to the contribution of public relations to organizational decision making was rather novel to many of the public relations professionals interviewed. The interviewees acknowledged that they were expected to contribute to organizational decision making. When asked about their tasks in the decision-making process, not all the interviewees were prepared to point this out and explain how they contributed to decision making in practice.

Dissemination

In this category, six different tasks related to dissemination were mentioned 21 times in total. Informing (11 mentions during the interviews) was described as one-way communication to stakeholders. Public relations professionals inform about decisions, the decision-making process or the possibilities for stakeholders to give feedback and influence the process. Public relations also informs how the (press) meeting went, how the decision-making process has been

executed and how the decision is justified. Media communication (4 mentions) task is mainly communication with the media about the outcomes of decisions. It is about communicating the negative decisions as well and it is much about telling a story by using the media to influence the internal stakeholders of the organization. Communication (magazine) (3 mentions), was described to be related to writing and publishing a customer magazine. The magazine opens and explains the background of decisions and what they mean for stakeholders. The magazine also opens up the main strategy of the organization. Spinning (1 mention) is related to media communication and it is very much the normal spinning routine of public relations to get some media coverage for the decisions. Financial communication (1 mention) is clearly related to the one-way communication about (?) decisions that have a financial impact on the organization. Communication (web) (1 mention) was described to be related to communication on social media and official websites.

Coordination

Coordination (5 mentions) is linked either to managing the

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whole work concerning the decision-making process with the help of the public relations function or to the cooperative work with business units. In the first case, the responsible public relations manager coordinates the annual work of individual public relations employees. The manager "solves the puzzle", creates the core messages related to the topic discussed, narrows down themes, and unifies and combines themes for one big entity. The most crucial thing is to narrow down tasks to keep the entity doable for public relations function. In the latter task / case, the public relations manager coordinates the discussions with business units on how the outcomes of a decision could be contributed to in practice. This means creating a communication plan either for one business unit or for the whole organization. This also includes evaluating the themes and possibilities for communication. Intranet (4 mentions) as a task contributes to the decision-making process recognizing the role of the intranet as part of the supportive channels for the decision-making process. It is the responsibility of public relations to create content on the intranet regarding the decision-making process and the outcomes of decisions. An intranet is considered to promote the decision and to give information about the process and the outcomes. In addition, different notifications in electronic form, like email notifications and group mailings, were mentioned. Electronic tools (3 mentions) is related to the various electronic tools public relations uses in communication. This includes collaboration tools and virtual working spaces where documents can be shared and comment. Guiding communications (2 mentions) is related to keeping the big picture of communication clear and the red thread of communication focused. Public relations plans what communicative actions are feasible. Management (2 mentions) is related to the overall management of daily work. In communication function, a/the communication manager must maintain the big picture and ensure that other employees in public relations have possibilities as is wanted and that the agreed actions are made. This also includes proceeding with a given role in the board ensuring that public relations representatives are managing the tasks which they are given. Content management (2 mentions) is related to the work of communication managers. Their task is to manage what content is included when communicating about decisions. The term mutual discussions (1 mention) was described to include discussions with colleagues about the communication plan for the next year.

Dialogue

Promotion of two-way communication (10 mentions) was identified as the promotion of communications related to decision-making processes. Public relations professionals actively try to bring more communicative methods to decision making by explaining how they could help in the decision-making process, what the possibilities for dialogue are, what communicative dimensions the decision might have, how this could affect stakeholders, how the goal is achieved, and what internal and external issues it might have. Conversation creating (3 mentions) is related to creating a more communicative environment around decisions by promoting discussion. This is created by giving possibilities to discuss face to face or online in public events, creating collaborative communication tools, sharing documents and creating discussion on the intranet. Transparency promotion (3 mentions) is related to the willingness of public relations to promote the openness and transparency of the decision-making process if possible. This could be for instance not hiding the negative news of the organization when laying off

workforce or "telling the story first". This is also giving opportunities for discussion face to face or via digital tools. Campaigning (2 mentions) is more related to marketing communication, and contributes to the decisions through the methods of marketing, e.g. direct letter postings, and email campaigning.

Implementation

Internal communication (7 mentions) was identified to contain the traditional internal communication about decisions and decision-making processes to employees. The interviewees found that it contains writing and managing the news on the intranet, making press releases, overall communication about themes that are discussed in the board(s), arranging internal meetings, and telling employees what expectations decisions create for them. Public relations also contributes to the superior-subordinate communication, tries to keep the whole personnel informed, clarifies the top-level focus of decision making, produces reasoning for decision outcomes, and gives the facts about what will be done in the future and about what the goals are. Operationalization (5 mentions) is found to be, to a great extent, traditional operative communication. Public relations is regarded as a function which is responsible for the operative implementation of decisions by deciding the timetable of communication, the form of the messages and the channel for communication. At the manager level, operationalizing is also the execution of timed communication actions. Material production (3 mentions) includes the production of material which is related to a decision and which needs to be discussed. Materials are very concrete, e.g. brochures, letters, visual materials and videos. Supporting (2 mentions) is related to supporting the daily operations of an organization by giving ideas for business units on how to get the messages through. This is also related to superior-subordinate communication, so the employees are well-informed about the goals of the organization. Change promotion (1 mention) is related to promoting the change after a decision. The quotation on change promotion also includes the terms discussion creation and openness, so this should perhaps be combined with the transparency creation or creating discussion.

Research

Analyzing (5 mentions) was found to contain thinking and evaluating what communication actions should be made, how things should be promoted, what pros and cons the matter would have, what pitfalls it might have, what issues might harm the organization and why this kind of reform should be made. This was found to be part of daily work and public relations professionals consider what themes should be communicated so that messages would flow through them. On the operational side, they also think of what should be done for instance regarding their customer magazine. Impact evaluation (3 mentions) means that public relations as a function evaluates and communicates the result of the evaluation to the board. The evaluation includes aspects of how stakeholders are affected by the decision, what different dimensions the decision might have, and how the communication with stakeholders is affected. This task is also used to evaluate if the media is interested in this topic and if the organization should be proactive with this topic. Gathering feedback (2 mentions) is related to ensuring that it is possible to gather feedback via electronic channels or discussions. Background work (2 mentions) is more about collecting information, backgrounds and getting ready to explain things to the board. Monitoring (1 mention) is related to monitoring

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and identifying different things and issues that are related to the performance of the organization. Reporting (1 mention) is related to the creation of summaries that are assigned to be sent to the board.

Consulting

This category contains seven different tasks. Expertise (4 mentions) is related to how public relations function is bringing their own expertise and substance into the decision-making table and how they promote it in decision-making processes. This also includes, according to quotations, giving pieces of advice and sparring the top management between decisions. Expertise is related to situations where there is not much time to react and public relations has to make quick communicative actions. In these cases, the trust upon public relations is tested. Private discussions (3 mentions) are a very intimate way to contribute to the decision-making process and they support the ideas of a decision maker. The public relations professional advises the dominant coalition from the communicative point of view. Consulting (2 mentions) is related to the board or the CEO and refers to consulting them through frequent mutual communication on how public relations can contribute to the decision and on what possibilities the decision opens for communication and for the organization to start discussing the topic. Inspiring (1 mention) was described to refer to creating "good mood" for superiors to give them some boost. Sparring (1 mention) is related to how public relations professionals express their opinions in a group where strategically important things are discussed. This also contains the idea that public relations should have a role in the strategy creation process. Preparing (1 mention) is related to preparing the communication material of board decisions, for instance press releases, together with other public relations professionals. Cooperation (1 mention) is cooperating with the CEO on communicative aspects.

Participation

Board meeting participation (4 mentions) is related to the general participation in decision making. Public relations is entitled to or must participate in different boards and other lower level meetings to ensure, that they'll get the information they need and that they have the possibility to influence the decision-making process. Without being present in the meetings, the public relations have no possibilities to influence or even be part of the decision-making group. Being present gives them a better chance to have a role in decision making. Internal participation (3 mentions) is related to the participation in the decision-making process. Public relations wants to participate to be close the sources of information and to the operations where the daily work is done. Public relations sits in meetings with employees and superiors, discusses internal and external possibilities with production units and defines the ways of how to contribute to their work. Public participation (3 mentions) is related to traditional work where public relations professionals participate in public meetings /events either face to face with the media or with other stakeholders, or in online events. Public relations participates in collecting feedback or in ensuring that stakeholders have a possibility to discuss the decision and public relations can also promote its point of view. Decision content creation (1 mention) is related to the creation process of strategy and vision. According to the quotation, public relations has a major role when creating the content for the new strategy and vision. Strategy creation (1 mention) was described to be involved in strategy creation and public

relations is giving input from the communication point of view.

Planning

Planning (9 mentions) was mentioned and identified to be about planning how a decision is operationalized. In this task, public relations plans what communicative actions are made, what the timetable for them is, how feedback is collected, what themes are used, and what point of views are used in different occasions. In addition, public relations decides what is told in the press releases, how the media is contacted and what wishes business units have and how these are taken into consideration, what different individual public relations employees are doing, and how the decision is justified. Development (2 mentions) is related to developing the communication plans of public relations. This contains the timetable and the communicative actions which are related to the decisions about the operation plan in the organization. Public relations could also be part of developing the strategy.

Contextualizing

Contextualizing (4 mentions) is related to creating the right context for messages. Public relations is asked or they are willingly creating the suitable communicative context for the messages about decisions so they can be tied into the daily operations of the organization. This includes what information is included in the communication and what kind of tone is used in the communication. This also contains the reasoning and the facts that the board wants, in addition to the plans on what should be done in the future. Creation of understanding (3 mentions) is making the decision understandable by clarifying the message, i.e. what it means for the daily operations of organizations, what it means for the communication function as a whole and what the board really wants to say so the whole organization understands. Meaning creation (1 mention) is related to the management work where the communication manager decides the tone of communication and how the message will be formed.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The various task categories formed based on the interviews are brought together in a new overview. Figure 1 shows the nine identified task categories. Short summaries of each task category are presented under the figure.

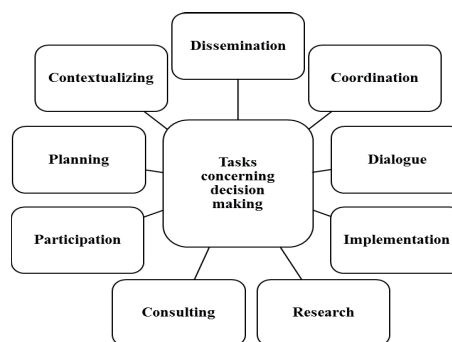


Figure 1: The Contribution Model of Public Relations Professionals to Organizational Decision Making.

The first and the most acknowledged task category, dissemination, includes various ways to communicate information about a decision-making process and decisions

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via different communication channels. Coordination includes the coordination and management of the actions and the related content of organizational communication about decisions. Promotion consists of promoting several communicative aspects of decision-making processes and pointing out possible issues. Implementation refers to operationalizing the decisions and implementing change by creating various organizational routines, for instance timetables and materials, together with appropriate communicative actions. Research includes the monitoring, analyzing, evaluation and reporting responsibilities related to decision making. Consulting comprises advising, sparring and consultation of the management and cooperation with the board during decision-making processes. Participation in decision making focuses on active participation in board meetings on various levels to ensure the access to and the input of information and the influence on the decision-making process. Planning involves bringing the internal and external communication processes related to strategic decision making to the operational level. Contextualizing implicates the clarification and building of a proper communicative context around the facts related to a decision-making process.

The initial results of this research show that public relations professionals contribute to organizational decision-making processes through many different tasks. The interviewees described their contribution in various ways, resulting in 135 quotations delivered during the interviews. After the analysis, these quotations were divided into nine distinguished task categories. The most frequent task category in decision-making processes was related to the dissemination of decisions with 21 mentions. After this the most often mentioned task categories were coordination, promotion and implementation (Table I). An analysis of different tasks indicates that the way in which public relations professionals contribute to decision making varies according to the different phases of decision making. The interviewees expressed to have multiple (simultaneous) tasks during the decision-making processes.

The results of this study uphold Grunig's (2006) findings that participation in top level management means different things to public relations professionals. Grunig (2006) also proposed to conduct further research on how public relations can be institutionalized as a bridging activity more broadly in organizations. The findings of this study show that the tasks of public relations discussed here contain important elements included in decision-making processes and hence support the bridging activity of public relations. This braces the argument of White and Mazur (1995) that public relations can contribute to the decision making of the management in uncertain conditions. This way public relations could also bridge itself more into the top level management and institutionalize itself more as a strategic partner. The results of this study underline how public relations as a function and through its processes can create a unique contribution to organizational decision making. This way public relations could, even more, fulfil their role as strategic management as Grunig (2006) encouraged to explore. The findings support also Leichty and Springston's (1996) argument that a lot of information is lost if practitioners' tasks are only considered from either the manager's or the technician's point of view. The overall findings also brace the findings of Johansson and Larsson (2015) that public relations in organizations has a service, support, and advisory function.

Theory wise, it would be important to study what kind of impact the empirical research in different organizational

settings and contexts would have. As Nassehi (2005, p. 15) pointed out, "the desideratum of Luhmann's organization theory is to describe in more detail how special kind of order of organizations is related to interactional and societal levels". The contribution of this paper was to describe how public relations professionals interact in their organizational settings and contexts during decision-making processes.

This small exploratory study gives insight into the organizational decision making and the tasks of public relations professionals in the Finnish organizational context. The data provides some interesting findings on the daily work of public relations professionals. As this was a qualitative study, the verification of results and the proposed model needs further quantitative research. The interviewees' answers were translated from Finnish to English and it has to be noted that this might have affected the results. To further complement the contribution of public relations professionals to organizational decision making, it would be beneficial to also examine the needed skills and competencies of public relations professionals that enable a strong contribution to organizational decision making.

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VI

CLARIFYING THE SKILLS AND COMPETENCIES IN ORGANISATIONAL DECISION MAKING - A FINNISH STUDY

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Clarifying Skills and Competencies in Organisational Decision-Making - Perceptions of Finnish Communication Professionals

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Abstract

This paper seeks to better understand the skills and competencies that Public Relations (PR) professionals use in contributing to organisational decision-making processes. The data were collected by interviewing Finnish professionals using thematic semi-structured interviews. Overall, the results highlight a deep understanding of organisation management and decision-making processes. The most important competencies were business understanding and target group oriented thinking. The findings indicate that important skills are related to writing and social media. 'Regarding personal attributes, interaction and tolerance to criticism were acknowledged as most crucial. The conclusions suggest that if professionals analyse and review their skills, competencies and personal attributes related to decision making, this will support organisational performance and strengthen the added value of PR function. A reflection on the strengths and weaknesses of their own traits helps professionals enact their expected role in organisational problem solving and decision-making.

Introduction

Rapid and fundamental changes in communication and decision-making in the twenty-first century have impelled Public Relations (PR) professionals to develop new knowledge, skills and competencies. Organisational decision-making is challenging because of the overwhelming volume of information to take into account, and communication professionals have to operate in a more turbulent environment than ever before. Decision-making and the related communication processes need to be more transparent, quick and flexible.

The decisions made in organisations are assumed to be based on certain preferences and expectations about the outcomes that are associated with different alternatives (March, 1988). They are also seen as

specific commitment to action (Mintzberg, Raisinghani & Théorêt, 1976) and as distributing responsibility or providing legitimacy (Brunsson, 1990). Different interests and perspectives are considered, but decision-making has almost universally been defined as choosing between alternatives (Brunsson, 1982; March, 1988; Luthans, 1989). Decision-making has also been defined as an information-processing activity (Vroom & Jago, 1974), a form of communication (Luhmann, 2000; Jönhill, 2003) or a communicative event which consists of information, utterance and meaning (Luhmann, 2000; Czarniawska, 2013).

It has long been discussed that organisations do not just interact with their environments, but rather, they enact them (Weick, 1979). PR professionals contribute to organisational decision-making and enact with the environment through interaction and meaning creation. The key elements in the enactment, as Gregory (2008) argues, are the competencies and skills of professionals.

To help implement the new demands for organisations and to contribute to decision-making, professionals need to have a more versatile repertoire of skills, competencies and personal attributes than their counterparts ten or twenty years ago. Nowadays, as Anadiou and Claro (2009) and Dede (2010) emphasise, it is not enough to just process and organise the information flow of new and more digitalised environments. The authors argue that making sense, collaborating, working as a team and creating new knowledge for decision-making is crucial for the twenty-first century communication professionals. PR professionals, as Gregory (2004, 55) emphasises, can also make “a valuable contribution to strategy-making by utilising their skills of interpretation and counselling”. PR professionals can have several different roles when contributing to organisational decision-making (Mykkänen, 2016; see also Mykkänen and Vos, 2015).

This article will take a closer look at organisational decision-making and, in particular, at the skills, competencies and personal attributes that enable PR professionals to contribute to organisational decision-making processes. The paper focuses on how the latter is perceived by Finnish PR professionals. The emphasis in this exploratory study is on what kind of skills, competencies and personal attributes the professionals consider that they require to contribute to and support decision-making in their organisations. First, a review discusses how skills, competencies and personal attributes have been studied in literature and PR recently. Then, the method of a qualitative interview study is described. Last, the findings are reported and conclusions drawn.

Defining Skills and Competencies

To function contributively for organisations and support problem solving, PR professionals need to master changing technologies and make sense of large amounts of available information. The skills and competencies that professionals need in order to meet the expectations have become more diverse and complex including insight in decision-making processes. Many professionals still lack capabilities in e.g. financial management, the strategy-making process, organisational development and change (Cornelissen, 2008).

Jeffrey and Brunton (2010) point out that it is often difficult to precisely identify competencies for a profession or industry and to articulate what skills are needed for competent performance. Moreover, the definitions of skills and competencies in scientific literature are unsettled and drawing a line between the two terms has been problematic. Terminology of European education and training policy (Cedefop, 2008: 47; 164) describes a skill as “the ability to perform tasks and solve problems” and a competence as “the ability to apply learning outcomes adequately in a defined context (education, work, personal or professional development)”. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development defines competence as “the ability to meet complex demands, by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context” (OECD, 2005: 4). The definition also acknowledges that competencies comprise more than just taught knowledge and a competence can be learned within a favourable learning environment. Competencies in business context are regarded as “how knowledge and skills are used in performance, and about how knowledge and skills are applied in the context of some particular set of job requirements” (Bartram, 2006: 5). Jeffrey and Brunton (2010: 202) point out that competence is derived from the interplay between “domain content” and “cognitive processing capacity”.

In the literature of organisational communication and PR, the competencies and skills of professionals have often been discussed from the perspective of the dichotomy of manager and technician roles. Cornelissen (2008) theorises that both these roles need certain sets of skills and competencies. Cornelissen (2008: 159) defines a skill as a “task-specific ability of communication practitioner to effectively perform a certain task”, whereas competence is “a domain of knowledge or specific expertise that an individual needs to possess to properly perform a specific job”. Skills have also been described by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) (The Professional Bond, 2006: 19) as being what professionals should “be able to do” and Gregory (2008: 216) relates competencies to supporting the “attainment of organisational objectives”. Overall, competencies in PR related studies

are considered a broader concept than skills (e.g. Flynn, 2014; Jeffrey and Brunton; 2010; Cernicova, Dragomir, and Palea, 2011).

Skills and Competencies in Profession and Decision-Making Research

How PR professionals perceive their skills and competencies is crucial for the profession and the organisations they work for (Asunta, 2016). Research in the field of PR, as acknowledged in a recent paper by Kiesenbauer and Zerfass (2015), has traditionally focused on communication processes, instruments, strategies and objectives. Now that organisations operate in a rapidly changing and complex environment, their decision-making will also be greatly influenced by the changes and interdependencies in that environment (Meng and Berger, 2013). The application of PR capabilities could be used to arrange communication needed for decision-making processes, help solve organisational problems, improve related interaction with stakeholders and thus, as Grunig (2006) emphasises, support the bridging activity of PR.

The general transition from the role of a technician to a manager role described by Cornelissen (2008; see also Baskin and Aronoff, 1988; Murray and White, 2005), is also relevant in order to be able to contribute to decision-making processes, as deep knowledge and understanding of business and strategy is needed. Cornelissen (2008: 164) acknowledges the problems of professionals' transition from one role to another. If professionals are expected to participate in the decision-making from the managerial perspective, they "do not always meet these requirements of competencies and skills associated with the manager role". He lists that in these kind of cases professionals lack the knowledge and skills especially in financial management and strategy making. Berger and Meng (2010) argue that also personal attributes need to be taken into account, as together with other capabilities they form the basis for an effective practice. Competent performance is the precondition for the effective execution of professionals' roles and tasks in decision-making processes as well (Mykkänen and Vos, 2015; Mykkänen, 2016).

During the past decades, many studies have discussed the PR skillset and competencies for the profession in general. Still, the body of research focusing on the decision-making contribution by PR professionals is limited. Decision-making processes were mentioned in a study on internal communication by Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick (2007). Among the competencies for internal communicators, they found competencies to be strongly linked to solving organisational problems and helping others to

make informed decisions (Dewhurst and Fitzpatrick, 2007). Studies on the PR profession have also briefly touched the topic of decision-making, showing that professionals may have influence on organisational planning and decision-making but with a limited role (e.g. Moreno, Verhoeven, Tench and Zerfass, 2010) and a significant gap of actual impact (Moreno, Zerfass, Tench, Verčič, Verhoeven, 2009). Clarifying the related capabilities may help in developing this further. White and Mazur (1995) emphasise that PR professionals can make a contribution to managerial decision-making, especially in the current situations of high uncertainty in which interdependencies feature, if they have the ability and opportunity to do this.

Skills and competencies of PR personnel

At the start of the century Van Ruler, Verčič, Bütschi, and Flodin (2000) found listening, writing and management skills to be the key skills for the PR profession. Goodman (2006) listed 23 different skills as the necessary general skillset of a PR professional. Jeffrey and Brunton (2010) found that the most important skill of PR professionals was adaptability, which indicates flexibility and willingness to learn. The second was leadership which was described to be important for a professional in order to be able to think strategically. Flynn (2014) found that, in literature, ethics are emphasised as being a crucial competence for PR professionals. Watson and Sreedhan (2010) proposed that in the future communication professionals' most needed competence is strategising, which was also acknowledged earlier by Brønn (2001). Writing skills and critical thinking were identified as "the most important communication skills" by McCleneghan (2006) and DiStaso, Stacks and Botan (2009).

The skillset of PR professionals has greatly changed over the years. Broom (2009) reminds that in the early days the skills of professionals were mostly derived from the studies on journalism. Today, as Broom (2009) lists, professionals have to have a versatile repertoire of different skills, e.g. knowledge of media and management, problem-solving abilities and intellectual curiosity. Professionals are also expected to possess skills to understand the specific industry, have the ability to relate to people and have knowledge of current events in organisational environment. Still, as Bowen (2009) notes, the top management of organisations, responsible for the strategic decisions, is not likely to understand the contribution of PR function.

Sha (2011), in her analysis, indicates that PR practice is centred on general business skills, media relations and theoretical knowledge. The general business skill included e.g. management skills, decision-making

abilities, problem-solving skills, leadership and organisational skills. Media relations included crisis communication management and use of information technology and new media channels. Theoretical knowledge included the application of historical knowledge of the field of PR and the application of communication models and theories (Sha, 2011).

Meng and Berger (2013) argue that the scope of communication knowledge is more important than the technical skills, such as writing or speaking. They emphasise “the power of research, converting knowledge into plans of action and strategies, applying knowledge to diverse media channels, and evaluating communication programmes, that will eventually support the organisation performance and manifest the value of Public Relations to the organisation” (Meng and Berger, 2013: 150).

In order to contribute to organisational goals, as White and Mazur (1995) argue, PR practitioners need to develop a strategic perspective to make their contribution more valuable. According to White and Mazur (1995), this needs one to systematically analyse one’s own skills and competencies.

It has been argued (Todd, 2014) that many PR curricula are not fully representing the needed skills of today’s industry. Flynn (2014) emphasises that skills and competencies are a critical foundation for building a practical and theoretical body of knowledge and demonstrating the value of PR. The working environments of professionals have certainly changed. Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) argue that the growth in knowledge work and service occupations has increased the demand of broad competencies. Possessing a general competence could become a prerequisite for securing employment (Finegold and Notabartolo, 2010). Tench and Moreno (2015) argue that, in practice, there are still relevant gaps and deficiencies in the development of the skills and competencies of individual PR professionals.

Recently, in the Finnish context, the PR profession has been studied actively. For example, in 2015 a study involving 300 leading communicators (Procom, 2015) looked into the PR managers’ perceptions of their work, and the position and significance of communication in their organisations. The results indicate, among other things, that the entrance requirements for young communication practitioners include, in addition to skills and competence, willingness to learn and enthusiastic work attitude, which clearly indicates the relevance of personal attributes. Other Finnish studies (e.g. Procom 2014) found that in the near future communications professionals wish to focus on further developing their social media skills, but also their expertise in strategic communications and communications management capabilities. Nevertheless, more should be done in Finnish context to

study professionals' skills and competencies in decision-making as well. The European Communication Monitor 2015 survey (Zerfass, Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno and Tench) has demonstrated that skills related to compiling, interpreting and analysing data and information are regarded as very important among European professionals.

However, most of the previous studies do not focus on organisational decision-making processes but rather on broader PR skills and competencies. The purpose of this paper is to concentrate on filling that gap and to offer new knowledge about skills, competencies and personal attributes from the perspective of professionals. The methodology of this study is presented in the next chapter.

Method

This empirical study aims to gain understanding of the skills, competencies and personal attributes of public relations professionals in order for them to contribute to organisational decision-making. In this paper the separation of skills and competencies follows the skills and competence dichotomy of Cornelissen (2008). Personal attributes were added, following Berger and Meng (2010). The three components of PR, i.e. skills, competencies and personal attributes are thus described as follows:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Skill | A task-specific ability to effectively perform a certain task. |
| Competence | A domain of knowledge or specific expertise that an individual needs to possess to properly perform a specific job. |
| Personal attribute | A characteristic or quality of a person. |

Table 1: The description of skill, competence and personal attribute in this study (based on Cornelissen 2008; Berger and Meng (2010)).

A qualitative method was chosen, because a rich description of the phenomena based on the interviewees' perceptions and experience was sought. When the information is based on people's subjective points of view and experiences, interviews give the best information (Daymon and Holloway, 2002). As Keyton (2006) argues, in interviews it is easier to understand the concept of past and present from the interviewees' perspectives and new phenomena may be revealed.

Research Question

The research question for this study is the following: What skills, competencies and personal attributes enable Finnish PR professionals to contribute to organisational decision-making?

The focus was on clarifying the interviewees' perceptions concerning the kinds of skills, competencies and personal attributes with which they contribute to organisational decision-making processes and what they would need to develop further in order to fulfil this role.

Data and Analysis

The research data for the study were collected by interviewing 12 public relations professionals during the time period from December 2013 to May 2014. Overall 19 participants mainly from the central and southern parts of the country were asked to participate in thematic semi-structured interviews. The interview protocol was critically reviewed by one independent PR professional and one experienced scholar.

The participants mostly worked in the role of a communication manager or director, as 9 managers out of 13 expressed their willingness to participate. 6 practical level press officers were asked to participate, but only 3 expressed their availability for the study. Overall, 12 interviews, 8 with females and 4 with males, were conducted. All the participants represented different organisations and the industry of the organisations varied from city and educational organisations to international companies.

Participation in the interview was based on availability and willingness. Anonymity and confidentiality was promised and ensured to all the participants. The criteria for the participants were that the organisation should have a distinguished PR function and employ at least two communication professionals. The interviews were conducted with manager or senior-level PR professionals. Only one interviewee per organisation were invited for an interview.

The interviews were conducted in person by the author and lasted up to 70 minutes. The topic was how the PR professionals contributed to organisational decision-making. The data on the capabilities of the PR professionals regarding decision-making processes are reported in this paper. Altogether, this resulted into / the study data consists of over 90 pages of transcript material. During the interview the questions were asked according to a prepared protocol, but unprepared specifying questions were asked to gain deeper knowledge from the interviewee. The interviewees were allowed to discuss the questions freely and add new knowledge to the questions that had already been answered if they wanted to do so. All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed

for further analysis. The level of transcription was basic. The contents of the conversations were transcribed, but the different tones of voices, pauses and filler words were left out.

After the transcription, the interviews were transferred to Atlas.ti, qualitative analysis software for extensive content analysis. The contents were analysed based on the topics discussed, e.g. where a later remark was added to a topic discussed earlier, it was included in the analysis of that topic. The interviewees' quotations were coded according to the main topics of the questionnaire. Every quotation inside the relevant family code was also given a more descriptive hyponym based on the contents of the quotation. All the codes were then printed separately and the quotations were analysed.

Every mentioned skill, competence or personal attribute was recorded. Then each of them was assigned to the corresponding categories according to the contents of the quotation. The categorisation was based on the descriptions provided earlier in the method section of this paper. For each skill, competence or personal attribute, it was marked how many times it was mentioned and the number of occurrence was coded to the interviewees' quotations.

Findings

The findings derived from the interviews are presented in this chapter. The interviews revealed that discussing capabilities relevant to contributing to organisational decision-making was rather novel to many of the interviewed professionals. The interviewees acknowledged that as PR professionals they used particular capabilities to contribute to organisational decision-making, but specifying these in detail took an effort. Still, many respondents precisely described several related skills and competencies while some only described a few. In the category of desired capabilities, the results revealed that only some interviewees emphasised technical skills whereas many described desired competencies. Overall, the interviews showed that competencies were valued more than skills and personal attributes.

Current Skills, Competencies and Personal Attributes

The semi-structured interview aimed at clarifying professionals' perceptions of their skills in organisational decision-making processes. The first question was: What capabilities do you currently use in contributing to decision-making processes in your organisation? The interviewees were asked to describe the skills as thoroughly as possible.

They were also encouraged to freely discuss their skills. During the interview, they mentioned various skills, competencies and personal attributes. In total 73 quotations were coded with 36 different codes. Based on the quotations, the mentioned skills were categorised either as a skill, a competence or a personal attribute and summarised in Table 2.

| Skills | Competencies | Personal attributes |
|---|---|----------------------------------|
| Text writing and content creation (6) | Business understanding (6) | Being focused on interaction (6) |
| Use of social media and web communication (6) | Target group and stakeholder oriented thinking (4) | Tolerance to criticism (2) |
| Planning | Understanding the key points and seeing the big picture (4) | Critical thinking (2) |
| Brainstorming | Understanding media and publicity (4) | Leadership |
| Consulting | Understanding of technology (3) | Diplomacy |
| Basic communication skills | Understanding information processes and networks (3) | Listening attitude |
| Oral communication | Understanding of decision-making processes (2) | Logical thinking |
| Mediation | Communication management and professionalism (2) | Sales orientation |
| Information processing | Crisis communication | Problem solving attitude |
| Language skills | Human resource management | Pressure tolerance |
| | Strategic thinking | Neutrality |
| | Understanding production | Visuality |
| | Marketing communication | |
| | Legal affairs | |
| Overall 20 | Overall 34 | Overall 19 |

Table 2: Summary of the skills, competencies and personal attributes used in contributing to organisational decision-making.

Among the currently used skills, text writing and content creation were described to be important for the operative work related to decision-making. The professionals expressed that they have to be able e.g. to prepare texts concerning the decision-making process and its outcomes. They also have to be able to crystallise the information into key points relevant to the organisation and stakeholders. The use of social media and web communications were emphasised as an important two-way channel to gather and analyse information to support decision-making, as well as a fast way to connect with stakeholders to answer questions concerning on-going decision-making processes.

Among the competencies used in decision-making, business understanding was emphasised. It was considered to be related to thorough knowledge on how the organisation works and creates its income, and on what the critical business factors and the characteristics are regarding the environment the organisation operates in. PR professionals should also know their roles and responsibilities in decision-making and how they can influence the process. Target group and stakeholder oriented thinking was mentioned, so that PR professionals would be able to anticipate the possible effects the decisions have on stakeholder groups and to include these effects as part of the decision-making process. The competence of finding the key points and seeing the big picture to put forward when communicating about a decision process or outcome was described as an important ability in every phase of the decision-making process. Understanding media and publicity were described to be related to understanding what the media are thinking of and expecting from the outcomes of the decision-making process.

Among the personal attributes, being focused on interaction included being easily approachable from within and from the outside of the organisation, connecting different points of view, and bridging differences between parties with different envisaged decision outcomes. Tolerance to criticism was underlined because the PR professionals often have to deal with negative reactions and handle critical opinions on decision outcomes. Critical thinking was highlighted in relation to internal judgement of ideas and evaluation of information.

Further Development

The second question in the interview aimed at clarifying what skills would need to be developed to reach a more effective contribution to organisational decision-making. The question was: What capabilities would you like to further develop to strongly contribute to decision-making processes in your organisation? Once again, the interviewees

were asked to provide as detailed a description as possible. In total 34 quotations were coded with 21 different codes. Based on the quotations, the capabilities mentioned were categorised in three groups in the same way as described earlier, and summarised in Table 3.

| Skills | Competencies | Personal attributes |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| Advanced use of social media (2) | Business understanding (4) | Listening to understand different points of view (2) |
| Information processing (2) | Understanding what is most essential in communication concerning decision-making (3) | Visuality |
| Presentation skills | Understanding management (2) | Interaction |
| Business skills | Understanding decision-making (2) | Influencing |
| Negotiation skills | Understanding stakeholder interests (2) | Networking |
| Organising skills | Knowledge of PR and future role of communication (2) | |
| Use of communication channels | Understanding of technology and new media (2) | |
| | Market understanding | |
| | Decision implementation and change communication | |
| Overall 9 | Overall 19 | Overall 6 |

Table 3: Desired skills, competencies and personal attributes in contribution to organisational decision-making to be further developed.

Among the desired skills, advanced use of social media was mentioned, referring to how to formulate and explain decision-making processes and outcomes in a way appropriate for the channel, for example, in cases of reorganisation. Information processing was deemed crucial in order to recognise and be sure that current information is still relevant for decision-making.

Among the desired competencies, business understanding was highlighted as the most important. Understanding what is most essential to communicate concerning decision-making was also seen as an important competency to develop further. Among the personal attributes, a skill to listen in order to understand different points of view was emphasised, as PR is more exposed to the discussion and to being present where decision-making is concerned. Overall, personal attributes gathered a wide range of responses related to negotiation and leadership characteristics.

The desired capabilities showed a stronger emphasis on change processes and future development, but largely followed the same lines as the current capabilities described earlier. Figure 1 describes the capabilities deemed the most important in contributing to decision-making.

| Skills | Competencies | Personal attributes |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Text writing and content creation • Advanced use of social media and web communication • Information processing related to decision-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business understanding • Target group and stakeholder oriented thinking • Understanding the key points and seeing the big picture • Understanding media and publicity • Understanding what is most essential to communicate concerning decision-making | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being focused on interaction • Tolerance to criticism • Critical thinking • Listening to understand different points of view |

Figure 1: The most mentioned elements of skills, competencies and personal attributes that enable contributing to organisational decision-making.

Figure 1 opens up the black box of PR capabilities used to contribute to organisational decision-making. Skills related to decision-making form a basis for PR professionals' work. Competencies emphasise broad knowledge and understanding of the business and organisational environment. In addition, a deeper understanding of communication expectations and the communicative contents of complex processes is emphasised. In decision making processes, personal attributes are

related to being easily approachable, but also capable of analysing critically.

Discussion and Conclusion

This paper sought to clarify the skills, competencies and personal attributes of PR professionals in organisational decision-making contribution. The results show that, in contributing to decision-making processes, PR professionals underline competencies more than skills and personal attributes. The study also indicates that the expertise of PR professionals is in part also built on personal attributes such as being focused on interaction and being tolerant for criticism, and that these add to the skills and competencies specific for PR. Business understanding was acknowledged to be the most important competence, whereas the understanding of organisational environments as well as communication processes and contents were also underlined. A deep understanding of business and management is essential for PR professionals when working with organisational plans, actions and strategies, and eventually to increasing the value of the PR function for an organisation.

With a focus on decision-making, the findings of this study support the conclusion of White and Mazur (1995) that PR professionals need to develop a perspective on what makes their contribution valuable. The findings also uphold the conclusions of Finegold and Notabartolo (2010) that professionals should be open to implementing new competencies, such as financial literacy and other specialised business insights. Professionals should also look at how the design of their organisations and jobs impacts their performance and competence requirements.

As White and Mazur (1995) state, if PR professionals are able to interpret and make sense of the environment, they will become more influential. Being more than an executor of operative communication in decision-making will earn the respect of management. This would, as Cornelissen (2008) concludes, also benefit the status of PR as a profession.

This qualitative study had a limited number of interviews, but in relation to earlier survey results on the PR profession it added a focus on the contribution of Finnish PR professionals to decision-making processes. The results help practitioners reflect on their skills, competencies and personal attributes and increase their role in the crucial area of organisational decision-making. Acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of their own capabilities could help the PR professionals to adjust the perspective of their professionalism and more effectively enact the expected role.

On the basis of the exploratory findings presented in this paper, the next stage of research could be to validate the results by studying skills and competencies in decision-making processes by conducting quantitative research. It would also be beneficial to study which categories of skills, competencies and personal attributes are dominant in sense making, collaborating, working as a team and creating new knowledge for organisational decision-making.

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