

**Inside stories:
Making sense of the daily lives of communication practitioners**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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*For Tommy,
With all my love.*

Abstract

The discipline of corporate communication is relatively embryonic, and has developed into its current form largely through the amalgamation of salient theories from the public relations and management disciplines. Existing academic research focuses broadly on the role of communication practitioners, factors constituting excellent communication functions, and issues of integration. As such, these three broad research agendas have shaped the current corporate communication landscape.

This thesis contends that whilst an analysis of roles, excellence and integration are important, prior research has failed to acknowledge the importance of the lived experience as encountered and interpreted by individual communication practitioners. This research therefore examines how practitioners interpret the events they experience and what this reveals about their lived experience. The research uses diaries and interviews to gather practitioners' talk and text. Through a fine-grained discourse analysis of the interpretive variability of practitioners' accounts, the research reveals two important interpretative repertoires employed by communication practitioners, that reveal a sense of dislocation embedded within their working lives. The research also reveals a number of themes that are prominent in their working lives, which can be understood and contextualised through adapting Dervin's (1999) Sense-Making Metaphor Model. This research also extends existing debates on practitioners roles, excellence in communication functions and issues of integration. The research shows that traditional notions of boundary spanning are not exclusive to managers, that a preoccupation with personal reputations can lead to an alignment of shared values with dominant coalitions, and that practitioners engage in their own form of encroachment in the form of penetrating departmental boundaries to educate others as to the value of effective communication.

Additionally, the research makes an important contribution to existing methodological debates, particularly in relation to the use of diaries in qualitative research. The contribution of the research to policy and practice highlights the need for case studies to show the lived experience of the modern communication practitioner, as opposed to listing abstract tasks and responsibilities.

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Chapter 1: Introducing the research

1.0 Introduction

Having worked as a communications practitioner for the last 15 years, I am aware of the shifting frameworks within which colleagues and organisations operate, and have an active interest in contributing to existing knowledge, shaping policy and challenging assumptions. My experience of communications, based on participant observations, anecdotal evidence and recent research (Ashra, 2006) undertaken on behalf of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), has shown that individuals and organisations carry with them a number of perceptions based on a wealth of information about the role and contribution of communication practitioners and departments.

The remit of a practitioner is often varied, embraces the needs of many individuals, organisational departments and stakeholders and is often tactical, particularly where no clear communication strategy exists. Activities range from press and media relations, through to writing and editing for publications and websites, providing advice to senior managers, planning and running events, marketing activities, crisis management, client liaison and, more recently, activities focused around corporate social responsibility (Ashra, 2006). Although these activities generally fall within the broader remit of “corporate communication,” it is rare that they are located within one department of an organisation.

The key literature suggests that communication practitioners have an important role to play in coordinating the key messages of an organisation and also in the planning and strategy of other organisational departments, which, it has been argued, should be done so at senior management level (Moss et al, 2000; Dozier et al, 1995). Whilst this research is useful in helping practitioners understand their main organisational responsibilities, the key literature does not appear to represent the lived experiences of communication practitioners, particularly their stories of what they experience in their natural work setting. As an experienced communication

practitioner, my interest is in uncovering aspects of the practitioners' lived experience (and not merely that of the manager) as articulated by communication practitioners, in order to understand how they interpret the events they experience.

1.1 Industry-led research and the practice of communication

In order to fully understand the application of communication in an organisational setting, it is important to acknowledge the contribution of industry-led research in the U.K. Recent research undertaken by the Centre for Economics and Business Research (CEBR) Ltd on behalf of the CIPR (2005) highlights the economic significance of the public relations industry in the UK; 48,000 professionals driving an industry with a £6.5 billion turnover. With this strengthened economic base comes the need for higher levels of internal and external transparency, increased involvement of communication practitioners in corporate decision-making and the acceptance and support from other professions of a traditionally misunderstood industry. These findings build upon an early Department of Trade and Industry (DTI, 2003) report, which similarly advocates the need for practitioners to understand "board-level governance" (2003: 4) and calls for greater collaboration between communication practitioners across industry sectors in an effort to increase awareness about the importance of communication as a management discipline.

The roots of public relations and corporate communication practice are very much organic, with only a recent emphasis on training and development issues. The two main pieces of industry sponsored research (CIPR, 2005; DTI, 2003) have tended to be outward looking, focusing on the impact and potential of the industry upon the UK economy as a whole. Internal reflection has been limited to salaries and personnel issues and an acknowledgement in the DTI report stating the need for "PR practitioners to re-position themselves as strategic advisers" (2003: 4). In relation to the roles and functions highlighted in the recent CIPR (2005) report, there is no analysis of the boundaries, definitions, levels of job satisfaction and perceptions that practitioners have of their roles. Both reports, however, provide a useful springboard for this particular research, which aims to analyse the internal and reflective processes which communication practitioners undertake in their daily tasks.

The significant contribution of the communication industry, however, is not universally shared across other business sectors. The Media Trust's study into the skills and capacity of voluntary sector organisations in the UK paints a very different picture (The Media Trust, 2004). The sector as a whole lags behind the private sector in terms of investment of time, money and staff resources for communication related activities (2004: 2). In addition to this, there are issues of practitioners "battling with the perception among funders and trustees that communications is not important, while their own evidence is that communications underpins successful targeting and involvement of users, volunteers, donors, funders, stakeholders and staff" (2004: 1). This highlights the need for organisational learning and acceptance from senior managers of the necessity for a robust communications function to serve voluntary sector organisations.

Where the private sector feels relatively confident about its ability to use communication to its advantage, the public sector feels the need for "leadership for communicators, understanding how new media works and how to use it effectively to get the message across, cohesive and coherent communications strategy planning and training for trainers, particularly in umbrella groups" (2004: 2). Research undertaken by the author (Ashra, 2002) also shows that "the focus of projects remains centred on ensuring specific social, environmental and economic outcomes. Publicity and raising awareness is therefore seen as a secondary activity by both donors and voluntary organisations in favour of project related activities." (2002: 55).

It can be argued that industry-led research has a strong influence over how practitioners apply communication initiatives within an organisational setting, as such research is often cited during the formal training of communication practitioners. Industry-led research is also influential in setting industry standards and codes of conduct for communication practitioners (see www.cipr.co.uk, www.cib.uk.com), and therefore plays a significant role in shaping how communication practitioners respond to events. This research aims to contribute to the policies and training practices that are advocated by such membership bodies and training institutions.

1.2 Prior corporate communication research

Corporate communication is a relatively embryonic discipline which has come to fruition largely through the amalgamation of particular strands of public relations, marketing and management thinking. Academic debates on the role and remit of corporate communication focus on a variety of themes from integration of communication functions (Cornelissen, 2000; Schultz, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1994; Lauzen, 1991; Kotler and Mindak, 1978), through to strategy (Cornelissen, 2004; Argenti, 2003; Van Riel, 1995).

The foundation of these debates incorporates dominant public relations research themes. These themes include attempts to define what constitutes an effective communication practitioner (Gregory, 2006, 2008; DeSanto and Moss, 2004; Moss et al, 2000; Dozier and Broom, 1995), the Excellence Study; a seminal piece of longitudinal research that details the factors that create “excellence” in communication teams (Grunig et al, 2002; Dozier et al, 1995), and the integration of communication related functions and processes (Kotler and Mindak, 1978; Millar and Rose, 1994; Cornelissen, 2000). Indeed, these three themes continue to dominate academic debates in the literatures of corporate communication and public relations alike.

As a consequence of this dominance, an overwhelming body of prior research concentrates on the role, remit, actions, and the strategic value of communication managers and the departments within which they are situated. This thesis will show that whilst prior research has been valuable in shaping the corporate communication discipline, it is highly abstract and presents a gap in our understanding of how communication practitioners interpret the events they experience. This thesis argues that these interpretations tell us a great deal about the daily working lives of the modern communication practitioner and this is on what this thesis will focus.

1.3 The focus and aims of this research

The thesis deviates from previous studies in that whilst an analysis of the roles, activities and strategic value of communication functions and the practitioner is seen to be important, prior research has failed to acknowledge the importance of the lived

experience as encountered and interpreted by individual communication practitioners themselves. As such, it is likely that what practitioners say they do is different from what they actually do, and perhaps different from their job description (Mintzberg, 1990). This research, therefore, is about understanding the different interpretations of the lived experience that constitute the working lives of communication practitioners, beyond that of the “labelled” practitioner and departmental role, and notions of communication excellence and integration. The primary focus, and questions guiding the research are:

1. What do the interpretations of communication practitioners suggest about the nature of their working lives?
2. What interpretive repertoires do communication practitioners employ in making sense of their working lives?

The secondary focus of the research is to ask:

3. How do communication practitioners make sense of what they experience as part of their working lives?

The research aims to gain a number of insights into the nature of work in the modern communication environment. In particular, it aims to identify the types of themes which govern practitioners’ working lives, as well as how these events are articulated by practitioners. In focusing on the articulation of events, the research aims to reveal the discourses employed by practitioners as they make sense of what they experience. Whilst the intention of this thesis is not to generalise, the findings do allow for theoretical inferences about the verbal repertoires or “discrete discourse styles” (Brewer, 2003: 75) of the communication practitioners, which have been identified as a direct consequence of this research.

The importance of this research lies in examining how the discourses help better our understanding of the social and organisational themes which govern the nature of communication work for practitioners. Of particular significance is in how the research examines the interpretations of events within the context in which they occur. As this research moves away from the more traditional focus of corporate communication research, it is the first study of its kind to examine the interpretations of communication practitioners within their natural work setting, thereby contributing significantly to the key academic and industry debates in corporate

communication and public relation alike. The significance and relevance of examining practitioners' interpretations also extends to the professional development, and training and education of future communication practitioners, which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 8.

1.4 An overview of the foundations of this research

In Chapter 2, this thesis will show that key academic research has favoured positivist approaches to analysing excellence in communication functions, practitioner roles and the integration of operational processes and departmental functions (Cornelissen, 2000; Schultz, 1996; Dozier et al, 1995, Dozier and Broom, 1995). This research argues that this prior research, whilst valuable in shaping the communications discipline over the last few decades, has inadvertently set up philosophical and methodological boundaries through the promotion of a positivist worldview. This thesis therefore moves away from the traditional positivist approaches in favour of a social constructionist approach which will be explored in Chapter 3. Social constructionism places importance on the thinking (Dervin et al, 2007), use of language (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) and the sensemaking processes (Dervin and Frenette, 2001; Weick, 1979) that shape the lived experience of the communication practitioner. Language, in particular, is central to social constructionism and much discourse analysis focuses on language as the link between interpretation and how the world is created for individuals through their use of a shared language (Burr, 2003). Public relations research dating back to the early 1990s uses a more interpretive approach to understanding the workings of organisational life (see Heath, 2001; Toth and Heath, 1992). In particular, there is an emphasis on examining the rhetoric used in creating and maintaining organisational identities (Ihlen, 2008; Porter, 1992) and what this reveals about the nature of reputation management (Stern, 2006). This new "linguistic turn" (Alvesson and Karreman, 2000) has allowed the communications discipline to move beyond traditional positivist approaches, to embrace a social constructionist viewpoint in researching the diverse aspects of communications work. This research takes this linguistic turn into consideration, and uses a methodology and methods that allows for the analysis of practitioner "talk and text" (Wood and Kroger, 2000), which will be elaborated upon in Chapter 4. In adopting a social constructionist approach, and in

employing a methodology and method that favours the collection of narrative accounts, this research makes a significant contribution to existing methodological debates in both the academic disciplines of corporate communication and public relations.

1.5 An overview of the contributions of this research

The value of this research lies in its contributions to current knowledge, methodology, and policy and practice. This thesis argues that the key debates discussed in Chapter 2, have shaped the current corporate communications landscape through promoting a discourse of “strategic value” which practitioners attempt to apply in their unique working environments. Previous research can therefore be said to represent a normative body of research which is being continually reinforced in three areas of social life. First, the normative research agenda is reinforced through academic literature, second, it is reinforced through the methodologies employed in research and third, it is reinforced through the formal teaching and professional development of communication practitioners. This thesis aims to make contributions to all three of these areas by complementing, and to some extent challenging, existing key debates. The contributions of this research to these three areas have been developed in Chapter 8.

1.6 Definitions and concepts used for this research

The etymological roots of corporate and communication help to us understand the foundations from which the term corporate communication developed and its meaning today. The word “communicate” comes from the Latin *communicare*, meaning “to impart, share, or make common”¹. The noun, “communication” means “something that is communicated by or to or between people or groups”² and the verb means to “pass on...put across...convey, transmit, join or connect”³.

¹ See <http://www.colorado.edu>, accessed 21 April 2008

² See <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>, accessed 29 April 2008

³ See <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>, accessed 29 April 2008

The word “corporate” has an interesting history. Its etymological root is *corpus* which means “body”⁴. As an adjective it means a “collection of individuals acting together” and a group which is “organized and maintained as a legal corporation”.⁵

The combination of definitions for both “corporate” and “communication” emphasise a group of individuals who share or transmit information as one voice. With changes in legislation, today’s meaning of the corporation grants the corporate body a personality, which has subsequently led to an emphasis on the corporation being viewed as a living organism (Morgan, 1986, 2006) that embodies certain aspects of communication (Christensen et al, 2008; Cornelissen, 2008).

The development, growth and formalisation of corporate communication as an academic discipline is relatively recent, and has been steadily gathering importance and momentum since the 1980s (Argenti, 2003; Van Riel, 1995). Corporate communication in its current form has evolved from early notions of “engineering” the consent of publics (Bernays, 1923, 1928, 1955; Lee, 1906), to incorporate aspects of traditional marketing (Kotler and Keller, 2006; Sargeant, 2004; Kotler and Mindak, 1978) and mass communication (McQuail, 1987), and evolved again to include elements of information coordination and management within an organisational setting (Cornelissen, 2004, 2008; Argenti, 2003; Van Riel, 1995). Since the early notions of propaganda espoused by Bernays (1955) and Lee (1906), the public relations industry has given rise to a broader communications industry which now encompasses fields as diverse as public affairs, investor relations, internal communications, advocacy and campaigning, and more recently, corporate social responsibility. Similarly, academic research has considered influences from other disciplines, such as sociology and organisational psychology, to extend existing theory (Schudson, 1997; Grunig, 1992). These early influences, whilst lending depth and breadth to an evolving communications discipline, have resulted in a plethora of definitions about what constitutes and classifies corporate communications. These definitions map the development of corporate communications over the last two decades and are detailed in Table 1.1 below:

⁴ See <http://www.etymonline.com>, accessed 29 April 2008

⁵ See <http://wordnet.princeton.edu>, accessed 29 April 2008

Table 1.1: Definitions of corporate communication

Author	Definition	Emphasis on...
Toth and Trujillo (1987)	A multi faceted process that connects the organization with a variety of publics – internal and external – to its organizational boundaries	...relationship with multiple and separate publics
Blauw (1994 cited in Van Riel 1995)	The integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at all relevant target groups. Each item must convey and emphasise the corporate identity	...integrated activities to produce a consistent image
Van Riel (1995)	An instrument of management by means of which all consciously used forms of internal and external communication are harmonised as effectively and efficiently as possible, so as to create a favourable basis for relationships with groups upon which the company is dependent	...identity, image and corporate brand with the aim of building relationships
Argenti and Forman (2002)	The corporation's voice and the images it projects of itself on a world stage populated by it's various audiences, or what we refer to as its constituents	...the function and process of communication, resulting in tangible outputs, such as reports or news releases
Van Riel in Bronn and Wiig (2002)	The orchestration of all the instruments in the field of organizational identity	...maintaining a positive reputation and identity are central
Argenti (2003)	The way organizations communicate with various groups of people	...communicating to different stakeholders
Cornelissen (2008)	A management function that offers a framework for the effective coordination of all internal and external communication with the overall purpose of establishing and maintaining favourable reputations with stakeholder groups upon which the organization is dependent	...management and coordination of communications with the aim of building reputation, which is different from building relationships
Christensen, Morsing and Cheney (2008)	With its emphasis on total images of the organization, the concept of corporate communications draws on the notions of holism and synergy	...the embodiment of corporate communication components by the organisation. This extends early definitions of the organisation being a "person" (see etymological roots, p7-8)

The definitions in Table 1.1 largely encompass any number of what Argenti (1996) names as communication “sub-disciplines,” such as image and identity, relationship or stakeholder management, or one of the management sub-disciplines, such as management, business or organisational communication (Argenti 1996). Shelby (1993) however acknowledges the lack of consensus amongst scholars on the meaning and function of corporate communication and offers another definition of corporate communication based on existing “contrary descriptors” (1993: 255):

Its locus is collectivities that exist inside and outside organizations. Its focus is intervention, based on both analysis (environmental scanning, for example) and synthesis (comprehensive issues management plans). Its practical grounding is skills and method. (1993: 255)

Such variance in definitions suggests different interpretations of the label “corporate communication” which not only characterise a shifting landscape, but

also reflect the subjectivity that exists in the analysis of the discipline. The influence of other disciplines has on the one hand served to increase the depth and breadth of understanding about minute aspects of communication, and on the other hand, it has served to create an environment of confusion and ambiguity about the nature of communications work (Hutton et al, 2001). Add to this the continually changing nature of the working environment across different communication sectors (Camuffo et al, 2001; Klein, 1996) and reasons for the lack of clarity and consistency about the roles and responsibilities of the communication function become more apparent.

Given the many influences that have come together to form corporate communication, the process of labelling and defining corporate communication can be viewed in numerous ways. For example, corporate communication can be viewed as “a container...transmission, or tool.” (Cheney et al, 2004b: 7). It can be seen as a container whereby it “holds” public relations, marketing, media relations and other related activities (Kovecses, 2002; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). It can also be a conduit, whereby it “transfers thoughts and feelings from person to person” (Axley, 1984: 429. See also Reddy, 1993). Or it can be a tool whereby it has a specific technical remit within a larger communication function, such as when corporate communication is part of corporate marketing (Balmer and Greyser, 2006), or has a specific technical role as part of public relations (Wood, 2006; Toth and Trujillo, 1987). The way in which corporate communication is defined therefore gives us an insight into how corporate communication is viewed by the organisation, i.e. as a composite part of another communication function, or as an umbrella term for other components. The definitions also advocate the institutionalisation of communication across organisations, which give little information on the lived experience of the communication practitioner, or on the nature of communication work beyond that of the likely tasks associated with communication roles.

1.6.1 Components of corporate communication

In addition to the multiple definitions of corporate communications, there remains little consensus about whether corporate communication is part of public relations (Wood, 2006; Toth and Trujillo, 1987), or vice versa. This is largely due to the vastly overlapping responsibilities undertaken by each (Broom et al, 1991). An analysis of key academic and industry literature reveals the extent of this overlap

(Cornelissen, 2008; CIPR, 2005; Argenti, 2003; DTI, 2003; Argenti, 1996; Van Riel, 1995). Through this analysis, traditional public relations and corporate communications activities can be categorised into one or more of the ten components detailed in Table 1.2 below:

Table 1.2: Components of modern corporate communication and public relations

Corporate communication component	Description of likely activities
strategy development	analysing internal and external communication needs writing short, medium and long-term strategy influencing senior management and other key staff
reputation and identity management	developing written and visual concepts that represent the organisation and its values linking the concepts into external communications strategies working with media relations to persuade stakeholders of the positive value of the organisation
advertising and brand management <i>(includes elements of traditional public relations)</i>	developing images and phrases to sell products developing a marketing strategy
media relations <i>(includes elements of traditional public relations)</i>	developing beneficial relationships with print and broadcast media correspondents writing and sending press releases responding to media enquiries
internal communications	linking internal strategy to external strategy writing and sending messages to staff using print and online media
investor relations	communicating to financial investors persuading investors about the benefits of investing in the organisation
government relations/ public affairs	persuading senior government ministers to change legislation in order to benefit your stakeholders/your organisation develop beneficial relationships with key government staff
issues and crisis management <i>(includes elements of traditional public relations)</i>	writing an action plan to be implemented in the event of a crisis working with media relations in the event of an issue making the news advising and briefing senior managers on what to say during a crisis communicating what the organisation is doing during the crisis to all its stakeholders
stakeholder/community relations/corporate social responsibility	communicating the actions of an organisation that affect communities and other stakeholders organising events to gather information about what communities need from organisations persuading senior managers to invest in social and environmental programmes for communities
events management <i>(includes elements of traditional public relations)</i>	designing and implementing events that link to the internal and external communications strategy

Although the components in Table 1.2 represent relatively new terminology within the domain of corporate communication, this terminology has existed as early as the 1950s as part of public relations and marketing discourse, and has been gradually adopted by corporate communication discourse. What the varying modern definitions and multiple components indicate is that not only is corporate

communication understood differently in different organisations, but it is still an emerging discipline with a focus that changes in response to organisational and environmental factors.

1.6.2 Definitions used in this research

Whatever the disputes between practitioners and academics from both the public relations and corporate communication discipline, there remains a clear link between the two bodies of research (Cheney et al, 2004b), each continuing to feed upon and develop the other. Given the clear link between the two bodies of public relations and corporate communication research, and the apparent overlap in perceived responsibilities, it is important to set out the definitions used in this thesis. As a discipline, corporate communication is fairly fluid in terms of where it aligns itself. Some academics would argue that it is a management function (Cornelissen 2008, Argenti 2003, Van Riel, 1995), others that it is part of public relations (Wood, 2006, Toth and Trujillo, 1987). This research takes the view that whilst the two disciplines owe much to each other's salient theories, as well as to those of other communication related disciplines, corporate communication has nevertheless developed sufficiently to encompass the more traditional public relations and stakeholder relations activities under the umbrella of "corporate communication," and therefore does not form part of a "public relations function," but instead often governs it. That said, this particular research contributes to the three key debates which stem largely from early public relations research, and which have helped shape modern corporate communication. These debates centre on practitioner roles, excellence in communication departments and the integration of communication functions and operational procedures. These key debates will be elaborated upon in the Chapter 2, and the contribution of the current research to these debates will be discussed in Chapter 8.

1.7 Structure of thesis and chapter summaries

The thesis comprises eight chapters, beginning with this introduction. This chapter has introduced my interest in the research topic, as well as offering a brief overview of industry-led communication research and prior academic corporate communication research to help contextualise this study. The chapter then outlined

the focus, questions and aims of this study, followed by a brief overview of the foundations and contributions of the study. The final section of this chapter detailed existing definitions and components of corporate communications, followed by the definitions used in this study.

Chapter 2 elaborates on the key enduring debates within public relations and corporate communication disciplines and how they have consequently influenced the nature of corporate communication work in the modern organisation. The chapter outlines these key debates within a historical context and argues that their continued dominance within normative research has marginalised other perspectives in favour of more positivist approaches to examining communications related work.

Chapter 3 then discusses the philosophical foundations of the research as embedded within the social constructionist paradigm, and presents an argument for applying an social constructionist lens to the traditionally positivist oriented discipline of corporate communication research. It then links the philosophical foundation to notions of discourse and sensemaking and advocates that they are central to examining the interpretations of communication practitioners. The chapter concludes by positioning the current research within a body of literature that seeks to “rethink” corporate communications and public relations.

Chapter 4 details the methodology and methods used to gather the data for a study of this kind, specifically, the design, piloting and implementation of online diaries, as well as the use of interviews. The chapter also outlines the coding protocol used to analyse the data within a qualitative framework, as well as organising the initial findings into a table, which show the first order coding and second order themes that are present in practitioners’ written and oral narratives.

Chapter 5 elaborates upon the themes present in practitioners’ narratives. The themes are first contextualised in each of the three organisations and then discussed in detail using illustrative examples from the data. The chapter then brings the themes together, by adapting Dervin and Frenette’s (2001) sensemaking metaphor model, to show how practitioners attempt to make sense of what they experience by “bridging gaps” in understanding, as well as how a number of the themes can be clustered together to reveal two important interpretive repertoires employed by

communication practitioners. This chapter essentially links the coding of data to the higher level discourse analysis in the following two chapters.

Chapter 6 introduces and defines the two interpretive repertoires of centrality and periphery, which are then elaborated upon in chapters 6 and 7. In doing so, the chapter offers a model of movement between the two interpretive repertoires. The chapter then elaborates on the first of the two key repertoires – the repertoire of centrality – using extended diary and interview extracts from the current research data. In elaborating on the repertoire of centrality, it details the discursive characteristics through which the repertoire can be identified.

Chapter 7 continues to explain the model of movement between the interpretive repertoires and presents the second of the repertoires – the repertoire of periphery – also using extended diary and interview extracts from the current research data to illustrate the characteristics which define repertoires of periphery.

Chapter 8 offers a broader discussion of the findings within the context of how these findings contribute to existing academic knowledge, methodological debates, and policy and practice. The chapter then concludes with a summary of the main thesis and limitations of the research, and offers a research agenda for the future, as well as recommendations for policy and practice.

The appendices show the initial press release which went out to CIPR members asking for participants to take part in the research, as well as extracts from interviews and diaries, and copies of *The Independent* articles showing examples of the strategic value discourse. Appendices have been kept to a minimum as anything of note has been included in the body of the thesis.

1.8 In conclusion

The predominant research themes for corporate communication have come to fruition largely through the contributions of public relations, marketing and management scholars. The next chapter provides an historical overview of corporate communication, which includes the key academic discussions that have emerged from public relations, marketing and management disciplines, and how these discussions have contributed to the evolution of corporate communication.

Chapter 2:

Key debates in corporate communication

2.0 Introduction

The following chapter examines the key debates in corporate communication and how they have developed since the 1950s. These debates have been situated in their historical context and are structured around the disciplines of public relations and the evolving corporate communication discipline situated largely within the management literature. The public relations discipline remains dominated by communication practitioner roles theory (Toth et al, 1998; Dozier and Broom, 1995; Broom, 1982), the Excellence theory (Grunig et al, 2002; Dozier et al, 1995) and a continuing debate on the pros and cons of integrating public relations and marketing functions within an organisational setting (Schultz, 1996; Lauzen 1991; Miller and Rose 1994), whilst evolving corporate communication debates have a strong body of research ordered around aspects of organisational and integrated communication (Cornelissen and Lock, 2001; Cornelissen, 2000). As well as understanding how corporate communication has been heavily influenced by early public relations practice (Cheney et al, 2004b), an examination of the historical roots of public relations and corporate communication is useful in understanding the occurrence of particular organisational trends and environmental factors, such as legislation (Argenti, 2006), upon the growth and purpose of the communications function within the larger organisation.

2.1 The historical roots of modern corporate communication

The history of corporate communication belies its importance in the modern, large organisation. Historically, the development of modern corporate communications stems from an amalgamation of practices and theories from public relations, advertising, marketing and more recently, management and human resources (Christensen et al, 2008). More specifically, existing theory can be tracked

back to 1) communication practitioner roles theory, which has identified the activities that communication practitioners undertake (Toth et al, 1998; Dozier and Broom, 1995; Broom, 1982), 2) the “Excellence” theory, which has served to move the public relations discipline into a strategic position within the organisation (Dozier et al, 1995; Grunig et al, 1995, 2002), and 3) the integration of marketing and public relations, traditionally seen as separate, and often competing, disciplines (Kotler and Mindak, 1978). In addition to these debates, there are clear links identified between management, organisational and business communication (Argenti, 1996; Porterfield, 1980) as corporate communication has evolved, which have also placed an importance on the strategic function of communication within the larger organisation (Argenti 1996; Shelby 1993).

Christensen et al (2008) see the historical roots as embedded in the social legitimacy of an organisation and directly influenced by the work of large organisations in the US during the 1920s (2008: 17). Argenti and Forman (2002) place the historical roots with Ivy Ledbetter Lee and the formation of his public relations company in 1904 (2002: 20), but also in the formalising of public relations ideas through the books *Crystallizing Public Opinion* (1923) and *Propaganda* (1928) of Edward L. Bernays (2002: 29, see also Edwards, 2006). What Lee and Bernays shared were ideas which have shaped primarily the practice of public relations, and subsequently the practice of corporate communication (Argenti and Forman, 2002). These ideas and techniques are employed to this day in communication functions within large organisations, such as assessing the “social, political, economic and political climate” (2002: 31), creating specific events to take advantage of “opportune moments”, identifying and targeting messages at “constituents,” using appropriate media channels and considering the ethical stance and reputation of the organisation (2002: 31-35).

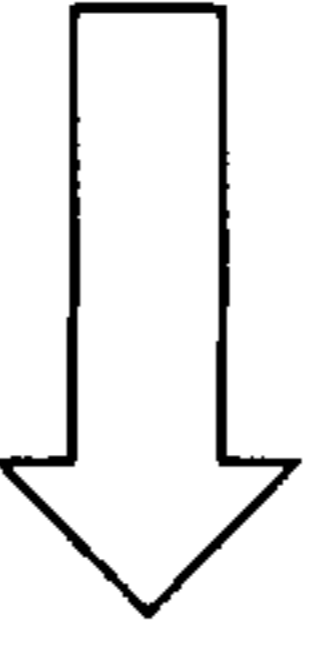
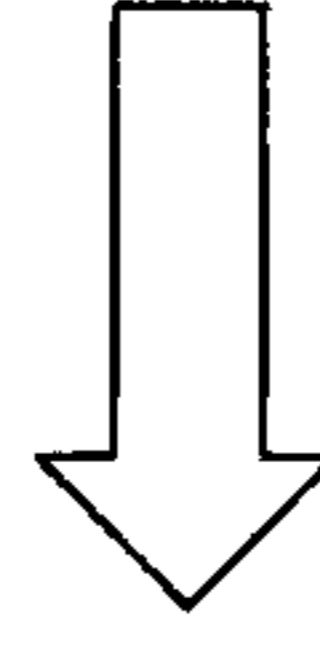
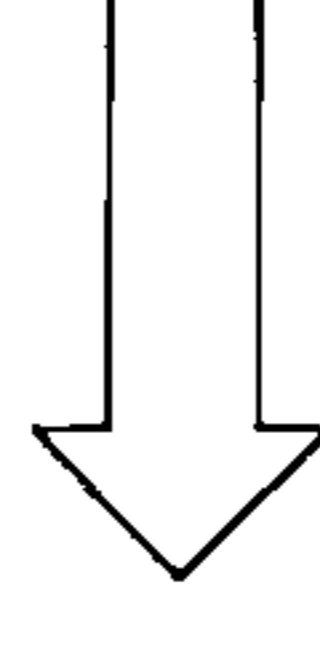
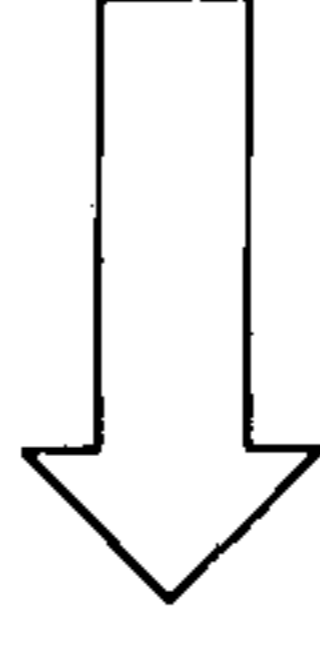
Much is made of Bernays’ notion that “intelligent propaganda” was something to aspire to in order “to control...what otherwise would be controlled disastrously by chance” (Bernays in Olasky, 1984). The word control is interesting here, as control would have to come from the powerful organisations of the day, which would imply that “chance” represented the rest of society; the powerless majority (Laughey, 2007). Yet the supposed good intentions of Bernays are not questioned too deeply and normative debate is happy to credit him, rightly, as one of two founding fathers

of public relations, the other being Ivy Ledbetter Lee (Bronn, 2002). What is not explicit, however, is that these two men founded public relations in the USA. Normative debate makes an assumption in its historical accounts that the roots of public relations lie in recent North American history, partly through paucity in Asian and African research detailing public relations development in the non-Western countries, and partly because much social science research is governed by Western schools of thought (Gunaratne, 2008).

Public relations continued to flourish throughout the early 1900s and became “concerned with the voice and image of big business” (Argenti and Forman, 2002: 17), whilst marketing formed a parallel function to public relations that focussed specifically on targeting and selling products to specific consumers (Kotler et al, 1989). As the birth of public relations through Lee and Bernays has been well documented (Edwards, 2006; Bronn and Wiig, 2002; Ewen, 1996; Olasky, 1984) this historical overview begins in the 1950s and continues through to the present day.

Table 2.1 shows the timeline of normative debates that have helped shape the development of modern corporate communication. The left hand side shows the significant debates from the public relations disciplines, in particular the idea of integrating public relations and marketing functions, and the development of both the practitioner roles theory and the Excellence theory. The right hand side shows the key developments in the corporate communication debate, which focus on integrating the sub-disciplines of management, organisational and business communication and the rise of organisational communication as the preferred labelled practice of communication functions in large organisations. It is worth noting at this stage that the label of corporate communication did not come about until the early 1990’s and as such, the deeper historical roots of corporate communications are embedded within certain areas of management research, hence the title “management and corporate communication debates” is used in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Historical roots of modern corporate communication

Public relations debates	Decade	Management and corporate communication debates
<p>Public relations and marketing remain separate organisational functions, but some links are made:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Marketing should consider using 5 principles of public relations in their strategic planning (Lesly 1959) There is a fundamental difference between public relations and marketing (Kotler and Mindak 1978) Public relations practitioners should be trained in management (Kotler and Mindak 1978) 	<p>1950 - 1970s</p> 	<p>Focus on communication within organisations; operational systems needed to cascade information throughout the organisation, adopted a linear process model of communication:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Workplace communication should measure effectiveness and efficiency (Greenbaum 1974) Systems linked to personnel departments (Kirkpatrick 1972)
<p>New practitioner roles theory:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4 public relations practitioner roles identified (Broom 1982) Beginning of the Excellence Study (Grunig et al, 1985) <p>Corporate communication needs reinventing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need to give greater consideration to language (Toth and Trujillo, 1987) 	<p>1980s</p> 	<p>Integration of business, organisational and management communication debate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management and communication need to integrate (Porterfield 1980) The meaning and status of organisational communication (Lesikar 1981)
<p>Integration of public relations and marketing debate :</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Integration encourages consistency, better relationships with stakeholders and is inevitable (eg Miller and Rose 1994; Schultz 1996) Integration means marketing will subsume the public relations function (eg Lauzen 1991) Practitioner roles theory: Technical and manager roles identified (Dozier and Broom 1995) <p>Excellence Study complete:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 3 spheres of communication excellence highlighted (Dozier et al, 1995) 	<p>1990s</p> 	<p>Definitions of corporate communication beginning to form:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> stakeholder relationship focus (Argenti 1994) Branding and identity focus (Van Riel 1995) Communication sub-disciplines defined (Argenti 1996) PR has "matured" into corporate communication (Kitchen 1997)
<p>Existing debates continue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearer definition of "integration" needed (Cornelissen 2000) <p>Rethinking of previous debates:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Power and public relations (Edwards, 2006) Role of public relations in society and democracy (McKie and Munshi, 2008) Democracy and technology (Heibert, 2004) Narrative accounts of public relations expertise (Pieczka, 2007) 	<p>2000s</p> 	<p>Aspects of organisational and integrated communication gains even more prominence:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The role of communication in the modern organisation (Cheney et al, 2004b) Corporate communication reinforced as a management discipline (Cornelissen, 2008) Technology has a significant impact on corporate communication (Argenti 2006; Cheney et al 2004b) Embodying corporate communication (Christensen et al, 2008)

Whilst public relations and marketing remained separate functions, Lesly (1959) made the first connection between these two functions. As early as 1959, Phillip Lesly detailed five principles of public relations which, when read in the context of today's public relations and corporate communication literature, seemed

to prophesise current academic debates on managing and executing large scale communication initiatives within organisations. His five principles were to:

1. “Determine what image the company and the product have with their publics;
2. Organise the sales program to use all the marketing tools;
3. Set realistic goals, budgets and timescales;
4. Make the concepts of modern public relations basic to the thinking of the entire marketing operation; and
5. Direct the public relations concept throughout the company”
(Lesly, 1959: 5-6)

As the president of his own public relations company, he commented on a shift in the “whole civilization’s outlook on life” to more “psychological satisfactions” such as the “emotional fulfilment of the personality” (1959:1). Consequently, this required marketing to consider the use of more subtle techniques to influence target groups – techniques traditionally in the domain of public relations. He also developed Bernays’ notion of propaganda to include manipulation, defining the essence of public relations as “influence[ing] people without their knowing they are being influenced” (1959: 4) in such a way that they feel they own the idea and do not realise they have been subtly manipulated. Through his five principles of public relations, he advocated the inclusion of “softer” public relations techniques into marketing programmes, an argument which was later elaborated upon by Kotler and Mindak in 1978.

The seminal text of Kotler and Mindak (1978) was the first to examine the nature of the divide that exists between marketing and public relations. Kotler and Mindak’s (1978) own historical overview shows how marketing essentially developed from the need to sell, with advertising and market research quickly being adopted by the marketing discipline. Running parallel to this was the evolution of public relations as a separate discipline (though not as a component of marketing as Lesly had envisaged), which built upon Bernay’s notion of “propaganda” to evolve into a force for persuasion and change. Public relations was influenced by theories of mass communication, which sought to inform, create continuity of messages, entertain and mobilise communities into action (McQuail, 1987).

Around the same time, management scholars were also beginning to acknowledge communication as an important factor to organisational success, but

there remained a debate about “whether the organization is a function of communication, or whether communication is a function of the organization” (Porterfield, 1980: 15). The influence of management theory on aspects of organisational communication was instrumental in extending traditional public relations debates into the management discipline. This is based on historical and political reasons (Argenti 1996; Shelby 1993). Argenti (1996) places the historical and political development of corporate communication within organisations as early as the 1970s, in response to changing attitudes and external pressures. Regulation played a huge role in the drive toward transparency (Argenti, 1996), which marked a shift in attitude about how accountable organisations are to their customers and the community within which they are located. In the initial stages, corporate communications borrowed heavily from its close links with public relations (Cheney and Christensen, 2001) and the tactical nature of public relations, with practitioners acting as buffers and “boundary spanners” (Grunig et al, 2002) between top management and the media, activists and even their own staff. Courting the media or being proactive was not the optimum management trend at the time, with management advocating keeping information internal and within a closed loop. Rather than take on staff with skills to deal with external pressures, the trend was to go outside for help, creating a boom in external public relations agency culture (Argenti, 1996). These agencies positioned themselves as “experts” who could shape communication functions on behalf of organisations. Arguably, the growth of public relations consultancy marked the legitimising of communication “expertise” which has become the subject of much research about the nature of “spin” within public relations literature (Davies, 2008; Argenti, 2003; Ewen, 1996).

What Table 2.1 illustrates is that although modern corporate communication draws from more than one discipline, it remains very much dominated by European and North American schools of thought. Broom (1982), and Dozier and Broom (1995), produced the salient models on practitioner roles theory that emerged from the North American schools, which continue to dominate public relations discourse today. Similarly, Van Riel (1995) was considered to be the founding father of the European school for corporate communication, introducing management, marketing and organisation communication as the components of corporate communication, as well as emphasising branding and identity.

The table also shows that the historical roots of modern corporate communication can be seated within the disciplines of public relations, marketing and management. The specific contributions of these disciplines to the development and growth of corporate communication need further inspection in order to fully understand the nature of the debates that have helped shape modern corporate communication.

2.2 Communication practitioner roles theory

In the 1980s, public relations was little more than press relations, staffed by former journalists with a strong network of media contacts. As organisations developed more complex relationships with their customers, public relations assumed a greater role in the organisation by managing the messages between a company and their growing number of stakeholders. Marketing functions, by contrast, assumed less responsibility for dealing with stakeholders directly, other than to market a product or service. Wood (2006) argues that at the same time there was also a conscious effort on the part of communication practitioners to “disassociate themselves from spin-doctors” (2006: 540). Also important at this time was the work of Broom (1982) and subsequent research into the roles undertaken by communication practitioners (Dozier and Broom, 1995). This spawned one of the most enduring debates and associated research in public relations (Moss et al, 2005; DeSanto and Moss, 2004; Moss and Green, 2001; Moss et al, 2000; Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis, 1999; Hogg and Doolan, 1999; Toth et al, 1998; Leichty and Springston, 1996; Lauzen, 1995, Lauzen and Dozier, 1992; Culbertson, 1991). Roles in this context can be defined as an “organized set of behaviours identified with a position” (Mintzberg, 1990: 168).

The role of the communication practitioner has been the subject of much research over the last two decades, with scholars choosing to critically analyse the specifics of the practitioner role, such as the operational remit (Moss et al, 2005) perceived power and status (White and Vercic, 2001), professional development (Berkowitz and Hristodoulakis, 1999; L’Etang, 1999), role boundaries affected through integration (Lauzen, 1991, 1995) and gender disparities (Weaver-Lariscy et al, 1994; Toth and Grunig, 1993). The dominant practitioner roles theory labels the

individual practitioner as either a “technician” or “manager” (Dozier and Broom, 1995; Broom, 1982) terminology that has come to represent not only a generic skill set, but also a position within a team hierarchy. However, a recent exploratory study conducted by the author shows that these dominant labels mask the vastness of the role (Ashra, 2006). These dominant practitioner labels were developed as a synthesis of Broom’s (1982) earlier research into communication practitioner roles. Table 2.2 details Broom’s (1982) original practitioner labels, their definitions and the labels they were subsequently given by Dozier and Broom (1995). Table 2.2 also includes two additional roles – the agency profile (Toth et al, 1998) and the boundary spanner (Grunig et al, 2002; Dozier et al, 1995), both of which are seen to overlap with the practitioner role labels attributed by Dozier and Broom (1995).

Table 2.2: Definitions of practitioner roles

Broom’s (1982) practitioner roles	Definition of practitioner role	Developed by Dozier and Broom (1995) into...
expert prescriber - overlaps with agency profile (Toth et al, 1998)	an expert acting in an advisory role to top management/ counselling and research	...manager
communication facilitator - overlaps with boundary spanner (Grunig et al, 1995)	concerned with moving information efficiently throughout the organisation giving and receiving information from the environment to top management	...manager
problem-solving process facilitator	works directly with top management on strategic issues	...manager
the communications technician	roles that called upon the use of specific technical skills, such as writing or design.	...technician

Broom (1982) first identified the roles of the *expert prescriber* (someone who is regarded as an expert and acts in an advisory role to top management), *communication facilitator* (concerned with moving information efficiently throughout the organisation) and *problem-solving process facilitator* (works directly with top management on strategic issues). A fourth role identified, *the communications technician*, was used to describe roles that called upon the use of specific technical skills, such as writing or designing. Dozier and Broom (1995) later suggested that the expert prescriber, communication facilitator and problem-solving process facilitator roles were interchangeable and categorised these three practitioner roles under the all-encompassing label of the *manager* (Dozier and Broom 1995). The remaining role of the communications technician became known as the

technician. These two role labels have since become central to research into the influence of the communication practitioner upon senior management (DeSanto et al, 2007; DeSanto and Moss, 2004; Dozier and Broom, 1995; Dozier et al, 1995; Lauzen, 1995) and the value that a communications function may add to the organisations' "bottom-line" (Gregory and Watson, 2008; Watson and Noble, 2007).

The nature of the technical and the managerial roles has been the subject of analysis with many scholars, with extensions of these two roles including the "agency profile" (Toth et al, 1998: 158) and "boundary spanner" (Grunig et al, 2002; Dozier et al 1995). The agency profile role does not include any of the technical activities, but focuses instead on activities such as counselling and research (Toth et al 1998). Although cited as an additional role, Toth et al (1998) acknowledge that the agency profile "seemed more like Broom's expert prescriber role" (1998: 158), suggesting that there is an overlap among roles identified by scholars to this day, as well as an inerrant subjectivity in labelling.

Boundary spanning suggests a process that encompasses many departments and/or stakeholders, with an emphasis on giving and receiving information as a representative of the communication team. Practitioners engaging as boundary spanners are "individuals within the organization who frequently interact with the organization's environment and who gather, select, and relay information from the environment to decision-makers in the dominant coalition" (White and Dozier, 1992 cited in Lauzen, 1995: 290). This positions the practitioner as a conduit, who enables information to pass from one person to another (Axley, 1984; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

The recent Survey of the Company by The Economist (2006) also adds another definition into the mix – that of "knowledge mules" or "brokers" (2006: 16). Knowledge mules or brokers "carry ideas from one corporate silo to another and thereby spark off new ideas" (2006: 16). In light of having to carry information to multiple stakeholders, the definition of a knowledge mule may be more fitting for communication practitioners in today's modern organisation. There is also potential for further research into whether the term can be used legitimately to apply to the entire communication team as, arguably, the procedural activities and strategic impact of communication teams cut across all areas of an organisation (Cornelissen, 2008; Argenti, 2003).

Although questioned by many (Wrigley, 2002; Toth et al, 1998; Creedon, 1991), Dozier and Broom (1995) argue for the continued use of the two role labels, as they detail where particular activities inevitably lie with the communications team, making the labels essentially predictive in nature. The labels allow us to categorise practitioners into either technicians or managers with ease. Such categorisation rests on assumptions about the boundaries of each role, as well as the skills of individuals, and relies on a prescriptive approach to categorising role types. Findings from the author's recent exploratory study (Ashra, 2006) indicate just how varied the scope of the role is and that the components that constitute the role of the communication practitioner, at all levels, can merge or span traditional technical and managerial categories. Dozier and Broom (1995) do, however, acknowledge the inherent overlap and state that "enacting one role does not preclude enacting the other role" (1995: 5), but it is the frequency with which this happens and the circumstances which trigger this dual enactment that has yet to be acknowledged.

The study of practitioner roles theory, with particular emphasis upon the causal relationship between environment, action and reaction is central to understanding how practitioners perceive their role and the events which shape their interpretations (Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Burr, 2003) within their daily work, yet existing practitioner roles theory stops short of making this connection. For example, Dozier and Broom (1995) do not state whether during their research, practitioners were given the opportunity to categorise themselves into roles, and if so, if there was a marked difference in how practitioners interpreted their roles in relation to the researchers' categorisation. This raises questions about first and second order categorisation, who does the categorising and how practice is labelled through theory. As valid and influential as Dozier and Broom's (1995) practitioner roles theory is, the relationship between events and how practitioners make sense of these events has been omitted from their original research, and subsequent inquiry by other academics.

Much normative research has served to perpetuate an activity based logic, whereby roles are a collection of activities and tasks to be completed when an individual is engaged in a position which is clearly labelled, for example, as a "communications manager" or "information officer." Such research places the practitioner in a relatively passive role, devoid of a personality. There is,

nevertheless, a growing body of research which attempts to gain an insight into the characteristics which are embodied by a successful communication practitioner (Gregory, 2008, 2006; Moss, 2005; Moss et al, 2000). However, this growing body of research comes with its own set of limitations, which will now be elaborated below.

2.2.1 Practitioner personalities

A growing component of roles research looks at the person enacting the role of the communication practitioner, in an effort to define the precise characteristics which make them successful in their role (Levine, 2008; Moss, 2005; DeSanto and Moss, 2004). In doing so, this research relies on quantitative approaches to define aspects of practitioners' personalities, their results being positioned as an extension of existing practitioner roles theory. Whilst a study of the characteristics of a successful communication practitioner is interesting in itself, the research in question favours survey methodology and semi-structured interviews to illicit rich information on the dynamics and conflicts of human emotion and enactment, which is then "quantified" through scales (Levine, 2008). This raises concerns about how human characteristics are viewed as variables on a scale which invariably de-contextualises that particular characteristic. The process of quantifying human characteristics, on the whole, serves to reduce "personality" down to its constituent parts, thereby omitting the dynamism, internal conflicts and contradictions which feature as part of the sensemaking process of the individual whilst engaged in that role.

Researching personality traits and other characteristics is not altogether new in communication related disciplines. For example, in organisational communication literature we see the influence of Weber's "charismatic authority" attributed to visionary leaders (Cheney et al, 2004b: 29). In Cheney et al's (2004b) critique of researching charismatic authority, the same concerns exist as to "how to capture some of the spirit, energy and dynamism" (2004b: 29) of working life without de-contextualising the notion of charisma.

The inclusion of practitioner personalities as part of the normative debate, whilst acknowledging that certain traits are more prevalent in successful communication practitioners, nevertheless excludes the interpretive and

sensemaking processes of practitioners from normative enquiry. This is particularly worrying when we consider just how much space practitioner roles theory has been given within normative debate and how influential it has become in shaping the practice of existing and future practitioners. To omit the interpretive and sensemaking processes of communication practitioners is therefore a great oversight on the part of normative research and this thesis aims to begin the process of addressing that imbalance.

2.2.2. Gender and the communication practitioner

A recent CEBR (2005) report shows that the communication industry is a predominantly female profession. Whilst this is initially encouraging for female practitioners, research by Cline et al (1986), Toth et al (1998) and Wrigley (2002) tells us that the positions of power are filled predominantly by men, highlighting the paradox that exists in spite of the “increased feminization of public relations” (Wrigley 2002: 31). This raises concerns about the role of men and women within the communication industry, not least because such unspoken segregation of roles occurring within the workplace risks the reputation of the industry as a whole. Organisations may not openly discriminate, but there are factors within an organisation that perpetuate a “glass ceiling,” (Wrigley, 2002) albeit unintentionally.

Radical feminist theory suggests that the status quo is built and maintained by men and that factors such as gender role socialisation and historical precedence help to perpetuate the status quo (Wrigley, 2002). Liberal feminist theory is more forgiving of the status quo and asks us to perceive gender differences and role socialisation as advantageous to the individual (Wrigley, 2002). It offers a long-term vision to replace gender disparity at senior management level “through attrition” when, Wrigley argues, “women will replace men in power in increasing numbers” (2002: 46). However, the vision comes with no clear strategy for how to move this forward, other than to “look for clues in industries where women have done especially well” (2002: 50) and does not fully consider the extent of socio-economic influences.

The feminist paradigm also reveals that men are more likely to be groomed for promotion, allowing them to relinquish the ‘technical’ side of their role, such as editing or writing, in favour of learning business and strategic skills to help gain

promotion. Women, on the other hand, take on managerial roles *in addition* to their technical tasks, whilst formally engaged in largely technical roles (Wrigley, 2002; Toth et al, 1998). Toth et al (1998) make the link in their research between gender, role and salary. A manager is more likely to have a higher salary than a technician, and women are more likely to be technicians than managers, meaning they inevitably earn less (Toth et al, 1998). Managers are also more likely to be included in the decision making process alongside senior managers, inevitably excluding the female practitioner from the decision-making process (Wrigley, 2002; Toth et al, 1998; Dozier et al, 1995). These results are consistent in spite of the length of service or experience of women, suggesting a traditional gender bias in favour of men.

Toth et al's (1998) research came at an important time for the profession, as it highlighted trends that could be attributed to the downturn in economy, resulting in the downsizing of the communication teams (Toth et al, 1998). Although the socio-economic changes of the 1990s are not fully explored, the research touched upon an important factor, namely that women are still "doing it all" (Wrigley 2002: 49) and are working longer hours than men (CEBR, 2005). This places increasing importance upon critically analysing the reasons for this power imbalance.

2.2.3 The limitations of practitioner roles theory

The continued influence of practitioner roles theory points to its undoubted value within the discipline of public relations. However, it comes with its own set of limitations which, amongst other issues, serve to hinder the boundaries of normative research. Whilst it is very good at identifying the minutiae of tasks and activities which make up a role, it omits the human element of negotiation and interpretation of events that occur during these tasks and activities. This has made practitioner roles theory reductionist in nature. A reductionist approach may give us attributes or component parts, but it does not give us a "rounded" or "integrated" version of the role (Mintzberg, 1994). This study instead concentrates on how the constituent parts are held together through the interpretive process and the importance of that interpretation. Furthermore, the roles themselves are generically labelled, and are essentially predictive in nature, representing a broad skill set and also a position within a team hierarchy. The function of roles theory remains in predicting types of activities and relies on labelling which does not allow for much latitude or flexibility

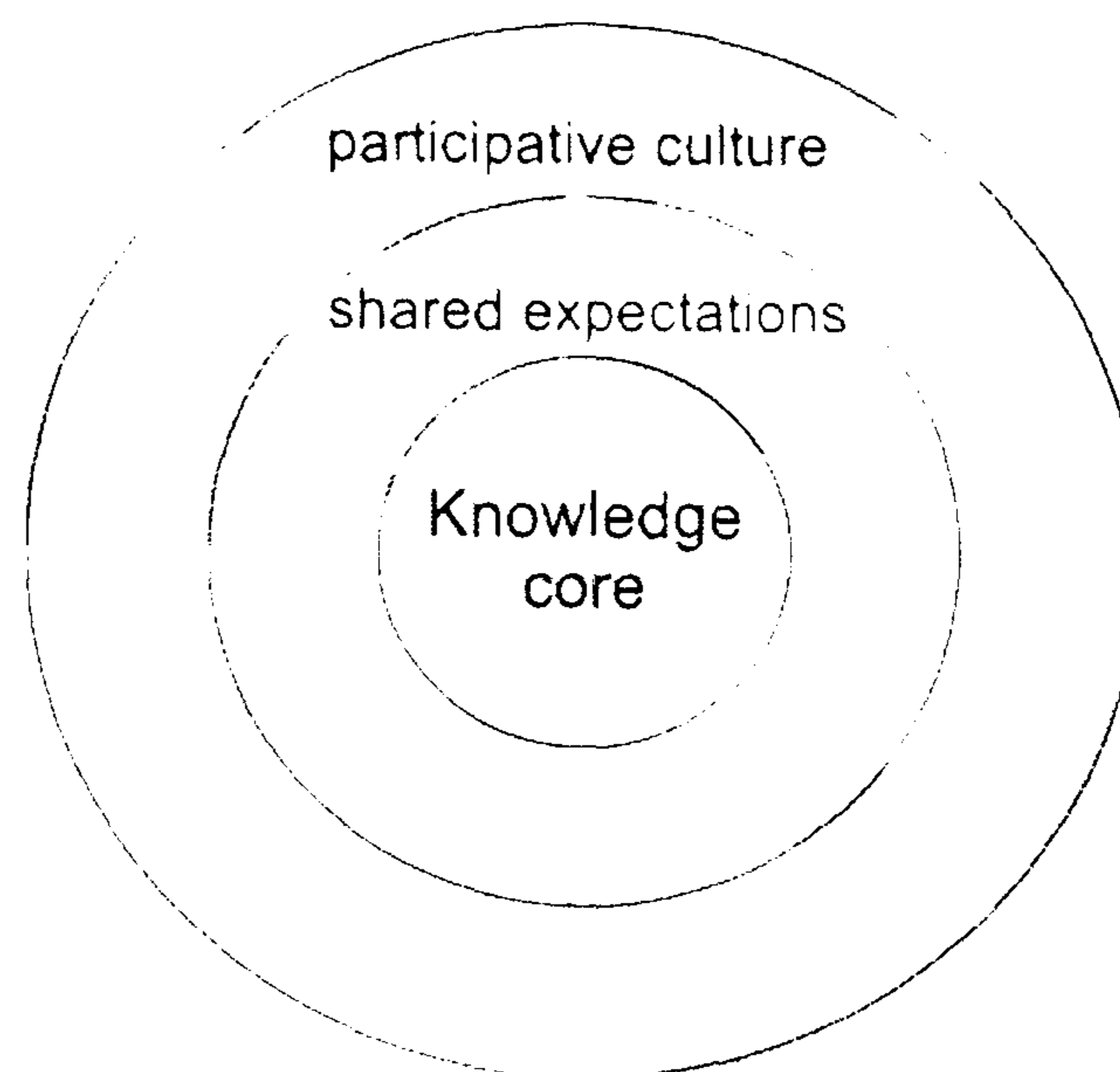
between the labels and their associated skill sets. Additionally, practitioner roles theory takes a linear view of professional development, where the technician is at the bottom of the hierarchy and the manager is at the top, and also places the management role as something to be aspired.

Within the public relations debate, practitioner roles theory is one of three influential theories which impacts upon the workings of the modern communications function. The second influential theory comes from the Excellence study which is linked closely to the role of the practitioner.

2.3 Communication and the Excellence theory

A study of corporate communication would not be complete without a discussion of the seminal research of Dozier et al (1995) and their “Excellence Study” which presents the findings of a 10-year study into the factors that create “excellence” in public relations teams. Practitioner roles theory is embedded in what Dozier et al (1995) call the “three spheres of communication excellence” (1995: 10) which are the: 1) knowledge base of the practitioner, 2) shared expectations of the practitioner and the senior management team and 3) participative organisational culture (Dozier et al, 1995). The dominance of this research, with its emphasis on a programmatic approach, has influenced subsequent research into the strategic importance of public relations (Cornelissen, 2008; Argenti, 1996, 2003; Moss et al, 2000; Van Riel, 1995). Figure 2.1 shows the three spheres of communication excellence.

Figure 2.1: The 3 spheres of communication excellence

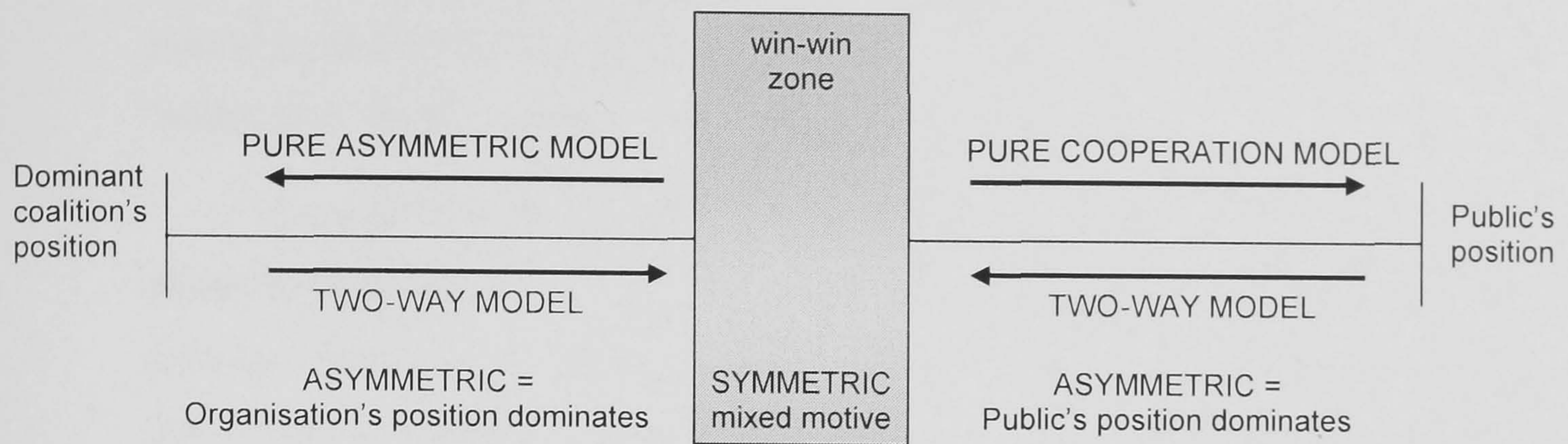


Source: adapted from Dozier et al (1995:10)

2.3.1 Sphere one: the core knowledge of a practitioner

Core knowledge is created and held both within the individual, and collectively within the team, forming a strategic, practical and historical body of knowledge. This knowledge is based not only on the number of years in education and experience, but also on the models and processes that practitioners are formally taught, understand and use to execute communication strategies. The research therefore places great importance on the learned processes and models that form practitioner knowledge. Two-way symmetrical practice is seen as one such important model for “excellent” communication practice and therefore an essential ingredient of core knowledge. Symmetric and asymmetric communication models govern the flow of communication and are referred to as the dominant communication models that exist within larger organisations. Figure 2.2 illustrates the symmetrical model as two-way practice.

Figure 2.2: Model of symmetry as two-way practice



Source: Dozier et al (1995: 48)

The process most advocated by scholars (Dozier et al, 1995; Grunig et al, 2002) is the two-way symmetrical model, which bears a resemblance to open system theory (Cheney et al, 2004b), and has been identified as a model that is aspired to by practitioners, but not yet executed through lack of knowledge and management buy-in (Grunig et al, 2002). The advantage of the symmetrical model is that it presents a negotiating area for participants that can be mutually beneficial and potentially offers a “win-win” scenario (Dozier et al 1995: 48). The space given over to a “win-win” scenario in the two-way model comes with its own meaning. An example of a win-win scenario is well illustrated by the negotiations that occur between pressure groups and organisations. Murphy (1991, cited in Grunig et al, 1995) describes this type of relationship as “mixed motive” public relations. In a “mixed-motive” game (Dozier et al, 1995: 47), participants willing to negotiate are described as “cooperative antagonists, [who are] looking for a compromise around an issue in which true differences exist between parties” (Dozier et al 1995: 48). Murphy (1991) suggests that “most public relations practitioners have mixed motives. They serve both as advocates for their organisations and as mediators between the organisation and its strategic publics” (Murphy, 1991, cited in Grunig et al 1995: 170), which is a close description of boundary spanning, but also reprises the conduit nature of practitioner roles.

Grunig et al (1995) argue that organisations using a symmetrical model to communicate tend to have a greater level of participation with their stakeholders, whereas an organisation that uses asymmetrical models to communicate with its

publics may be seen as manipulative and distant (1995: 185). The word itself - *symmetrical* – implies an equal power balance in a relationship, which hides individual and group agendas within a highly categorised and prescriptive model (McKie and Munshi, 2007).

Asymmetrical models, by contrast, are designed to impart information without asking for information in return. *Press agency/publicity* and *public information* are processes that sit within this asymmetrical model, as they are based on the one-way flow of communication. Grunig et al (1995) note that “organizations seem to practice several of the models together, and the press agency model is most popular” (1995: 170). This presents us with a more empirical picture of the type of communication flow that is favoured as practice in organisations, as opposed to the symmetrical model which is advocated by normative research.

Grunig et al (1995) ask some important cultural and organisational questions about the conditions that are conducive to excellence in communication. The limitation they themselves identify is that the models presented are western models of communication (Gunaratne, 2008), which warns against an underlying danger, already recognised by Boton (1992), that “practitioners from Western countries often impose the assumptions of their culture on public relations practice in other countries” (cited in Grunig et al 1995: 165).

In addition to an understanding of essential models and processes, strategic knowledge, planning, research and financial acumen are crucial in building the foundations of core knowledge (Dozier et al, 1995), particularly if communication practitioners and their teams want senior management to see that their efforts add value to the organisation (Moss et al, 2005). The implication here is that the traditional response of relying on technical expertise is not enough for excellent communication management. Although technical skills are essential to execute a strategy, using only technical skills “lacks a sense of direction” (Dozier et al 1995: 59). The process of putting out press releases is a reactive approach that is done in a “witless manner” (1995: 59). These “witless” approaches are therefore seen to lack vision, direction and any thought or planning about the purpose of the messages and which relationships will be affected as a result.

For Dozier et al (1995) strategic knowledge is therefore at the very core of communication excellence. However, this raises concerns about the way in which knowledge is presented. In the excellence study, knowledge is portrayed as a gap that needs to be filled (Dervin and Frenette, 2001) and where strategic knowledge, planning skills, research skills and business acumen act as a tick-list of competencies that need to be acquired before “excellence” is achieved. This therefore presents knowledge as finite, and views the people “needing” this knowledge, as passive containers that need filling with the “right ingredients” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This presents philosophical problems in how practitioners are viewed and their capacity for learning, as learning takes place in all areas of one’s life, is incremental and is acquired through “real world” experience (Robson, 2002). Moreover, a singular core of knowledge detaches the communication practitioner from their natural context and fails to acknowledge the interaction and meaning making that occurs collectively whilst working with their team members, consequently forming a collective body of core knowledge. The notion of a body of knowledge shared through a network of people is akin to Hutchins and Klausen’s (1998) “socially distributed cognition” where understanding comes from a “complex network” (1998, cited in Cheney et al, 2004b: 55). Learning and the acquisition of knowledge in this study is therefore viewed as infinite, continual and iterative, notions which are not represented in the excellence study.

2.3.2 Sphere two: shared expectations

Shared expectations refer to the expectations that senior management have of communication practitioners, and vice versa (Dozier et al, 1995). This places an importance upon relationships and the ability to influence. When considering levels of influence and power, many scholars refer to the relationship that practitioners have with the “dominant coalition” (Wood, 2006; Grunig et al, 2002; Moss et al 2000; Dozier et al 1995). The dominant coalition are a “group of individuals in organizations with the power to set directions” (Dozier et al, 1995: 14). Such individuals are not necessarily the formal members of the senior management team, suggesting that inclusion of someone is not necessarily based on the role, but on their relationship and other factors, such as charisma or credibility (Moss et al, 2000).

The importance of shared expectations is articulated by Lauzen (1995), who observes that a mismatch in values between communication practitioners and senior management may mean that the entire communication team is perceived as “poorly managed” (1995: 295). In addition, if the team will not accept ideas from other departments in the organisation, particularly from those who are considered part of the dominant coalition, the communication team may be seen as “too narrow” (1995: 295), which means that strategic and operational activities may be handed to someone else, resulting in encroachment of one team over another (Lauzen, 1991, 1995). This observation emphasises just how important it is for practitioners to align themselves with the values of the dominant coalition, as when “practitioners are isolated from decision making, public relations becomes a low level function” (1995: 290).

Lauzen (1995) argues that the closeness a practitioner develops to a dominant coalition is directly related to the values that they share as a group. The greater the number of shared values, the more likely practitioners are to engage in a “strategic issue diagnosis,” meaning there is less likelihood of encroachment occurring (1995: 287). Moreover, it is the values of the dominant coalition, and not the values of organisational functions, that permeate throughout the organisation, ensuring that it is the teams whose “values are perceived to be congruent with those of top management that will possess power” (Enz, 1988: 284).

Moss et al (2000) confirm that practitioners are more likely to be part of the decision making process when they demonstrate broader business knowledge and are able to show a “contribution to the bottom-line” (2000: 298). By demonstrating broad business knowledge and becoming part of the decision-making process, practitioners are then more likely to influence, which in turn increases their credibility (2000: 304) and may affect their ultimate inclusion within the dominant coalition. Lauzen (1995) calls this “intra-organisational power,” which is key to determining how practitioners participate in issues management and strategic issue diagnosis.

Influence and active engagement in the decision making process is an important area of research (Moss et al, 2000; Dozier and Broom, 1995; Lauzen, 1995) and has been seen to affect the perceived value and impact of the communication team in the eyes of senior managers. Alignment of shared

expectations is therefore critical to achieving access to and support from the dominant coalition, as well as increasing individual and team status. It would be interesting to note what happens when practitioners do not share the same values as their dominant coalition, but allow others to believe that they do share the same values. Does this then become an act of deception?

The ability to influence using core knowledge places great importance upon the relationship between practitioners and their managers, as it helps negotiate and form shared experiences. More importantly, these relationships will change over time, meaning that practitioners may operate in a state of flux (Culbertson, 1991), that relationships may have to be constantly negotiated and re-negotiated and that external influences may not be fully anticipated. The interpretive and sensemaking processes that practitioners undergo during negotiation and alignment of values are therefore an important aspect of shared expectations, yet the three sphere model of the excellence study omits this vital element.

2.3.3 Sphere three: participative organisational culture

The culture of an organisation has a significant impact not only on the role and status of the practitioner, but also on the relationships that are built and played out amongst employees across the organisation as a whole. In the three spheres of communication excellence, the organisational culture forms the outer layer that encompasses the core of knowledge and the middle layer of shared experience (Dozier et al, 1995).

The values of an organisation play an important role in laying the foundations of cultural traits that are both implicit and explicit, but where explicit values may not necessarily represent implicit values. Ott (1989, cited in Lauzen, 1995) notes that the cultural paradigm “assumes that many organizational behaviours and decisions are almost predetermined by the patterns of basic assumptions existing in the organisation” (1995: 288). With these basic assumptions comes a “negotiated order” (Strauss et al, 1963, cited in Lauzen 1995: 289) that becomes “its set of rules, understandings and working arrangements that allow it to function.” (Lucus, 1987, cited in Lauzen 1995: 289).

The symmetrical and asymmetrical models noted in the core knowledge sphere are closely linked to participative and authoritarian organisational cultures

respectively. Authoritarian cultures have more traditional command and control structures with “power rooted in formal authority” (Dozier et al 1995: 77). Participative cultures, by contrast, have their power rooted in the group, as the consensus on decisions brings group ownership, which increases their power base.

As Grunig et al (1995) note, it is important to have senior management buy in for a participative, two-way symmetrical model to operate in the organisation. Senior management buy-in is also more likely to result in the communication team contributing more in the eyes of the dominant coalition, which in turn means that the team adds more value to the organisation. The organisational culture therefore matters in that it has the potential to guide employees in fulfilling their role as organisational capital (Hindle, 2006: 8).

Grunig et al (1995) identify five important indicators of organisational culture and shared experience, in which professional communication teams can excel. Organisations that support and understand their communication needs tend to have 1) participative and 2) organic cultures, as well as 3) symmetrical communication systems. They are also seen to 4) value communication and are 5) open to ideas from outside of their organisation, in particular, from pressure groups and other outside agencies (1995: 164).

2.3.4 The limitations of Excellence theory

Whilst the outer sphere acknowledges the importance of organisational culture, it fails to recognise the interaction between the cultural and human paradigms and how events are interpreted within the context of the organisation’s culture, both by the individual and within formal and informal team membership. This study moves beyond the Excellence theory by revealing what practitioners’ interpretations indicate about core knowledge, shared expectations and engagement in organisational culture.

The third influential debate stemming from both the public relations and corporate communication discipline is the debate surrounding integration. This is organised around two areas; the first is the integration of public relations and marketing functions and the second is the integration of communication sub-disciplines which is situated within the management discipline and focuses largely on organisational communication processes.

2.4 Issues of integration

2.4.1. The integration of public relations and marketing

Debate in the 1990s was dominated not only by practitioner roles theory, but also by an intense debate about the future of public relations and marketing disciplines, with “integration” being heralded as the way forward, largely in response to protecting both functions against the economic downturn of the 1980s. In order to fully understand the debate about integration, it is first necessary to understand the distinctions and similarities that exist between public relations and marketing. The distinctions lie in the evolution of each discipline, with marketing being used essentially to sell products and services to consumers and public relations being used to persuade and inform target audiences (Kotler and Mindak, 1978). This distinction emphasises the functional element of marketing, whereas Hutton (1996) emphasises the relational element of public relations, in that public relations assumes the management of relationships with all stakeholders. Broom et al (1991) also emphasise the “fundamentally different philosophies” (1991: 219) within which the disciplines are rooted, yet also acknowledge that similarities exist between the disciplines through the shared skill set of practitioners; their understanding of mass media, their training in defining, targeting and forming messages to specific audiences and their use of techniques and processes (Broom et al, 1991), to name a few examples. Such “domain similarity” encourages “interdependence” (Cornelissen and Harris 2004: 246), a term that is arguably a catalyst for debates about integration.

Integration, although readily accepted by most academics in the 1980s and 1990s (Schultz, 1996; Miller and Rose, 1994; Kotler and Mindak, 1978), has its critics (Grunig et al, 1995; Lauzen, 1993). Academic debate was quick to espouse the virtues of integration, based on the assumption that such change would be beneficial to both functions. The “inevitability of integration” that Schultz (1996) writes of constitutes a number of factors which have gained credibility as arguments in favour of integrated communication:

- 1. Integration is necessary to better manage stakeholder groups.**

Working with stakeholders presents more of a challenge for modern

organisations as the boundaries between trustee, customer, consumer, employee and activist are much more fluid (Argenti et al, 2005; Scholes and Clutterbuck, 1998). Given the complexity of these relationships, integration of public relations and marketing has been embraced as the strategic and operational alternative to managing the often overlapping relationships between these groups (Cornelissen, 2004; Argenti, 2003). It is also argued that integration aids relationship building between these functions and with external stakeholders, which is particularly important given the rise of corporate social responsibility programmes and the need to be a “good corporate citizen” (Scholes and Clutterbuck 1998: 228).

2. **Integration is necessary to maintain a consistent company image.** In light of such scrutiny by stakeholders over the working practices, accountability, ethics, financial dealings, external relationships and other collaborations of the modern company, identity and image have become increasingly important for the organisation (Christensen et al, 2008; Argenti et al, 2005). Scholes and Clutterbuck (1998) argue that implementing an integrated approach to communication ensures that the entire organisation has the same reference point when dealing with their respective clients, thereby minimising the risk of misinterpretation and conflicting messages to stakeholders.
3. **Integration is necessary for personal and organisational survival.** If practitioners are to maintain or increase their status within their companies, they will have to learn additional skills to help them maintain their position within their organisation. Integration is an opportunity for the two disciplines to stop “[bickering] over resources or strategies” (Kotler and Mindak 1978: 13) and instead “grow and garner respect” (Miller and Rose 1994: 15). Miller and Rose (1994) emphasise that outside forces, such as technological advances (Schultz 1996) and the change in client needs (Cornelissen and Lock, 2001), will mean that practitioners will have to learn the skills of other disciplines as a matter of survival. Miller and Rose’s (1994) research shows that this is welcomed, as they found a genuine desire on the part of

practitioners to learn about “strategic planning, designing communication programs, consumer behaviour, creative strategy, marketing management and consulting, as well as pursuing non-traditional skills of public speaking, oral presentation and promotions” (1994: 14).

4. **Integration is necessary to reduce duplicated effort and infighting.** Scholars argue that integration should be seen as a “marriage of interests” (Kitchen and Moss, 1995 cited in Cornelissen et al, 2001), as it creates cross-fertilisation between disciplines (Gronstedt, 1996), gives people access to other personal networks for getting the job done (Argenti et al, 2005) and shatters separatist assumptions that exist about the role of the communications function and the separate disciplines of public relations and marketing (Kotler and Mindak, 1978). In addition to this, segmentation does little to improve appreciation of other skills or to encourage learning (Gronstedt, 1996).

The cautioning against integration is not just seen as a rejection of merging two disciplines, but is also based on a number of other factors:

1. **There is no clear definition of “integration” amongst disciplines.** The blind acceptance of the term “integration” is questioned on the grounds that it has not been clearly defined as a concept, and that the lack of a clear construct has led to the term being used interchangeably to describe organisational integration and/or procedural integration (Cornelissen, 2000). It could be argued that the “chaotic” (2000: 598) use of the term is symptomatic of the changing landscape of the corporate communications discipline. Definitions need to reflect procedural and organisational integration (Cornelissen and Lock, 2001; Cornelissen, 2000); integration must reflect both the planning of activities between disciplines (procedural) and the “alignment and coordination of disciplines” (organisational) (Cornelissen, 2000: 599).
2. **Marketing is likely to encroach upon the remit of public relations.** The professional standing of the public relations discipline is what is at stake here, as scholars and practitioners remain fearful of marketing

taking over the public relations function in organisations (Broom et al 1991; Lauzen, 1991). This “encroachment” applies equally to other functions such as an “operations” function of an organisation that, without the required knowledge to fulfil communication tasks, are nevertheless taking over the public relations remit. Arguably the move towards professionalising public relations in the UK is a response to the threat of encroachment from marketing in particular (L’Etang, 1999; Lauzen, 1993), resulting in a marketing “mindset” which ultimately may be detrimental to stakeholder relationships (Wood, 2006). The counter argument points out that what may be seen as encroachment, may in fact be organisations changing themselves to respond to market demands, such as clients who ask for a more integrated approach to communication (Cornelissen et al, 2001), or in response to regulation (Argenti et al, 2005). Scholars such as Broom et al (1991) are even charged with skewing the debate around encroachment and creating a false issue over creating boundaries about the “turf” of the two disciplines (Hutton, 1996).

3. **Who owns the integrated function?** Scholes and Clutterbuck (1998) ask the questions “Who should be responsible for what, what structures and processes are required, which are the priorities and how should the output be measured?” (1998: 230). Both public relations and marketing practitioners are taught how to achieve certain outcomes using similar techniques (Broom et al, 1991), although historically, marketing is taught in business schools and public relations is taught in mass communication schools (Kotler and Mindak, 1978). This means that in being separated during the formal education process, future practitioners learn little about each others’ skill set and techniques, which in turn does not allow them to see the value of sharing these complementary skills to work, transparently, toward a single outcome. Without such transparency and skill sharing, there is a danger that coordination of the two functions is not formalised, which may lead to the undermining of one discipline by another and the duplication of effort. Lauzen (1991, 1993) argues that marketing is more likely to

absorb public relations, which is particularly critical if public relations managers lack the business acumen and perceived higher status of marketing managers, if resources are scarce, or if public relations is seen as a support function that merely houses technicians.

2.4.2 Limitations to the integration of public relations and marketing

The debate into the integration of public relations and marketing functions has been extremely valuable in helping us understand the perceived differences between the two disciplines, as well as distinguishing between strategic and operational definitions of integration (Cornelissen, 2000). However, the similarities between the two disciplines have been underplayed. Whilst public relations and marketing function jostle for a higher ranking within this debate, it has promoted a separatist culture in practice and in academia. In advocating integration, normative debate has seen a backlash to any real acceptance towards integration as the two disciplines attempt to define and protect their boundaries. A separatist culture has therefore reinforced boundaries, meaning that organisations are not able to respond to market conditions, the wishes of clients (Cornelissen and Lock, 2001) or a calling from employees to learn more from other communication related disciplines (Miller and Rose, 1994).

Even with the arguments for and against integration, the question has to be asked; *what is the resistance to it?* The protection of boundaries is central to the debate on integration and normative debate gives some indication of the tension that exists between the two disciplines (Kotler and Mindak, 1978), but this is positioned as tension between two faceless departmental functions. The debate therefore does not account for the ebb and flow of any perceived tensions or negotiations at an individual level, nor does it relate any empirical evidence to highlight strategies for protecting, or coming together, that may occur at an informal level between the people that work within these functions. As such, the debate on integration remains focused on the formal integration of functions at an organisational level and does not take into account the daily practices undertaken, and negotiation tactics employed by practitioners, as they come together from these disciplines, for example, to undertake a project.

Moreover, the notions of boundaries or “turf” remain unexplained in terms of what they represent. The issue of turf, when dissected, can represent “political”, “operational” and “personal” turf, yet existing literature has not acknowledged these dimensions as separate constructs. Instead, the concepts such as “boundaries” or “turf” have come to represent *both* the demarcation of boundaries and activities *and* of roles between public relations and marketing disciplines. Existing literature would benefit by separating the terms into three separate conceptual constructs. For example, “political turf” can be characterised as the hierarchical and organisational alignment considerations with particular reference to anticipating the benefits of specific long term personal and strategic relationships, “operational turf” as the activities and procedures distinct to each discipline and “personal turf” as the individual motives for protecting, maintaining or negotiating formal and/or unspoken boundaries. The debate for integration will no doubt continue until there is agreement on the value of greater cooperation between disciplines, sharing skills and knowledge, and learning from each other.

Whilst the broader debate over practitioner roles, communication excellence and the integration of departmental boundaries continues, there are, however, additional debates, shaped by their historical roots in the separate management discipline, which centres on the integration of communication sub-disciplines and subsequent coordination of sub-disciplines under the umbrella term of organisational communication. Corporate communication draws on aspects of organisational communication to shape its concepts of internal and external stakeholder relationships, as well as how to engage with these stakeholders during communication related initiatives in large organisations.

2.4.3 The integration of communication sub-disciplines

The 1990s saw definitions of corporate communication come to the fore, emphasising everything from stakeholder relationships (Argenti, 2003) to branding and identity (Van Riel, 1995). Parallel to this, prior research, coupled with organisations sensing the need for more integrated communication systems, spawned new terminology; that of management communication, organisational communication and business communication, each representing a particular focus which subsequently became subsumed into modern corporate communication. The

focus, however, remained on defining these communication “sub-disciplines” (Argenti, 1996), with research tackling what was essentially the salience of one sub-discipline over the other (Shelby, 1993), rather than the idea of integration. There were, however, concerns as to the relevance of the integrated approach, namely:

1. **There is no clear definition of integration within the management discipline in relation to communication sub-disciplines.** As in the academic debates between public relations and marketing, integration is never far away from the organisational communication debate. Cornelissen and Lock’s (2001) critique of the use of the term “integration” can apply not only to the public relations and marketing debate, but also to implementing “integrated communications.” Their central arguments, which advocate differentiating between process and organisational integration, are extended by Argenti (2006) who goes on to define integrated corporate communication as either “a function...a channel of communication...a communication process...or an attitude or set of beliefs” (2006: 358). In this respect, the debate on integration of business, management and organisational communication parallels the integration debate in public relations and marketing in that the emphasis lies in defining boundaries and clarity of purpose. To a lesser extent, the debate includes whether to include public relations and marketing activities as part of a corporate communications remit or whether to set itself apart from these as an organisational function.
2. **Clearer definitions are needed for communication sub-disciplines.** The protection of political, operational and personal turf has manifested in debates about the “preeminence” of one sub-discipline over another, an issue first acknowledged by Porterfield (1980). Subsequent debates highlight the tension over the meaning, status and operational boundaries of each sub-discipline, with scholars favouring one function over another without fully considering the interaction and boundaries of each. Shelby (1993) elaborated on the perceived overlap of these sub-disciplines and presented clear definitions and boundaries for each of the emerging sub-disciplines of communication, emphasising that her research was an analysis of boundaries and disciplines, rather than an

assertion of the primacy of one sub-discipline over another. She places management communication as the “boundary spanning discipline” (1993: 262), a view that is supported by Argenti (1996) in his definitions, although he favours “marketing communication” over “business communication.”

Since the 1990s, prior research has also continued to draw upon management and organisation theory to form a compelling argument for integrated communication, albeit relating mostly to large organisations. Its argument concentrates on pulling together various strands of communication, including their related activities and tasks, at a broader organisational level. Part of the drive for integration is to ensure consistency in messages and in voices in an effort to protect organisational identity and reputation (Christensen et al, 2008; Argenti, 2006). In essence, this separates into procedural integration (using systems which centralise this controlling process) and organisational integration (controlling messages which represent the organisational identity) (Cornelissen, 2000). Integrated communications is therefore a frequently cited solution in managing organisational identities and holds much importance for scholars in organisational communication (Cornelissen, 2008; Argenti, 2003). In advocating integrated communication, and with its emphasis on a centralised approach, early research therefore positioned itself as an extension of the broader integration debate.

2.4.4 The integration of internal and external stakeholders

Issues of integration extend to notions of stakeholder relationships. In particular, these relate to management teams viewing stakeholders as either internal or external to the organisation, communication systems as either open or closed, and networks as either formal or informal (Cheney and Christensen, 2001). In adopting this perspective, the purpose of organisational communication centres on managing these processes and functions, which immediately pulls the practitioner into the integration debate.

In relation to internal and external publics, this assumes clearly defined and static boundaries. However, this is a relatively dated view which has now given way to the notion of “blurred boundaries.” The blurring of boundaries (Cheney et al, 2004a, 2004b) is a vital development for the integration debate, and also for the

communication practitioner, and impacts directly on their role. How does a practitioner respond to an organisation's many stakeholders? With one voice or with many? Is it really a risky strategy to forgo "reigning in" critical voices within an organisation? These issues unfortunately have been somewhat downplayed in favour of research into manufacturing organisational identity and saving organisational reputations from crisis situations (Argenti, 2003; Van Riel, 1995). Given the ease with which traditional organisational communication boundaries can become "fuzzy" (Cheney and Christensen, 2001: 234), the notion of clearly delineated stakeholders placed either inside or outside an organisation is therefore a flawed premise in the modern corporate communication environment. Furthermore, as this perception of stakeholders rests on symmetrical models of communication, early research into organisational communication can be said to favour a more traditional view of communicating across organisations, particularly in its assertion that models of integrated communication can apply equally to most large organisations (Cornelissen, 2004, 2008; Argenti, 2003; Van Riel, 1995).

Practitioners dealing with organisational communication are concerned with transparency, which is a key driver for integration. The move towards transparency in organisations is evident through the numerous documents an organisation produces, where integrated communication is seen as the only procedure that can adequately deal with an increased demand for transparency (Christensen and Langer, 2008). Additionally, in an effort to control the various strands of communication through integration, Christensen and Langer (2008) argue that the level of control exercised through integrated communication initiatives reduces creativity within an organisation, thereby changing how people engage with the transparency process, the nature of what becomes transparent and to whom.

Unlike the dominant theories of the public relations discipline, research into organisational communication has been characterised by an interpretive approach in understanding an organisation's identity and reputation. A large body of research into organisational identity pays particular attention to the language an organisation uses to present its identity to multiple audiences. This type of interpretive approach is supported by a social constructionist worldview, which ensures that identity construction is interpreted through multiple lenses to explore the numerous potential meanings of an organisation's identity (Ihlen, 2008; Cheney et al, 2004b). As such,

the body of research into organisational communication can be said to differ from public relations research in its fundamental approach to examining communication related phenomena within an organisational setting. The philosophical foundations of normative research in both public relations and corporate communication disciplines therefore not only position research within a specific epistemological realm, but they also effect the subsequent interpretation of the data, ultimately effecting contributions to knowledge and practice.

2.4.5 Limitations to the integrated organisational communication debate

Whilst the push and pull of the integration debate continues within both the public relations and corporate communication disciplines, it has its limitations. Within the corporate communication discipline, research into organisational communication is dominated by the creation of organisational identities and reputations (Balmer and Greyser, 2003). However, the concern with identity and reputation is aimed squarely at probing macro-level organisational practices that largely uphold or reinforce specific identities during periods of organisational change (Van den Bosch et al, 2004) rather than the social processes which create multiple identities at a micro level. Additionally, much prior organisational communication literature conceives stakeholders, or audiences, as mostly internal or external to the organisation and is concerned with how relationships are maintained with these internal and external audiences. However, Cheney and Christensen (2001) argue that these neat categories do not reflect the continually shifting boundaries that now constitute organisational communication, stressing that internal and external communication “no longer constitute separate fields of practice” (2001: 232) and does not consider how easily the boundaries between internal and external can be blurred within the modern corporate communications environment (Cheney et al, 2004b).

Argenti (2006) agrees that “more sophisticated and overlapping constituencies” (2006: 364) are blurring the boundaries of who is traditionally viewed as internal and external. However, he views this as a reason to integrate operational and organisational communication strands. To Argenti (2006) “overlapping constituencies” represent the individual shift in boundaries, where one person working at any level of the organisation, can now work for an organisation, as well

as campaign against how it treats its workers, and also control publicity about their actions through blogging or others forms of self-publishing (see www.nosweat.org.uk or www.mcspotlight.org). However, in advocating integration, Argenti (2006) fails to acknowledge the multi-vocal environment to which the organisation must respond. The “emerging technologies of communication” (Gergen, 2001:9) also play a key role in connecting individuals together to form cooperatives based on common agendas and values (Gergen, 2001).

Furthermore, the notion that stakeholders are either internal or external is based on a symmetrical model of communication (Dozier et al, 1995), which does not account for the inherent power imbalances that exist between an organisation and its many stakeholders (Cheney and Christensen, 2001). It also assumes that a “uni-vocal” approach, where the organisation articulates its intentions as one voice, is an appropriate response to the many stakeholder, or “multi-vocal” demands they have to manage (Christensen et al, 2008; Cheney et al, 2004a: 93).

2.5 Modern corporate communication: remaining true to its origins

Returning to Lesly’s (1959) original call for an alliance between public relations and marketing, we can see that the debates in public relations, marketing and in corporate communication have taken the trajectories first anticipated by Phillip Lesly in 1959. His distinction between the “selling” of marketing and the “shifting and molding of people’s ideas” (1959: 4) in public relations is inherent in much of prior research and is a distinction that both disciplines cling to in an effort to exert status over the other (Broom et al, 1991; Lauzen, 1991). In terms of Lesly’s (1959) five principles of public relations, a retrospective look at the historical roots of modern corporate communication shows that his original principles have endured over the decades. In particular, he posited that the “value of public relations” (1959: 5-6) lay in its ability to contribute to the economy (CEBR, 2005), enhance the image of companies (Van Riel, 1995) and mediate between stakeholder groups (Argenti, 2003).

2.6 The discourse of strategic value

Throughout the first two chapters, I have made reference to how the key debates represent the main body of “normative” research. Normative research can be said to shape and promote a discourse of strategic value. Whilst the next chapter deals with concepts associated with discourse, it is worth illustrating the normative discourse of strategic value in action, in order to contextualise what is meant by the term, and also to contextualise some of elements of the key debates. This can be illustrated through recent UK media coverage of the public relations industry.

On 16th June, 2008, *The Independent*, a well respected national newspaper in the UK, published a special supplement in association with the UK based CIPR, on the public relations industry. The supplement included interviews from CIPR staff and members on various industry trends, their experiences and their opinions. In the lead article alone (Burrell, 2008. See Appendix 1), public relations was described as “struggling to get on with journalists,” as being associated with “cynically spinning and distorting the output of hard-pressed organisations,” as being a “business-driven multi-million pound” industry, and, most importantly, as evolving from being concerned solely with traditional notions of persuasion, to being concerned with reputation, relationships and “delivering value.” Further interviews in the supplement continue to emphasise one or more of the above points, in addition to the need for incorporating technological developments (Farrington, 2008; Lewis-Jones, 2008).

On the face of it, this supplement shows the broader issues shaping today’s public relations and wider communications industry. A closer look, however, reveals a key message that is repeated throughout the interviews and articles. CIPR staff and members are keen to impress upon readers the value of public relations within an organisational setting, and in doing so, they are actively promoting a discourse of “strategic value” throughout. Indications of the strategic value of public relations and communications are evident with “PR professionals...sitting at the boardroom table,” as well as public relations being labelled as “...‘incredibly efficient’ in delivering value” and “becoming more and more important because it’s not just about generating media coverage...it’s about generating relationships.”

Notions of the strategic value of public relations and communications are not new to the discipline. In fact, the discourse of strategic value has been developing and gaining momentum over the last three decades, largely through the extension of key academic debates, and the language used in this press coverage shows the extent to which it has been adopted by practitioners and member institutions, such as the CIPR, across the globe.

2.7 Gaps within prior research

Modern corporate communication owes much to the public relations and management disciplines. However, as influential as these research themes are, they have their limitations. Practitioner roles theory can be said to separate what constitutes the role of the practitioner, which de-contextualises the activities from the social context within which they occur. Furthermore, the generic labelling of roles as “manager” or “technician” provides little flexibility within and between these roles, which perpetuate organisational and professional hierarchies. In terms of their inclusion in research projects, “managers” have been favoured over “technicians” which excludes the voices of technicians and other types of communication practitioners from actively contributing to empirical research. The dominance of role labels also propagates a damaging stereotype about the skill levels and ability of technicians to contribute fully to organisational life, as well as to scholarly research, conveniently forgetting that the reputations of successful advertising and public relations agencies are built upon the creative and technical skills of technicians.

The Excellence theory, whilst valuable in showing relative factors of ‘excellence’ in large communication departments, houses a number of assumptions which skew its boundaries of use. Excellence theory positions the core knowledge of an individual as a set of skills one can acquire quickly, but in doing so, it does not mention innate personal characteristics which are unquantifiable, such as charisma or empathy (Gregory, 2006; Moss, 2005). In the act of “acquiring” core knowledge, skills are not seen as developed through experiences, dialogue and relationships with others, but rather “possessed” by the individual practitioner who is then viewed as a container for a finite set of skills (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This positions the

practitioner as a relatively passive being who “reacts” when “given” information (Gergen, 2001: 151). The theory also houses a fixed notion of excellence within a given timeframe, which does not account for the meaning of excellence changing over time; that what was excellent then has become reprioritised in light of broader environmental trends, for example, engaging with local communities (McKie and Munshi, 2007). In this respect, the excellence study itself makes no mention of what happens if the theory’s notion of excellence is not maintained over a number of years (McKie and Munshi, 2007).

The drive for excellence suggests that establishing and maintaining the two-way symmetrical model is the end result that communication teams should be driving towards (McKie and Munshi, 2007). This presents a somewhat linear and one dimensional view of communications, emphasising process over the social and cultural influences which impact upon the nature of communications work. In particular, the linear view positions the communications department as conduits of two-way symmetrical models of communications, which omit the interplay of many actors, varying power relations and varying interpretations that alter the nature of stakeholder relationships.

Much prior research within the public relations discipline is bounded by positivist perspectives of the world. This impacts upon scholarly thinking in two ways; firstly it influences the design and application of research, which favours methodologies that quantify and categorise the “truth”, above those that interpret social contexts and human interaction (Geertz, 1973). Secondly, in quantifying and categorising data, the positivist perspective openly rejects attempts to contextualise the social processes, interactions and interpretations of research participants, over and above distilling the characteristics of a successful communications practitioner and of excellent communication teams. As such, the focus of much practitioner roles and excellence theory remains on easily identifiable characteristics and activities, as opposed to what practitioners experience, how they interpret these experiences in their natural work setting and how meanings are socially constructed (Gergen, 1999, 2001). This study therefore aims to fill this gap in knowledge and to shed light on the interpretive process of the individual practitioner, giving us a more rounded view of the modern communication practitioner in their natural environment (Mintzberg, 1994).

Within the management discipline, organisational communication research is divided into neat categories, such as open or closed, and formal and informal (Cheney et al, 2004b), which view communication processes as a linear form for imparting organisational knowledge to an audience. Central to this linear perspective is the notion of control, as seen by the definitions in Table 1.1 (Chapter 1), whereby communication processes are “pulled together” in an effort to centralise and control wayward messages and voices. However, the idea of control as a central tenet of organisational communication is problematic, as it rests on assumptions about the conferred status of the communication function (and to some extent the individuals of that function), access to resources, and access and inclusion to decision making processes about the identity and reputation of an organisation.

2.8 Chapter summary

This chapter has shown that the historical roots of corporate communication lie firmly within the discipline of public relations, with an evolving path in the management discipline. One of the central themes underpinning the historical roots of corporate communication is that of integration. In particular, this relates to integration of public relations and marketing functions, the tasks entailed in communication related activities, the messages and voices of an organisation and, lastly, information flow. The purpose of integration within an organisation is to ensure that there is no duplication of effort between organisational functions, that skills are shared between communication practitioners and, most importantly, that the messages leaving an organisation are consistent and do not damage its reputation. Additional debates stemming from the historical roots exist around the specific role of the communication practitioner and the factors that constitute excellent communication. Together, the three broader debates surrounding integration, practitioner roles and excellent communication form the dominant research agenda for corporate communication. The public relations and corporate communication discipline have mostly used positivist approaches to explore salient research agendas. This research draws upon the lesser-used social constructionist epistemology, which is evident within the management discipline. This shift in paradigm aims to bring new insight to the lived experience of the communication practitioner, which is an important contribution to existing debates. The next chapter

unpacks the philosophical foundation and interpretive approaches used for this study, and then concludes by positioning the current research within a social constructionist paradigm, as well as within an emerging body of research which seeks to rethink public relations and corporate communication.

Chapter 3:

Situating the research

3.0 Introduction

In the last chapter, the historical overview highlighted three key debates that have dominated corporate communication and public relations research. These debates concern themselves with aspects of practitioner roles, communication excellence and integration. These debates can be said to form the body of normative research. The current research moves away from normative approaches to focus on how individual communication practitioners interpret the events they experience in their working lives, rather than the outcomes of the tasks they undertake in their day-to-day work. In doing so, the current research focuses on the lived experience of communication practitioners and the discourses they employ that consequently help shape the “real world” within which they work. This chapter outlines the philosophical foundations of this study, and argues for a more interpretive approach to examining the lived experiences of communication practitioners, in particular, through using discourse and sensemaking enquiry. It then concludes with situating the research within a philosophical foundation and within a body of literature.

3.1 The philosophical foundation of this research

As stated in the previous chapter, much research into practitioner roles and communications excellence adopts a positivist perspective. Positivism can be described as a philosophical foundation which sets out to find the “truth” through scientific enquiry (Clegg, 2008; Brewer, 2003; Burr, 2003). Such truth is said to inhabit a rational, objective world that exists outside of our mind, and positivist approaches are set up to “discover” sets of quantifiable truths that constitute the “real” and rational world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Berger and Luckman, 1966). Positivism’s quest for meaning lies in the cause and effect of observable phenomena

and is therefore detached from or “uncontaminated” by external cultural, social or historical influences (Gergen, 1999, 2001).

Recent research in public relations, such as the Excellence Study (Dozier et al 1995), claims to have constructionist roots. Yet a careful look at the mixed methodology used suggests positivist leanings, in that such research can be usefully replicated in other communication settings (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). The research team for the Excellence Study surveyed 300 organisations and conducted “almost 100 hours of interviews” (Dozier et al 1995: 238). This data generated new information on the role of the practitioner and the factors that constitute excellent public relations departments, yet this information was supported by the use of “fractionation scales” (1995: 245) to quantify observable phenomena, and the precise use of a sampling strategy, thereby excluding certain groups from taking part in the research. Grunig et al (1995) and Lauzen (1995) followed in the tradition of the Excellence Study and used a mixture of quantitative and qualitative methodologies to first gather the data and then to “quantify” it. In quantifying data, categorising must occur, which has the effect of marginalising minority voices and traits (Gergen, 1999). Those opposed to positivist worldviews argue that marginalised voices and traits hold equal validity for empirical research; the small phenomena being just as important as the large (Weick et al, 2005). The positivist approach also favours the universal application of theories to multiple situations. This can be seen by the proliferation of research into two-way symmetrical models of communication across cultural and geographic borders (Shin et al, 2006; Naude et al, 2004; Guiniven, 2002; Karadjov et al, 2000). Gergen (1999) argues that this accelerates the “eradication” of idiosyncratic cultures and norms from which societies can learn, in favour of propagating a dominant world view, which is largely Western (Gunaratne, 2008).

In contrast to positivism, research into organisational communication has adopted a more interpretive and social constructionist approach, particularly in exploring organisational identity and reputation. Social constructionism is often positioned as a counterpoint to positivism, particularly by sociologists, who cite the construction of meaning as intrinsically linked to, and the product of, cultural, social, historical and political influences (Burr, 1998, 2003; Berger and Luckman, 1966). It takes the stand that “reality” is constructed in the mind of the individual and our

interaction with the world (Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and that it is our negotiation of events and relationships that creates meaning. There are, however, contentions and confusion within definitions of social constructionism, whereby “reality” can be seen to be either a “falsehood...illusion...or construction” (Burr, 1998: 23), the underlying intent holding an accusatory or derogatory premise about constructionist explanations being “a figment of our imagination” (1998: 23).

In an organisational context, the shared experiences of practitioners are crucial, as they present a platform on which to base assumptions, norms, identities and, most importantly, the “developing [of] organizational knowledge” (Von Krogh et al, 1994: 63), which can be likened to Grunig et al’s (1995) second sphere of shared experiences within the excellence theory. Allard-Poesi (2005) argues that shared meaning is not possible as “the influence processes are too multiple to produce similarity” (2005: 172), touching on a valid point about human interaction and interpretation being too vast, complex and unique to comprehend or anticipate fully. In essence, this makes interpretations subjective and fleeting, and social constructionists argue that the subjective nature of making sense of the world is equally as valid as the statistics which seek to quantify the world around us; the subjectively interpreted experience is very “real” for the people who experience it. Fleetwood (2005) however argues that such claims and weight placed on the constructionist discourse have led to “ontological exaggeration” (2005: 206), leading to a commonly accepted view that the construction of reality is very much a consequence of interaction and interpretation that denies the impact of material constraints (critical realism).

Social constructionists do indeed strongly suggest that our interaction with people and engagement in events shape how we see the world around us (Burr, 2003). As such, it is through written and verbal text that our thoughts and beliefs, and how we interpret the world, become apparent. Written and verbal text therefore plays a key role in forming our interpretation of the world around us and social constructionists are particularly interested in how these texts are historically and culturally situated (Burr, 2003), how they legitimise and perpetuate cultural and group norms (Berger and Luckman, 1966) and how they shape our relationships. Burr (2003) suggests, however, that it is important to step away from discussions about defining reality and move instead to what written and verbal texts (discourses)

suggest about experienced reality (see also Potter and Wetherell, 1987). As such, in examining the socially constructed phenomenon, this research takes the view that “the focus is firmly upon the content and function of the accounts themselves, not upon the persons doing the accounting” (Burr, 1998: 21).

Social constructionism provides a solid foundation upon which to base this study, as it accepts that individuals “construct” meaning through interaction, through reacting to events and through engaging in meaningful relationships. The social constructionist approach therefore takes a “grounded approach that seeks to grasp people’s understandings” (Allard-Poesi, 2005: 170). Consequently, this research is grounded in the natural setting of the communication practitioner and the departmental team within which they are formally situated. In embedding the current research in a natural setting and basing it upon social constructionist principles, it seeks to move away from the positivist stance as delineated by the salient theories in public relations and corporate communications, and adopt a more interpretive approach, as favoured in some areas of organisational communication research (Christensen et al, 2008; Ihlen, 2008). As Van Maanen states, “counting and classifying can take one only so far. Meaning and interpretation are required to attach significance to counts and classifications and these are fundamentally qualitative matters” (Van Maanen, 2000: x). This is close to Weick’s (1979) proposition that elaborate or refined tallying does not allow us to move beyond the counting stage to “embed the count more richly” (1979: 29).

The current research therefore takes the qualitative approaches of discourse analysis and applies it to an area of public relations and corporate communication research which has been largely omitted from traditional research; that of examining the lived experience of the communication practitioner in their natural setting. In resting the current research upon a foundation of social constructionism, there is an implicit importance placed upon the use of language, discourse and the sensemaking processes of communication practitioners within their natural setting. Before we can understand the importance of discourse and sensemaking in the context of the current research, it is first necessary to unpack conceptual notions of discourse and sensemaking.

3.2 Discourse and the construction of reality

The importance of discourse for social constructionists lies in its capacity for illuminating how the world is produced and how this world is then revealed through multiple discourses (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). In this context, discourse represents many forms of “text” from the oral and written through to the visual (Cunliffe, 2008), with each form being intrinsically linked to the other, forming a network of texts that shape a broader discourse and therefore broader sense of the world. As Gergen (2001) understands it “all claims to ‘the real’ are traced to processes of relationship, and there is no extra-cultural means of ultimately privileging one construction of reality over another” (2001: 8).

Discourse has benefited from a relatively broad interpretation of its definition, uses and implementation in normative research. Although definitions offer little consensus (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002), they each maintain an underlying theme of linking language to its social context through either written or verbal text that are intrinsically related (Cunliffe, 2008; Burr, 2003; Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Others view discourse in a number of ways. Gergen (1999), for example, breaks discourse into three different strands; the rhetorical, the structural and the procedural (Cunliffe, 2008). Although presented as three distinct categories, they do not function as isolated aspects of discourse, but are, fundamentally, linked. An example of the multiple functions of discourse is observed by Phillips and Hardy (2002) who characterise discourse as an “epistemology that explains how we know the social world, as well as a set of methods for studying it” (2002: 3). This dualism “emphasises the importance of linguistic processes but also underscores language as fundamental to the construction of social reality” (Phillips et al, 2004: 637). It has also allowed for many interpretations and applications of discourse, but the essence remains the same; discourse is about understanding our world through written and verbal text. Given the multiple and overlapping definitions of discourse which exist, the current study uses the following definition from Burr (2003) who states the underlying theme of discourse is to “make visible how certain representations of events or persons are being achieved” (2003: 63).

Given the many interpretations of discourse, it stands to reason that in analysing discourse, the researcher is presented with more than one path to follow.

The main schools of thought centre on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Discourse Analysis (DA). CDA is a critical approach rooted in examining the use and abuse and legitimisation of power through talk and text (Phillips and Hardy, 2002) and is built upon the notion that one voice is privileged over another (Foucault, 1989). Voices in CDA often refer to cultural and political forces which dominate, either overtly or covertly, a particular agenda. These cultural and political forces represent macro discourses (Boje et al, 2004; Burr, 2003). The work of media and cultural theorists, and the power that certain discourses are purported to have, are good examples of this (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). Additional influential research at the macro level includes the body of work on the feminist discourse (McRobbie, 2000; Mills, 2004; Tannen, 1994) and colonial/post-colonial discourses (Broadfoot and Munshi, 2007). Moving down a level, meso level discourses focus on organisational patterns and networks (Boje et al, 2004). Micro level discourses, on the other hand, represent what Brewer (2003) would describe as “discrete discourse styles” (2003: 75) used by groups to conform to and maintain particular identities and group norms. Micro level, or discrete discourses, are also akin to Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) interpretive repertoires, who cite Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) study of scientists to illustrate how group members interpret the same events, and how their beliefs and judgements manifest through their unconscious use of language, drawing particular attention to the formal and informal interpretive repertoires which they use to articulate themselves. The notion of interpretive repertoires is particularly important for this research, as one of the aims of the research is to uncover any interpretive repertoires beyond that of the dominant academic and industry discourse of strategic value. These levels of engagement (Boje et al, 2004) – the micro, meso and macro – are not used exclusively, but interplay and merge with each other to blend and shape multiple discourses.

The construction of identity is an important and prolific research area for discourse analysts, as language is seen as a crucial indicator of individual perceptions of the self, of others (Brewer and Gardner, 1996; Goffman, 1959) and of social structures and networks within a given context. Individuals form and negotiate their identities in relation to others (Berger and Luckman, 1966). Their relationships define who they are – their role (manager, technician) and the language used to describe that role indicates how they interpret that relationship (lazy manager, good

technician), their alliances, personal agendas, how they see themselves, etc. The labelling of an identity is therefore laden with meaning and is used to negotiate positions and status within many groups. As Burr (2003) states “constructions arise not from people attempting to communicate supposed internal states but from their attempts to bring off a representation of themselves or the world that had a liberating, legitimising or otherwise positive effect for them” (2003: 137). This positions the human and their worldviews as being in a continual state of formation, rather than a container which is filled with “truth” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) from which they then take rational interpretations of the world.

Structuralism and post-structuralism offer further schools of thought within discourse. Structuralist and post-structuralist strands of constructing meaning examine the specific signs exhibited through language. Structuralism is concerned with the linguistic analysis of the signifier and the signified (Burr, 2003: 50) with language given prominence over the contextualisation of the signs themselves. Structuralism, places meaning on the relational, as signs possess meaning only once they are attached to a signifier, and in doing so the meaning becomes set. This is a fairly inflexible perspective on language which de-contextualises words from their cultural and social influences.

Post-structuralism debunks the notion that meanings of signs are set, and redresses this by contending that all meaning is open to interpretation. This brings post-structuralism closer to the social constructionist worldview. Post-structuralism is an important linguistic perspective, as it positions language as the “site of variability, disagreement and potential conflict...where power relations are acted out and contested” (Burr, 2003: 54-55). Post structuralism is therefore said to give voice to the marginalised identities harboured throughout society by allowing them the freedom to dispute identities imposed upon them.

For Shotter (1993), the central tenet of discourse is rhetorical, underlining how we link events and ideas through our use of language and how our beliefs manifest through language. This presents an interesting framework for the current research, as the beliefs of practitioners may become apparent through how they articulate themselves in their natural work setting. This rhetorical perspective is gaining importance in many fields (Motion and Leitch, 1996; Yeoman, 2008; Pieczka, 2007) and is particularly relevant in communication related disciplines, as it allows us to

move beyond the linear models presented by traditional communication research. As Shotter states:

it is the character of these conversationally developed and developing relations, and the events occurring within them, that are coming to be seen as of much greater importance than the shared ideas to which they might (or might not) give rise (1993: 1-2)

What Shotter (1993) highlights is the importance of moving away from the linear and outcome focused research that has dominated academic debate over the last few decades. Instead, the adoption of a rhetorical perspective allows us to focus on the meaning created by individuals, as well the “contingent flow of continuous communicative interaction” (1993: 7) that may govern the daily lives of communication practitioners. Of particular importance to Shotter (1993) is the rhetorical-responsive critique in discourse, which demands a considered response by individuals to justify their stance, a notion also espoused by Weick (1995). The rhetorical-responsive critique places a value on dialectical aspects, particularly the metaphorical lens, viewing metaphors as important rhetorical components which help in linking utterances, thereby shaping cognition. Metaphors, from a social constructionist viewpoint, are therefore loaded with meaning (Shotter, 1993).

3.3 Metaphors in discourse

In the study of the metaphor, the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and Gareth Morgan (2006, 1986), dominates the field. Their work emphasises the multiple meanings derived from placing a metaphorical lens to aspects of social and organisational life. Metaphors are important in understanding the world as “one thing in terms of another” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 36), and are particularly useful in this study as they add another layer of meaning beyond that of the normative definitions. The language, and related mental images, help express the complexity within which communication practitioners operate, as they help to bring clarity to that complexity (Weick, 1979) and simplify it (Cheney et al, 2004b). Yet the clarity can oversimplify dynamic thought by giving prominence to the minutiae of one aspect of the experience over another (Cheney et al, 2004b).

Metaphors are commonly used to represent the process of communication. If we revisit the definitions in Table 1.1 (Chapter 1), we see that the dominant theme

across the definitions is that of coordination, implying the pulling together of disparate voices. These definitions are about conformity through the control of rogue or multiple voices, images and messages (Christensen et al, 2008, Cornelissen, 2008). Metaphors of alignment and the pulling together of many strands, such as an “integrated approach,” the “orchestration of all the instruments,” or the “coordination of all means of communications” feature frequently in the definitions. Metaphors of implied power relations are also present through “dependent” relationships with stakeholders. Viewing these divergent definitions through the metaphorical lens allows us to see the commonality embedded within the definitions, illustrating the metaphors’ capacity to encompass multiple meanings.

The importance of metaphor in this study therefore lies in how they reveal aspects of the working lives of communication practitioners, not just through the “metaphors-in-use” (Cornelissen et al, 2008: 7) within individual sensemaking accounts, but also in how broader discourses are shown to exist. In eliciting metaphors in people’s naturally occurring talk and text, the potential meanings of the metaphors-in-use remain contextualised and therefore sensitive to their natural setting (Cornelissen et al, 2008).

From the unpacking of conceptual notions of discourse and outlining the suggestive properties of the metaphor, we can see that much of the literature perceives the construction of reality as an iterative and rhetorical process, whereby the back and forth motion of creating meaning results in a cyclical and contingent formation of realities. By contingent, we mean that the creation of reality relies on an individual’s capacity to relate one “micro-event” to another within a given context (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). Aspects such as language, text, signs, icons, past experience and symbols are therefore woven together to form a reality. This reality is contextual, continually changing and embedded in meaning which “are shared and social, emanating out of actors’ actions in producing texts; at the same time, discourse gives meaning to these actions, thereby constituting the social world” (Phillips et al, 2004: 637).

3.4 Constructing organisational reality through discourse

Discourse is apparent in the artefacts of our everyday world; our written text, the words we use to describe people, events, cultures and subcultures, and local and global trends. In the organisational setting, discourse is manifest in the official and unofficial language that permeates through an organisation and could be viewed as “coercive pressures” in the form of “organisational charts, reports, accounts and so on” (Phillips et al, 2004: 639). Within organisational communication then, we see a turn towards how the organisation expresses itself; a turn towards analysing the discourse of an organisation (Gergen et al, 2004; Cheney et al, 2004a; Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001). Organisational discourse is used by social constructionists as a basis to better our understanding of an organisation; how it organises itself (Weick, 1995), its networks (Morgan, 1986, 2006) and how individual, group and organisation identities are constructed and deconstructed (Cheney et al, 2004b). Weick (1979, 1995) suggests that identity construction is negotiated through interpretation of environmental cues and interaction with other members of the organisation, meaning that it is essentially a dynamic and social process (Berger and Luckman, 1966), as well as relational (Fielder, 2007). As a result, these schools of thought have encouraged practitioners and scholars alike to view the organisation as more than a functional unit (Boje et al, 2004), and instead posited that there is value in scrutinising the organisation through particular lenses which represent organisations as complex networks (Morgan, 1986, 2006). As Shotter (1993) states “it is not yet more or better theories that we need in management studies, but a better understanding of conversation and conversational realities” (1993: 148).

Of note is work on organisational discourse which views communication as a conduit (Reddy, 1993; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), organisational members as performers (Goffman, 1959), rhetorical analyses of organisational communication (Ilhen, 2008), symbolism and storytelling within organisations (Boje, 2001, 2008), organisational struggles, conflict and resistance which manifest through discourse (Putnam, 2008; Phillips et al, 2004), or organisations as either organisms, machines, political systems or a combination of many other socially constructed cultures (Morgan, 1986, 2006). What this body of work shows is that multiple meanings can emerge from a considered social constructionist interpretation of an organisational

unit. In some ways, these multiple meanings can be said to possess “emancipatory potential” (Gergen, 2001: 10) by giving us freedom to move beyond dominant positivist perspectives which have come to be institutionalised in Western social sciences (Gunaratne, 2008). In promoting one discourse over another, discourse can therefore be viewed as a powerful institutionalising force to include or exclude “certain ways of thinking and acting” (Phillips et al, 2004: 638).

Interpretation through a social constructionist lens not only allows us to view organisational traits from an alternative vantage point, it also helps us gain an insight into how the organisation views itself and constructs its own identity for multiple and overlapping audiences. A substantial body of research in organisational discourse is devoted to how organisational identities are constructed (Balmer and Greyser, 2003; Cheney and Christensen, 2001), the research being driven by a climate of “organizational growth and complexity” (Argenti, 2006: 364) and increased scrutiny of organisations by diverse groups. Growth, complexity and increased scrutiny has forced organisations to create unique identities that are easily distinguishable from their competitors, resulting in a saturation of images and messages faced by consumers everyday (Cheney et al, 2004b).

When viewed with a social constructionist lens, organisations are constructing their reality through the interplay of text, language, images and embedded cultural and group behaviours. This complex interplay results in a continued legitimisation of specific organisational discourses (Brown et al, 2005; Brown, 2000, 2004, 2005). Prior studies of organisational discourse attribute the actions and motivations of senior managers as the driving agent of discourse production. However, on a practical level, it could be argued that it is the communications function that is given the role of “the rhetor, or the persuader” (Cheney et al, 2004a), charged with forming and managing the organisational identity to its many audiences. This places the communications practitioner, and not necessarily the manager, as one of the “architects” of organisational identity (Christensen et al, 2008).

The importance of existing research into organisational discourse, its link to the construction of “corporate reality” (Toth and Trujillo, 1987), and how it legitimises corporate actions, has undoubtedly added much to our understanding of organisational life. However, there are limitations to the scope of such research. Prior research leans toward examining large scale change initiatives that shift the

focus away from individual discourses and sensemaking in favour of collective, univocal accounts that largely concentrate on how management strategies are altered and how to engage members in organisational change (Balogun and Johnson, 2004, 2005; Ericson, 2001). By focusing on broader organisational phenomena in such a way, prior research therefore rules out notions of interpretive variability (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) and any notion of alternative possibilities that may exist, thereby ruling out alternative realities, or “future possibilities” (Weick, 1979). This study therefore uses a social constructionist lens to widen our knowledge of the traditional concepts that have so far de-contextualised the various aspects of communication work. It begins a conversation about the nature of communications work, rather than offering prescriptive solutions identified through positivist interpretation.

3.5 The centrality of language in communications work

Language is integral to the working life of the communication practitioner (Motion and Leitch, 2007), yet its use and analysis at the micro level has been largely omitted from corporate communication research over the last few decades. Instead, the focus of existing research has been on the skill set and power base of the individual practitioner within a large organisation (Moss et al, 2000; Dozier et al, 1995). Research has also focused on the socio-economic impact of the communications industry as a whole (CEBR, 2005; DTI, 2003). To this end, prior research has been primarily outward looking and focused on tangible aspects such as the Return On Investment of the communications function within specific organisational settings (Gregory and Watson; 2008; CEBR, 2005). This thesis advocates the analysis of practitioner discourses and in their natural setting to give us a greater insight into the working lives, or lived experiences of the communication practitioner, and the boundaries within which they operate. In doing so, it uses discourse analysis to draw out major themes and interpretive repertoires in use within the natural setting of the communication practitioner (Talja, 1999; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984).

The use and importance of discourse analysis is not new to broader communication related research. Previous discourse-centric research into the relationship between the power of language, iconography and its symbolic use to

represent the interests of a powerful elite (Herman and Chomsky, 1994), demonstrates the importance of critically analysing, for example, the level of influence that the public relations profession has on setting the media and cultural agenda within the UK (Davies, 2008; Ewen, 1996). Also of note is the work of Robert Heath (1994, 2000), which was instrumental in taking a rhetorical perspective on the nature of public relations (Heath, 1994, 2000; Toth and Heath, 1992). His research, however, scrutinises the macro and meso-level issues of projecting images and messages outward, whereas this study concentrates solely on the individual communication practitioner, essentially a micro-level analysis. Prior research strands have also taken to understanding the language of organisations through “dramaturgical and cultural approaches” (Toth and Trujillo, 1987: 44) in order to better comprehend how organisational reality is constructed.

The importance of discourse is also evident at the individual level where communication practitioners can be seen as “practical authors” (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003: 17) who create meaning within a given professional context. By creating meaning, they allow others to respond within the same cultural and linguistic framework (Shotter and Cunliffe, 2003). In this respect, the examination of a discourse, as articulated by the communication practitioner, takes on a greater significance, as it is the individual practitioner that is at the centre of that process of meaning creation, which then contributes to the wider communication discourse. To take that further, an analysis of that meaning creation also becomes crucial to understanding how communication practitioners make sense of what they experience in their working lives (Dervin et al, 2007), how their interpretations are enacted and the consequences of that enactment (Weick, 1995). Discourse, used in this context, therefore accepts the capacity for language to represent some aspects of the real world, in that it ‘bear[s] the truth’ (Gergen, 2001: 154).

Language for the communication practitioner serves as their tool, a notion which views practitioners as “discourse technologists” (Motion and Leitch, 2007: 266). Given the importance of language within the communications profession and its significance in shaping the “corporate reality” (Toth and Trujillo, 1987) of communication practitioners, this thesis argues that the study of the interpretive repertoires of communication practitioners and its contribution to the wider communications discourse is an integral part of analysing their lived experiences.

Moreover, the importance of micro-level research allows us to view everyday interpretations in new ways, which add to our understanding of the modern communications environment.

3.6 Acknowledging interpretive variability

Normative research processes favour the salience of patterns and dominant themes when analysing the discourse of groups of people around a particular topic (Talja, 1999; Machin and Carrithers, 1996; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). This arguably presents problems in theory identification and construction, as the dominating pattern of utterances is seen to represent an entire body of people, and therefore seen as a definitive account of that group's interpretation of an event (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). Viewing data through multiple lenses can therefore go some way towards redressing the promotion or prominence given to one or more all-encompassing discourses. Multiple interpretations allow us to see the contradictions and the interpretive variability that exists, not only within given social contexts (Putnam and Fairhurst, 2001), but also within the context of a semi-structured interview (Talja, 1999). Researchers can provide "unintentional cues" (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 7) which can stimulate the salience of one discourse over another: their utterances are context driven and guide participants to focus on specific aspects of their organisational life, in much the same way that practitioners' utterances will be carefully considered in the interview context. In this way, unintentional cues will inevitably give rise to one or two particular discourses or themes. Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) emphasise that in analysing interpretive repertoires, we can not assume that in identifying a pattern of discourse, we have uncovered the most reliable and definitive interpretation produced by the communication practitioners. To do so places weight upon the "methodological principle of linguistic consistency" (1984: 7) when what is needed is the use of multiple lenses to offer a contextualised or "multi-story" (Buchanan and Dawson, 2007) version of how discourses are produced. Additionally, promoting one interpretive lens over another, we "disregard copious interpretive uncertainties" (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 11).

In applying more than one interpretive lens to the raw data, this thesis supports the social constructionist approach which "conceive[s] the social world in terms of

an indefinite series of linguistic potentialities which can be realised in a wide variety of different ways and which are continually reformulated in the course of an ongoing interpretive process” (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 10). As such, what seem like conflicting or contradictory accounts are seen as equally valid, and rather than trying to reconcile them, it is worth noting the context in which they occur and the contingencies that give prominence to that discourse over another. Indeed, variability and seeming contradiction are surprisingly regular occurrences (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) which should be acknowledged, rather than reconciled, smoothed out or subsumed into another, broader discourse, not least because it allows us to view multiple meanings of an event within its natural setting.

By acknowledging interpretive variability, this research aims to redress the balance of research by focusing on individual agency, thereby moving beyond collective and managerial centred investigations (Craig-Lees, 2001). An examination of interpretive variability requires some understanding of the sensemaking processes of individuals. Examining the sensemaking of the individual communication practitioners within the context of their natural organisational setting is therefore an important element of this study.

3.7 The communication practitioner and sensemaking

Sensemaking is deeply embedded within the social constructionist worldview (Craig-Lees, 2001) and can be defined as “the social process by which meaning is produced” (Phillips et al, 2004: 641). In this study, it relates to how practitioners and their teams are perceived by themselves and others in their organisation, as it offers an insight into how practitioners interpret the events that lead them to believe certain ideas about their role and status within an organisation. Of central importance to sensemaking are the themes espoused by Brenda Dervin (see Dervin et al, 2007) and Karl Weick (1979, 1995). As sensemaking is an embryonic area for corporate communications research, an overview of the main themes is useful for understanding how particular elements of sensemaking are relevant to this research.

3.7.1 The Sense-Making Metaphor Model

In the media and communication domain, there exists an important body of work by Brenda Dervin (see Dervin et al, 2007) on “Sense-Making” that pulls apart the traditional “transmission” model of interpersonal communication, where “messages, or information, are things to be gotten, like dumping something into the heads of receivers as though they were empty buckets” (Foreman-Wernet, 2007: 3). In this domain, sensemaking is highly interpretive and contextualised and is a result of a “gap condition” that exists when interacting (Dervin, 1984: 255). The premise to the gap condition is that people are either information rich or information poor. These polarities offer a “static portrait” from which the body of subsequent research into social communication chooses to focus. Foreman-Wernet (2007) argues that the notion of there being a gap therefore places blame on the individual, as it is the responsibility of the individual to keep informed. Dervin’s (1984) critique of the gap condition further emphasises that rather than the fault laying with the individual, it actually highlights an inequity in systems which uphold these gaps.

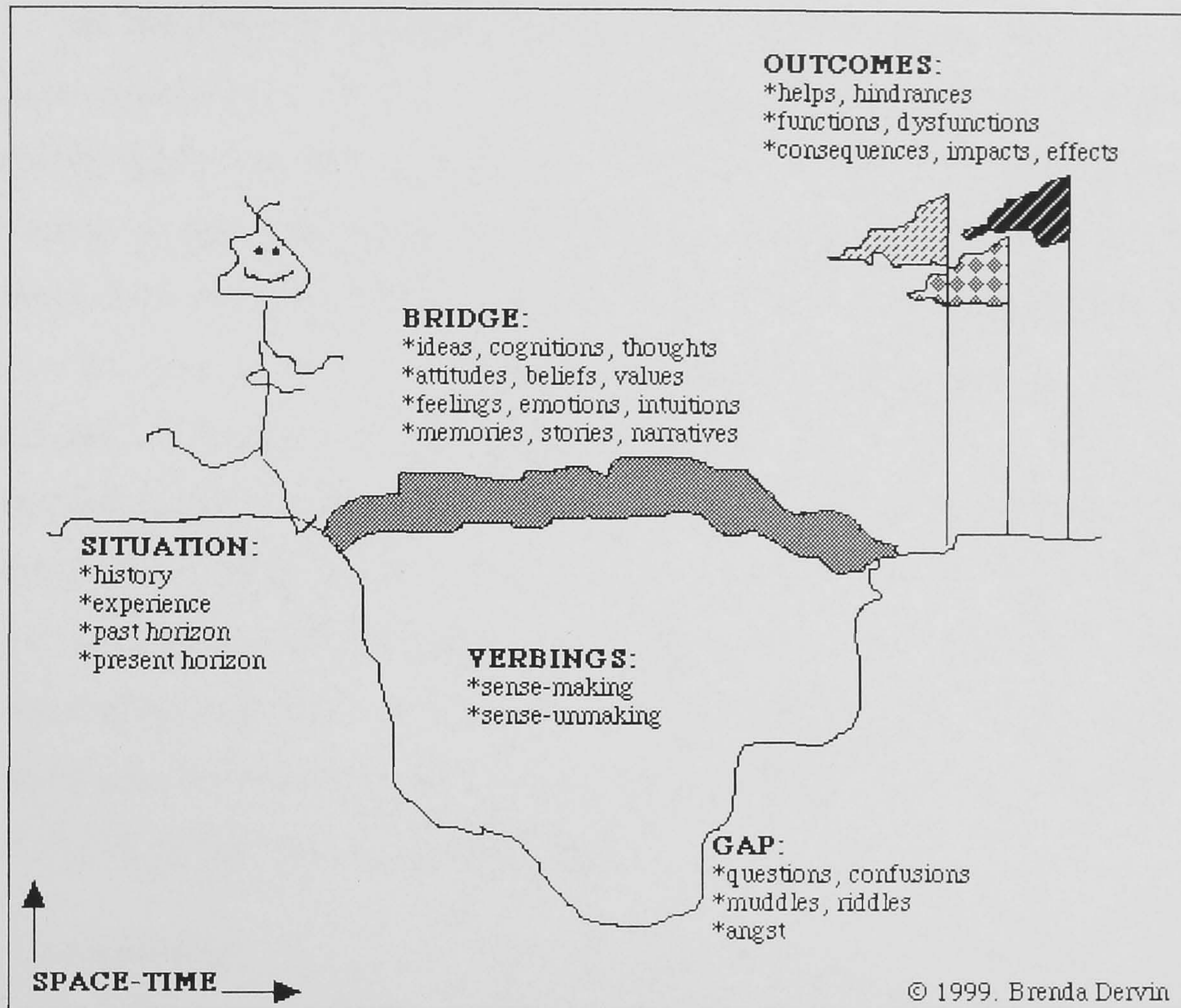
To counter this, Dervin and Frenette (2001) offer an alternative model that “conceptualizes messages not as *things* to be gotten, but as constructions that are tied to the specific times, places and perspectives of their creators” (Foreman-Wernet, 2007: 5, emphasis in original). As such, sensemaking is built on the premise that:

both humans and reality are sometimes orderly and sometimes chaotic...there is a human need to create meaning, and knowledge is something that is always sought in mediation and contest..,there are human differences in experience and observation (Foreman-Wernet, 2007: 7)

It is the chaos of the human experience which opens it up to multiple interpretations “because of change across time and space” (Foreman-Wernet, 2007:8). The chaos of making sense of “reality” is therefore fraught with contradictions and multiple meanings (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984; Potter and Wetherall, 1987) which makes Dervin’s model particularly relevant to this study. Dervin’s sensemaking metaphor model elaborates on the chaos and unpredictability of sensemaking. In particular, the model focuses on the situation, the gap, and the bridge that is constructed over that gap, the “verbings” which aid in bridging

constructions and the outcomes of the sensemaking process. Dervin's original (1999) model is depicted below:

Figure 3.1: The Sense-Making Metaphor Model



Source: Dervin and Frenette, (2001: 74)

3.7.2 The situation: sensemaking across time and space

There are a number of assumptions that are held in the sensemaking metaphor model. The first is that “humans are conceptualized metaphorically as moving across time and space by bridging gaps inherent in the human condition – between times, spaces, people and events” (Dervin and Frenette, 2001: 239). In viewing the practitioners as moving across space and time, this reinforces the social constructionist worldview of the changing nature of the human condition, as well as adding depth to the more traditional notions of the static and univocal practitioner who is concerned only with strategy, organisational identity or communicating with shareholders. Practitioners are therefore not the static, univocal experts often depicted in prior research, but are involved in a “constant journey through sense-making and sense-unmakings” (Dervin, 1999: 140). The continually changing

environment also recognises that sensemaking is “anchored” in minute “time and space” (Dervin and Frenette, 2001 cited in Dervin et al, 2007: 239).

3.7.3 The gap and the bridge

On the notion of information gaps, Dervin (1989) argues that prior research which categorises roles and functions actually serve to identify and label the “systems that make have and have-nots inevitable” (1989: 48). With the notion of information gaps at the forefront of Dervin’s notion of sensemaking, it follows that sensemaking can be defined as the *bridging of gaps*, where “communicating consists of in-the-head as well as physical acts of gap-bridging (making ideas, using strategies, connecting sources, choosing words, etc)” (Dervin, 2001: 67). As sensemaking is new to each moment in time, even if individuals experience familiar circumstances prior to what they are experiencing now, it then follows that “communicating is conceptualized as situated both in time and space” (2001: 67). Sensemaking therefore occurs where a need to fill a gap is identified and “the changing nature of time-space reduces gaps in a person’s understanding that require the making of new sense” (Dervin, 1984: 255).

3.7.4 Verbings

Within the model, people make and unmake sense whilst bridging gaps. Dervin labels this making and unmaking of sense as “verbings.” Verbings represent ideas, attitudes, feelings and memories (including personal narratives) (Dervin and Frenette, 2001) that people draw upon to make and unmake sense. However, what is unclear from this model is whether verbings are actionable thoughts or merely the label for drawing upon prior experiences, feelings and attitudes. On closer inspection, verbings could conceivably act as supports as the bridge is being constructed. Taylor and Robichaud (2004) make a similar connection between sensemaking and the experiences that people draw upon. They note that sensemaking “invokes language as members *call forth* knowledge of previous events through recollections and understandings of an appropriate response, given the situation” (2004: 397, my emphasis). These aspects which influence human cognition have been largely omitted from prior public relations and corporate communication research, which chooses instead to promote the practitioner as a

vessel (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) in which core knowledge is placed in order to strategise about work (Dozier et al, 1995).

3.7.5 The outcomes of the sensemaking process

The outcomes of the process can either help or hinder understanding, meaning that the process can either bring clarity (see also Weick, 1979) or give rise to unforeseen barriers. On a broader level, the outcomes are concerned with whether change occurs as a result of understanding and enacting our interpretations, such as a shift in a dominant discourse, or a change to the status quo.

3.7.6 Summarising the Sense-Making Metaphor Model

In summarising the Sensemaking Metaphor Model, we can see that there is a clear emphasis on the cognitive processes of humans and in contextualising their interpretations. Dervin's notions of comparing the contextualised experiences of humans also resemble Gilbert and Mulkay's (1984) process of looking for interpretative variability, in that both schools of thought advocate staying true to the language of people in their natural setting, in order to understand how they make sense of events across time and space. The use of the Sense-Making Metaphor Model has recently been acknowledged within public relations literature, but the focus of this remains on the outward facing role of the practitioner and the organisation's relationship with its publics (Walker, 2006). Its use to judge the reflexive aspects of practitioner sensemaking has therefore been omitted, once again, in favour of a more traditional research agenda. The Sense-Making Metaphor Model emphasises the importance of acknowledging the practitioner as operating within a continually changing environment, rather than the static individual portrayed through the excellence model and through the formal labelling of their roles. In moving through a continually changing environment, the model offers us flexibility, though a certain amount of "safety" or rigidity is also present through learned habits, such as formal communications training and practical experience. This thesis will draw upon Dervin's (1999) metaphor model in Chapter 5 to understand and contextualise a number of the findings.

Another influential body of work in sensemaking is the work of Karl Weick (1979, 1995) whose exploration of sensemaking is situated within a broader

organisational setting, looking in particular at the social organising processes of organisational members, which will now be elaborated upon below.

3.8 Sensemaking in organisations

The rise of sensemaking in management literature marks an increased interest in the cognition and behavioural aspects of managers' lives and the process of organising mental models and relaying appropriate information and concepts to stakeholders. Research into organisational sensemaking has therefore focused on detailed processes used by managers to make sense of the situations within which they operate and the events that are actioned as a result of the sensemaking process (Maitlis, 2005; Weick et al, 2005; Gioia et al, 2002; Weick, 1995; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Daft and Weick, 1984). Sensemaking in organisational research can therefore be seen as the act of grasping and conceptualising thoughts, actions, scenarios, crisis, surprises and anomalies, through reading and interpreting environmental cues and drawing upon individual and group experiences, values and history, to form an understanding of what has gone before (no matter how recently) (Maitlis, 2005; Weick et al, 2005; Gioia et al, 2002; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991; Weick, 1995; Daft and Weick, 1984). Sensemaking is triggered by what is "novel or surprising" (Phillips et al, 2004: 641), which could be different things to different people, although much literature seems to focus on extreme or crisis situations to clearly identify the novel experience (Weick, 1993).

Much discussion has stemmed from Weick's seminal texts *The Social Psychology of Organising* (1979) and *Sensemaking in Organisations* (1995), particularly on the acts and processes of understanding one's organisational environment and reading and interpreting the minute stimuli that culminate in "enactment" (Weick, 1979, 1995). Although Weick's work has broadly focused on the decision making of managers during particular organisational events, there are particular aspects of his work which are particularly relevant to a study of this kind, which seeks to examine the interpretive variability and sensemaking of communication practitioners. These include retrospective analysis, enactment and articulation of interpretations, the social process, the ongoing and dynamic aspect of interpretation and the plausibility of interpretations (Weick 1995: 17-61).

3.8.1 Retrospective analysis

A number of scholars argue that sensemaking is retrospective, as the act of understanding actions and thoughts can only be grasped fully through looking back at what has gone before (Henningsen et al, 2006; Weick et al, 2005; Gioia et al, 2002; Weick, 1995). The purpose of the retrospection is to gain clarity and reduce ambiguity (Weick, 1979, 1995; Daft and Weick, 1984). This retrospective, or historical angle, also informs our future thinking (Gioia et al, 2002) making sensemaking “prospective” in addition to retrospective, which in turn informs future events or actions (Gioia et al, 2002). Retrospective sensemaking also gives us the ability to revise history, known as the “revisionist history perspective” (2002: 627), which arguably influences more than just the perceived chronology of events, as it has the ability to alter the significance placed on events through scenario filtering by individuals.

Revising the past can often be used to make organisations appear “consistent with the way they currently see themselves” (2002: 623) as well as “align [themselves] with current images” (2002: 629) and may happen more than we realise during large scale change initiatives. The interplay between past and present is “manipulated” so that we are able to “anticipate” (2002: 625) an issue and solve the problem through careful manipulation of how present actions and decisions will be perceived in the future (Gioia et al, 2002). Through this idea of manipulating the “future perfect tense” Gioia et al’s (2002: 623) work touches on the self-fulfilling prophecy of organisations, as first highlighted by Weick (1995). Henningsen et al (2006) argue that retrospective analysis can also be used to blame a negative outcome or actions on poor decision making by groups – the now famous example of President Kennedy’s failed attack on the Bay of Pigs being blamed on “group think” (Handy, 1985) comes to mind.

Labelling and retrospective analysis are interdependent according to Weick et al (2005), as the “label follows after and names a completed act, but the labelling itself fails to capture the dynamics of what is happening” (2005: 412). The same critique can be applied to the labelling of practitioners as either “managers” or “technicians” (Dozier and Broom, 1995). Labelling, however, does serve an important purpose in that it allows identities to develop, for which the meanings may

change over time (Gioia et al, 2002; Weick, 1995; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991), as well as ensuring that the “world is simplified” (Weick et al 2005: 411) and that we have a sense of belonging in this simplified world. In this study, it could be argued that both the diary entries and interviews are likely to be structured around retrospective sensemaking accounts.

3.8.2 Enactment and articulation of interpretations

Weick et al’s (2005) enactment theory conceptualises sensemaking as a sequence of “enactment, selection and retention” (2005: 414). This model is an extension of the model presented by Daft and Weick (1984), which categorises the sensemaking sequence as “scanning, interpretation and learning” (1984: 286). Although illustrated in a linear format (Daft and Weick, 1984, Weick et al, 2005), sensemaking is cyclical, multi-layered and complex, which the linear layout of the models fail to fully convey. Daft and Weick (1984) in particular note that their model does not convey the complexity of interpretation, as “social behaviour cannot be simultaneously general, accurate and simple” (1984: 294). This chimes with a social constructionist view of interpretation and how meaning is created through complex human relationships (Gergen, 2001) and is too vast to fully comprehend (Allard-Poesi, 2005).

Enacting and articulating are the outcome of interpretations that occur within a continual flow of sensemaking (Weick et al, 2005) and are manifest through “reading, writing, conversing and editing” (2005: 365). Language is particularly important for Weick (1995, 2005; see also Shotter, 1993), as analysing it may miss the opportunity to focus on “the subtle, the small, the relational, the oral, the particular, and the momentary” (Weick et al, 2005: 410). In light of this, discourse analysis then could be said to take the emphasis away from the small, which is just as important as the more apparent or discursive cues. The enactment of interpretations means that we create our own reality through the environment within which we interact (Gergen, 2001; Weick, 1995; Shotter, 1993), which may lead to affirming or self-affirming actions (Weick, 1995). Enactment therefore is essentially centred in action and the maintenance of identities and interpretations (Weick, 1995, Goffman, 1959). In an organisational setting, enactment leads to greater accountability, as decisions are made transparent through language and legitimised

through action (Grant et al, 2004; Weick, 1995). The notion of “possibility” is at the core of sensemaking enquiry and why, at one precise moment, one action to change the future, takes precedence over another (Shotter, 1993).

3.8.3 The social process

Given the interaction and negotiation that occurs between individuals, their environment and other people, it is understood that sensemaking “is a fundamentally social process” (Maitlis, 2005: 21). Underlying the social processes are the values and judgements that shape our interpretations, which are formed from broader organisational influences and our socialisation into the organisation (Weick et al, 2005). The social process means that “powerful actors such as mass media, government agencies, professions and interest groups” (2005: 417) further influence us as we, as individuals, engage with them (Weick et al, 2005). Research into the effects of media manipulation of individuals is testimony to the power of media actors (Laughey, 2007). Our interaction and subsequent interpretation of events are therefore dependent upon the actions and reactions of others (Gergen, 2001; Weick, 1995). Even when alone, our interpretations remain linked to our relations with others, as we have the ability to perform “monologues” (1995: 40) to an audience who change whenever the content of our monologues alter (Weick, 1995).

The social process acknowledges the richness and complexity of interaction, as well as the reciprocal nature of human dynamics (Gergen, 2001; Weick, 1995; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). Part of the reciprocal sequence focuses on *sensegiving* (Maitlis, 2005; Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991) – an act which attempts to influence others into subscribing to either one consistent interpretation or implementing the interpretation of the dominant coalition, as seen in Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) study of academic institutions. Gioia and Chittipeddi’s (1991) four phases of tracking change through sensemaking and sensegiving have an underlying theme of social dynamics; in the descriptions of the four phases – envisioning, signalling, re-visioning, energising – each phase mentions the interaction between the CEO, his team, the trustees and the larger workforce, thereby highlighting the process as rooted in negotiation and meaning. The social dimensions highlighted in Maitlis’ study (2005) are useful for drawing parallels between the four social dimensions of guided, fragmented, restricted and minimal, to that of management styles loosely

divided into participatory or authoritarian approaches. Her study is also important in that it draws attention to sensemaking among large groups of stakeholders, rather than one level of management. Arguably, the focus on one person's sensemaking process means that the analysis is done at the exclusion of other peoples' sensemaking processes, which does not take into account the dynamic and reciprocal nature of sensemaking being embedded in relationships (Maitlis, 2005; Gergen et al, 2004).

Daft and Weick (1984) draw a useful comparison between organisational cultures and the dynamism of cultural forces by stating that "organisations are vast, fragmented and multidimensional" (1984: 284). This suggests that to some extent organisations mirror society in their dynamics. They also liken organisations to humans with a "central nervous system" (1984: 285), much like Morgan's (1986, 2006) metaphorical take on the organisation as a living organism, emphasising that organisations are living entities, made up of humans, each with their own continual sensemaking sequences and agendas. Daft and Weick's (1984) interpretation model makes four assumptions about organisational sensemaking, which take into account that sensemaking is a social process. The assumptions about organisations are that they are open and social systems, that there is a difference in how individuals and organisations interpret their environmental cues (particularly in relation to drawing cognitive maps), that senior managers hold and implement the dominant interpretation on behalf of the organisation, and finally, that there is no generic way for an organisation to interpret, as all organisations do this differently (1984: 285-286). These assumptions are important tenets in how sensemaking is viewed and consequently researched within management, thus illustrating how it differs from Dervin's (1999) micro-level focus. The social process is therefore an important characteristic in management sensemaking, although any analysis is unlikely to fully convey the dynamism of human sensemaking within the organisational setting (Allard-Poesi, 2005).

3.8.4 The ongoing and dynamic aspect of interpretation

Organisational sensemaking operates within, and helps to organise flux (Weick et al, 2005). It occurs in a continuum, much like Dervin and Frenette's (2001) contextualisation of events in time and space, and "amidst a stream of potential

antecedents and consequences” (2005: 411). All other components serve to make sensemaking ongoing and reciprocal (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991), with negotiation and renegotiation overlapping to help us gain clarity as events take shape (Weick et al 2005; Weick, 1995). The constant back and forth of interpretation means that sensemaking is “creation as well as discovery” (Weick, 1995: 8. See also Gergen, 2001) and “neither starts fresh nor stops cleanly” (Weick, 1995: 48). The dynamism of sensemaking ensures that although relationships are brief, they are also significant and woven together through systems of organisational meaning (Weick 1995). Sensemaking comes before decision making, which in turn contributes to the sensemaking process (Maitlis 2005), and then maintains its cyclical nature as it feeds back into the micro-level process of sensemaking (Dervin et al, 2007).

3.8.5 The plausibility of interpretations

Weick et al (2005) argue that sensemaking is less about truth than it is about the “continued redrafting of an emerging story” (2005: 415). The plausibility of an interpretation depends upon its alignment and consistency with dominant interpretations (Lauzen, 1995) and the story’s ability to offer “an aura of accuracy” (Weick et al, 2005: 415) when projecting an alternate future. In the organisational setting, this element of sensemaking challenges the assumption that the interpretations and actions of managers accurately determine the future success of organisations (Weick et al, 2005). Weick (1995) argues that managers “trade accuracy for plausibility” (1995: 84) when articulating their interpretations to the rest of the organisation, essentially suggesting that they manipulate the situation (Maitlis 2005).

3.8.6 Summarising sensemaking in organisations

Sensemaking and sensegiving enquiry adds a rich layer to the analysis of organisational life (Gioia and Chittipeddi 1991) and acknowledges the dynamic and continual flow of the present, as well as the minute detail of the reciprocal process. The components advocated by Weick (1995) are synchronised together with environmental cues and the creation of organisational and individual identity, to form a sensemaking process that helps understand the decision making of managers and how they interpret what they experience within the broader context of the complex organisation.

Weick's focus on sensemaking is, however, different from Dervin's in that Weick seeks to understand *how organisations organise decision making*, whereas Dervin seeks to understand the *context of how individuals attempt to make sense of events*. There are features of their work that undoubtedly overlap and consequently inform this research. With Weick's sensemaking research, aspects of retrospective analysis, enactment, social processes and plausible interpretation may link directly to examining the interpretive repertoires of practitioners through talk and text. However, although these elements are linked, Weick writes about these factors in isolation, which inevitably is highly abstract and de-contextualised. Dervin's model *visualises* and therefore pulls together these, and other factors which constitute sensemaking. This visualisation is important as it may serve to contextualise the lived experience of the practitioners.

3.9 The relevance of discourse and sensemaking to the current research

Quantitative analysis of discursive practices is useful for looking at the frequency of words and identifying patterns, but this detracts from the richness that comes with looking at the context within which communication practitioners are compelled to articulate themselves and, as such, this research uses a qualitative approach to analysing data. In examining practitioner discourses, this presents us with new information about the world in which the practitioner operates and in doing so allows us to gain a more rounded view of the nature of their work and the environment within which they operate. Research into the discourses of practitioners is, however, un-chartered territory, as prior research has tended to focus on specific activities that constitute the role of the practitioner (Dozier and Broom, 1995). Moreover, this research uses interpretive approaches previously used in some organisational communication research (Ihlen, 2008; Llewellyn and Harrison, 2006; Fairhurst and Putnam, 2004; Cooren and Taylor, 1997), and public relations research (Yeomans, 2008; Pieczka, 2007) and applies it to examining the lived experience of the practitioner, of which there is a marked paucity of such research. What this research therefore presents is a contribution to knowledge in the form of discourse analysis applied to a previously overlooked area of public relations and corporate

communication research; that of the sensemaking and interpretative repertoires of communication practitioners (Potter and Wetherall, 1994).

An exploratory study of the common scenarios experienced by communication practitioners (Ashra, 2006) gives further reason for a study of this kind. In that exploratory study, practitioners wrote about taking “mental steps,” making judgement calls, interpreting information and sending it through channels to be interpreted by others, negotiating between other organisational departments and using stories to educate. These sensemaking accounts offered by practitioners are loaded with individual interpretation, meaning and discrete discourses (Brewer, 2003), resulting in individual enactments that, although may be attributed to a broader pattern of behaviour, remain deeply personal and the ownership of the individual. The importance here lies in the link between the action taken, what influenced the action and alternative actions that were considered but not acted upon. All these reasons above present fertile ground for employing discourse and sensemaking enquiry to the working lives of communication practitioners, the results of which offer contributions to existing public relations and corporate communication literature beyond that of role labelling, two-way symmetrical models of communication, excellence and communication integration.

3.10 An explanation of the aims of this research

This study aims to explore the discourses and sensemaking processes of communication practitioners, thereby moving beyond existing communications theory to give us a more holistic picture of the nature of communications work, as interpreted by the communication practitioner. It does this through exploring practitioners’ discursive patterns and identifying discourses present within the natural setting of their work environment. To fully understand the discursive patterns and discourses used by practitioners in their natural setting, the foundation for analysis rests within a social constructionist paradigm, which is a departure from much existing research in public relations and corporate communications.

Positivist approaches continue to be favoured in communication related research (Levine, 2008; Elving and Hansma, 2008). This favoured paradigm is used in an effort to convey the ‘truth’ about activities, roles and purpose. However, it has

perpetuated a body of research that is outward looking; research which focuses on targets, outcomes, outputs and in achieving an end result. In doing so, it has adopted a traditional management discourse, but failed to understand the inner workings of the people enacting those particular roles within communication related disciplines.

3.11 Moving beyond roles research, communication excellence and issues of integration

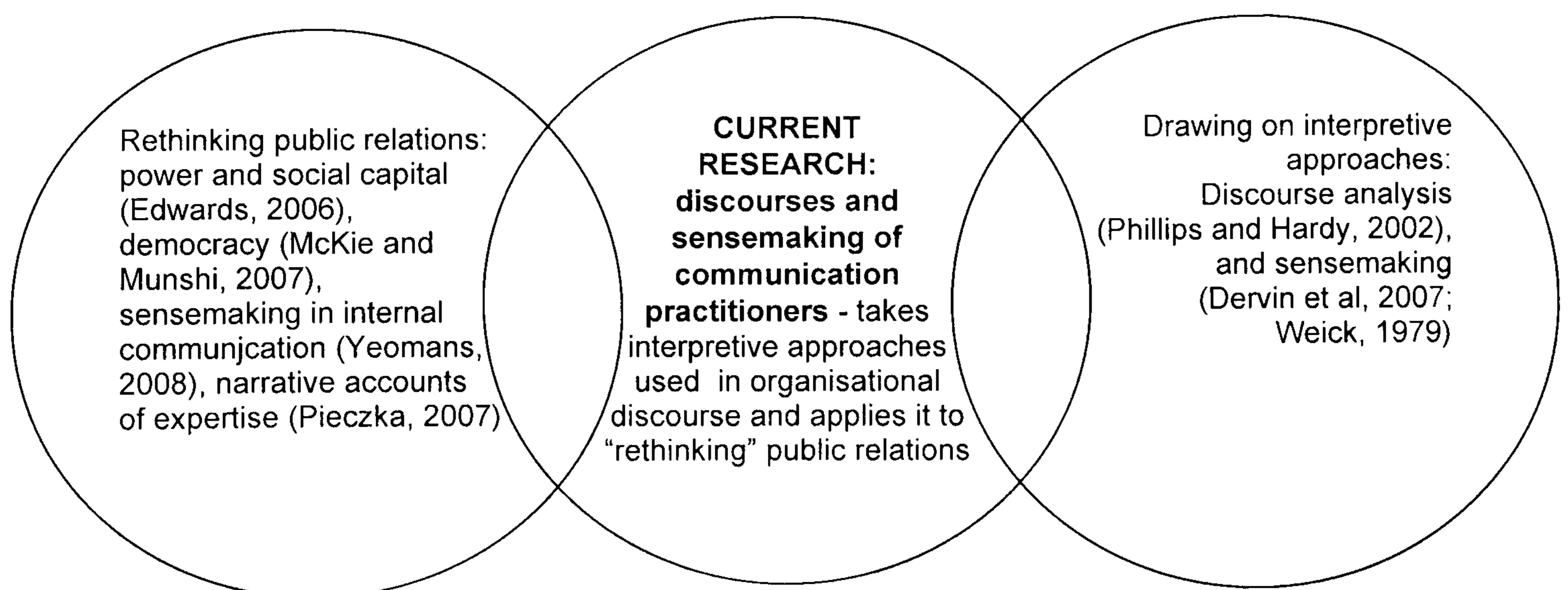
In looking at the discourses employed by communication practitioners, the current research moves beyond traditional notions of practitioner roles theory and takes the view that the living, breathing communications practitioner is more than the enactor tasks and activities, as identified in prior communication related texts (Dozier and Broom, 1995, Dozier et al, 1995). To position the practitioner solely as the enactor of tasks, tasks that are presumed to have a desired outcome, is in keeping with the act of communication being a linear process, which is a traditional view. Both practitioner roles theory and the excellence theory, with its three spheres of communication excellence, present communication as fundamentally linear, in that outcomes are contingent upon particular actions in order to fully develop and exist. With roles theory, the practitioner must carry out the tasks befitting a “manager” or “technician” in order for the series of tasks to convert into a potentially tangible outcome. Moreover, the labels of “manager” and “technician” have more power than they are credited with. In academia, these labels have endured critique and maintained their importance. In practice, the power lies not just in the ease with which we can predict the list of tasks and activities that should be undertaken by anyone attributed with the title of manager or technician, but in the way the label neatly closes off any other viewpoint on the role of practitioner and how it influences career progression. As stated in the previous chapter, the labels set up boundaries between the definitions and have certain connotations and assumptions attached to them about how the roles are enacted (Weick, 1979). In the excellence theory, although a spherical model is presented, the three factors of core knowledge, shared expectations and organisational culture are presented as incremental factors on a linear path to excellence, thereby actively discounting the many unique social contexts within which practitioners operate. Moving beyond practitioner roles theory

and excellence theory therefore involves viewing the practice of communication and the nature of communication work as more than a linear process. The current research takes the view that roles and excellence are more than a linear or incremental process and therefore seeks to understand the nature of communication work through the discourses and sensemaking of communications practitioners, which is a departure from the existing positions adopted in roles and excellence research. It also takes the view that the specific labels used to categorise the work of practitioners into particular types, whilst valuable for ease of identification in some circumstances, do not fully convey the depth of the interpretative processes and sensemaking (Phillips and Hardy, 2002; Potter and Wetherell, 1987), nor the contextual influences (Dervin, 1999) that guide practitioner enactment.

3.12 Situating this research

Drawing on Table 2.1 we can see, from the adapted Venn diagram below, that this research is situated within the body of recent public relations literature which seeks to “rethink” public relations using a social constructionist framework (McKie and Munshi, 2007; Yeomans, 2008; Motion and Leitch, 2007; Pieczka, 2007; Edwards, 2006). Figure 3.2 below also illustrates the influence of discourse and sensemaking centred approaches upon the current research:

Figure 3.2: Situating the current research



As stated throughout this chapter, the current study adopts a social constructionist approach to examine the lived experience of communication practitioners, that has not been used before. As Ihlen and van Ruler (2007) state, “there seems to be a growing interest in the scholarly field of public relations for differentiation in methodology” (2007: 246). There is a certain advantage in viewing aspects of the working life of the practitioner from a different position (Shotter, 1993; Morgan 1986), as this will highlight aspects about the daily lives of communication practitioners within the contemporary organisation, which have, in the main, remained unrecorded and unobserved. As Shotter (1993) states, there is value in “contrasting our knowledge practices with alternatives” (1993: 117).

3.13 In conclusion

This chapter has shown that whilst positivist approaches have greatly influenced communication research, the dominant body of research has omitted the vital element of examining the lived experiences of communication practitioners, specifically the discourses and sensemaking of practitioners. As discourse centred enquiry relies on verbal and written text, this research uses diaries and interviews to gather suitable data for discourse analysis and sensemaking enquiry. The complete methodology and methods will be elaborated upon in the next chapter.

Chapter 4:

Research design and implementation

4.0 Introduction

The previous chapter unpacked some of the concepts that lay the foundation of this study, which is firmly embedded in the social constructionist paradigm. This research is designed to examine the discourses and sensemaking of communication practitioners and in doing so it employs an interpretive approach, using diaries and interviews to gather suitable data. This chapter details the methodology (the broader research plan) and the methods (how the research was implemented) (Crotty, 1998). It also covers how the online diary method was piloted and used, the phenomena observed from using diaries as a data gathering method, the limitations of the research and any ethical concerns identified. It then concludes with detailing the protocol for data analysis and the first and second order categories identified.

4.1 Designing a qualitative study

Everyday texts, such as language, are held in high regard within social constructionism, as the discourse represented through these texts provide a window into how individuals interpret the events they experience. As such, it was important that the design of the current study employed a methodology which favoured the collection of written and oral the texts. Furthermore, it was important that these texts were constructed within their natural work setting, so as to make connections between the contexts and the social processes, which together create the prevalent discourses for these communication practitioners. Even before considering the specific methodology for the current study, designing an interpretive study presents a number of challenges for the qualitative researcher (Gummesson, 2000). Given how the social constructionist worldview places importance upon “real world” experiences of the individual, it is safe to say that my own experience as a communication practitioner prior to designing this research would impact upon my

focus for the research. This previous experience amounts to my “pre-understanding” of the research area (Gummesson, 2000) and whilst this highlights a level of bias that could shape my interpretation of data, it also gives me an advantage through my “insider” understanding of the type of language used, as well as an understanding of the varying cultural and organisational contexts within which practitioners operate. This insider “knowledge by acquaintance” (2000: 60) can be beneficial, as it can result in more meaningful abstraction from, and interpretation of the data. As an insider to the communications profession, this also allowed me to access existing practitioner networks where the research would be welcomed. The pre-understanding that comes from being an insider can therefore result in a greater contribution to knowledge (Gummesson, 2000). There were however, a number of ethical dilemmas which had to be considered throughout the study. These have been summarised at the end of the chapter.

4.1.1 Methodology

Crotty (1998) sees a distinction between the methodology and the methods, whereby the methodology is the broader plan designed to organise the research (which incorporates specific methods), and methods are the specific techniques used to collect and analyse the data. Within the social constructionist approach, there are a variety of *methodologies* available to the researcher that present opportunities to engage with individuals, and the organisations within which they are situated, at many levels (Boje et al, 2004). The current research uses discourse analysis, with its strong reputation in examining identity production within an organisational and cultural context (Phillips and Hardy, 2002), as a methodology for understanding the daily lives of communication practitioners.

Discourse analysis subsequently presents the researcher with many options for investigation using specific techniques within the field of discourse analysis, such as narrative, conversation or thematic analysis, through to critical discourse or social linguistic analysis. These techniques also give us an entry route into how individuals interpret “micro-events” (Dervin et al, 2007; Weick, 1979) thereby giving some insight into their interpretive repertoires (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984) and sensemaking processes (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). The specific technique used in the current research is thematic analysis of data from practitioner diaries and

interviews which allows us to identify the variability that exists in practitioner interpretations (Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984). I also used non-participant observation and organisational documents to help understand and contextualise the experience of communication practitioners. Thematic analysis was undertaken using NVIVO software to complement the iterative process of thematic analysis, with data being interpreted and abstracted into broader theoretical themes, as shown in Table 4.6 at the end of this chapter.

4.1.2 Negotiating access into the daily lives of communication practitioners

Gaining access to the lived experiences of the modern communication practitioners presents yet another challenge for the qualitative researcher (Gummesson, 2000). As an insider to the communications profession, I already had a relationship with the CIPR through an exploratory study that I had conducted for them in July 2006. This study gave me access, via the members' e-bulletin, to the CIPR membership base of approximately 8000 communication practitioners. Once the exploratory study was complete, I summarised its key findings into a short news article for inclusion in the members' e-bulletin and its online magazine "Profile." I used the article as a type of press release to outline the key findings, make two recommendations and to publicise and ask for communication practitioners to take part in the "second stage" of the research (See Appendix 2). This journalistic, or press release style of writing was in keeping with the industry and CIPR standard and also fit the writing style of the members' e-bulletin and online magazine. The concluding paragraph of the article asking for participants to take part gave details of the research design, which had been developed in the months leading up to the article being published. This was a deliberate strategy to ensure that when communication practitioners read the article, they would know exactly what was expected of them in terms of time and other commitments, thereby actively filtering out those who could not commit to writing diaries and taking part in interviews. On the day the e-bulletin went out, I received 7 emails from 7 different practitioners asking for more information about the research and stating an initial interest about wanting to take part. In addition to contacting communication practitioners through the CIPR, I also approached the communications department of a private sector

organisation known to have a partnership with the University of Leeds, as well as 3 UK based charities with which I have a strong relationship.

4.1.3 Sampling of participants for the current research

A number of criteria were used in selecting who would take part in the research. These criteria were decided before the CIPR article was printed, and formed the basis of a follow up conversation with each person who contacted me about wanting to take part in the research. The follow up conversation focused on:

1. **Physical or conceptual team:** Given that this study focuses on the social processes which create meaning, it was essential that communication practitioners working as a team were physically situated together, rather than operating as isolated individuals within a larger, decentralised communication function. Communication practitioners operating alone within their organisation, or organisations with a decentralised communication function were therefore not selected to participate in the research, as the physical proximity of team members was an important factor in data gathering.
2. **The size of the team:** The size of the team was crucial in getting a critical mass of information. The recent CEBR (2005) report states that the average size for a communications team in both the public and private sector is between 3-10 people. This formed the basis for relevance sampling (Krippendorff, 2004), in that the organisations eventually chosen from all those who responded to the call for participants, were those working within teams of between 3-10 communication practitioners. The chosen teams were therefore “average” in size for the UK communications industry as a whole.
3. **The nature of their work:** The nature of work included one or more of the activities outlined in Table 1.2: Components of modern corporate communication and public relations. This was relatively easy to check over the phone by asking practitioners about their departmental and individual remit, organisational hierarchies and their job titles. I also established whether each team member worked on an organisation-

wide project, as well as core communications work, such as internal communications, public affairs or publicity.

4. **Allowing access:** Also crucial was their commitment to allowing access for me to observe them at meetings. It was made clear from the beginning that this would ideally be at least one team meeting and one other type of meeting.
5. **Commitment to the diary and interview process:** Again, this was an extremely important aspect of the research as their continued commitment to keeping diaries and making time for interviews and non-participant observation would ensure the success or failure of the data collection phase.

In addition to these criteria, it was also important that the organisations broadly represented the private and public sector, as well as different industry sectors. Following the initial contact from seven communication practitioners through the CIPR e-bulletin, I spoke to each one to determine whether they matched the above criteria. Of the seven practitioners who contacted me, only five matched the criteria. Once suitability to the criteria had been identified, I then emailed the five remaining communication practitioners an A4 sheet of paper with the same press release, but this time it had the University of Leeds branding on it, which, again, was a deliberate strategy to make sure that the research was seen as independent from the work of the CIPR. This document was then shared between their respective organisational members and used as a discussion point to decide formally as to whether their organisation, and communication team, wanted to take part in the research. I gave the private sector organisation and the charities that I had contacted the same information as was made available to the practitioners who had contacted me through the CIPR, and waited for them to go through their decision-making processes as to whether they wanted to take part. Arguably, in allowing all the communications team to decide for themselves whether they wanted to take part, this created a sense of ownership about their involvement in the research. For example, there was continued evidence of commitment to the research when I visited two of the organisations to conduct the interviews; the prompt cards that I had designed could be seen visibly stuck onto individual computer screens and I also saw the

phrase “Nilam’s diary” written at the top of a white board in another organisation as part of their “to do” list.

Eventually, two organisations who responded to the CIPR e-bulletin were prepared to commit to the research and another organisation that I had contacted through a University of Leeds partnership also committed to the research. This left me with three organisations that were willing to take part in the research; one private sector financial services provider (Barksdales), one public sector care provider (Primecare) and one private sector legal services provider (Elco). Their details are outlined below.

4.1.4 Barksdales

Barksdales is a leading financial services provider and functions under many brand names throughout the world. It offers personal, private and business financial services and has a visible local sponsorship presence in the cities where their regional and country headquarters are situated. In the UK, it employs five full-time staff in its Media Centre, which constitutes its external affairs team. This team deals regularly and directly with journalists, celebrities, internal communication officers across the organisation, high profile organisations for long-term sponsorship deals and also government officials in Whitehall, the political capital of the UK. Their work is largely media related with frequent contact with their senior management team, consisting of 13 executives based in three of the major cities in the UK. Their jobs consequently involve lots of travelling during certain times of the year to manage their media contacts throughout these cities.

4.1.5 Primecare

Primecare is a public sector care provider in the UK and came into being through a change in government legislation, which aims to raise standards and monitor the social services offered to the public. It has grown from being an organisation of less than 20 people to now being an organisation of over 100 people within the last five years. In the UK, it employs six full-time and one part-time staff in its Media Centre, which constitutes its communications team. This team regularly deal directly with journalists, other public sector bodies and their communication teams and also other departments within their organisation. Their work regularly

involves staging high profile events and managing the information needed for the social care profession, which is done through written documents, their website and through events. They also have frequent contact with the senior management team, consisting of 12 board members and two executives.

4.1.6 Elco

Elco is a private sector legal services and training provider in the UK and its services are aimed at helping the legal profession support its clients. It has close links with similar legal services and training providers at in UK regions, with a presence in Brussels, the political capital of Europe. In the UK, it employs four full-time staff and one part-time writer at its Media Centre, which constitutes the corporate communications team. In the year preceding the research, they re-branded themselves from being the media team to being the corporate communications team. The team regularly deal directly with journalists, organisations throughout the legal profession in the UK and their associated communication teams, and government officials at the EU headquarters in Brussels. They have frequent contact with the President, Chief Executive and board members of the organisation.

4.2 Methods

As stated by Crotty (1998) the methods are the specific techniques used to collect and analyse the data. The broader methodology makes use of more than one method in gathering data.

4.2.1 Primary and secondary data sources

The data collection techniques employed in this research are:

1. participant dairies (primary source)
2. semi-structured, one-to-one, confidential interviews (primary source)
3. non-participant observation of meetings (secondary source)
4. analysis of respective organisational documents (secondary source)

The written and verbal data provided through both primary sources formed the body of data for examining the daily lives of communication practitioners. The

secondary sources provided important opportunities for clarifying, triangulating and contextualising some elements of the interpretive discourses employed by practitioners. Non-participant observation allowed me to see how language was used within different organisational settings. It also allowed me to see different non verbal cues in a group setting, as well as discursive patterns, how strategies or tactics were articulated and the content of meetings. This, again, added another layer of richness to the research data. Whilst observing, I took field notes, where permitted, of observations and informal chats over lunch and evening dinners. I was given access to a limited number of internal organisational documents, such as communication strategies and organisational charts that, again, helped me to contextualise the experience of the practitioners within their respective organisations.

4.2.2 Diaries in qualitative research

This thesis advocates the use and analysis of diaries as an entry point into making sense of the working lives of communication practitioners. It argues that although interviews have a longstanding reputation in obtaining qualitative data on the working lives of communication practitioners, this has resulted in limiting the boundaries of research to that of the roles and activities of communication practitioners and the teams within which they operate. As such, diaries present an important research method for interpretive research (Alaszewski, 2006b, Symon, 1998).

Diary studies in the past have been used to monitor and measure incidents, thoughts and actions (Waddington, 2005; Swim et al, 2001) and have historically been paper based, following formats that centre on events or specific time periods (Bolger et al, 2003). In the broader communications field, diaries have been limited to use in marketing, advertising and media studies, with an emphasis on gathering quantitative data, particularly through the use of scales and ratings (Abernethy, 1989; McKenzie, 1983). More recently, they have been used to assess the individual interaction that participants have with the internet (Baym et al, 2004). In the social sciences, diaries have been used to judge individual moods, activities and personal contacts throughout the day (Nezlek, 1995; Kirchier, 1988). It is worth noting, however, that such diary centred research rarely uses narrative extracts as part of its

research design, meaning that the results generated remain largely quantitative in nature.

One of the earliest pieces of management research by Stewart (1968) used diaries to look at the time management of managers and analysed the use of diaries as a management learning tool, although she states that the learning experienced by respondents through keeping diaries was a by-product of her research. Since then, the notion of management learning has made diaries more relevant to research, yet the methodology has not been developed fully for either corporate communication or management research. Given its potential for reflexivity, the use of diaries and the thematic analysis of their content is particularly appropriate in examining how communication practitioners interpret the events they experience, and is a particularly robust approach when the research design includes follow-up interviews (Zimmerman and Wieder, 1977).

Diaries have been used across many disciplines, but most importantly it is the notion that they can give researchers a first hand narrative account of the events, actions and motivations of individual communication practitioners that presents the most appealing argument for their inclusion in the field of corporate communication research (Alaszewski, 2006a; 2006b; Waddington, 2005). Their use presents a valuable tool for understanding the complex and dynamic events and relationships that shape the mindsets of communication practitioners, as well as providing an inroad into the, as yet, unrecorded sensemaking processes of communication practitioners, thereby bringing to light new information that complements existing literature on practitioner roles theory (Toth et al, 1998; Dozier and Broom, 1995).

In terms of research design, the diary process provides a useful entry point into accessing the lived experiences of communication practitioners in spite of the limitations they present for qualitative research. Nevertheless, it is a method which remains embedded within the social constructionist worldview, where each “person’s story is valued on its own right, not just a representative sample of a wider category” (Alaszewski, 2006b: 57).

4.2.3 The benefits of using diaries in qualitative research

A study such as this favours methods which allow for the collection of written data. Diaries therefore present an excellent option for collecting such data for the following reasons:

1. **Diaries enable a discourse analysis of practitioner talk and text.** The description of events experienced by practitioners relies on text, for which there are multiple interpretations (Burr, 2003). These multiple meanings add an additional level of richness to existing research. As a research project rooted in social constructionism, language becomes important in the sense that it represents interpretations and thoughts through utterances and in the written form. Diaries are therefore “one way of accessing the natural usage of language” (Alaszewski, 2006b: 120). The “reality” represented in diaries is of that moment, albeit in retrospect (Weick, 1995), and offers an insight into the individual’s underlying “reality.” In discourse analysis, the written word may therefore provide an inroad into the as yet unobserved sensemaking processes and triggers for enactment of communication practitioners (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007).
2. **Diaries will help with comparisons and clarifications.** Diaries will also enable descriptions and interpretations of critical incidents to be compared (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002), thus allowing a network of interpretations to form. The triangulation of written accounts came from semi-structured, one-to-one interviews, held at the convenience of practitioners, in an effort to understand their interpretation of critical incidents.
3. **Diaries will minimise researcher intervention.** Diaries provide one of the least obtrusive methods for gaining an insight into the personal thoughts of individuals in the work setting (Alaszewski, 2006b). It could be argued that the communication practitioners act as “a surrogate for the researcher and is recording for, on behalf of and to the standards set by the researcher” (2006b: 79).

4. **Diaries will minimise researcher bias.** Although absolute objectivity can not be guaranteed from a social constructionist view, diaries present less of an option for the researcher to become involved in the lives of their participants. There are however, issues of bias that creep in when categorising concepts or labelling patterns of behaviour (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). Emerging themes from diaries may overlap and to an extent they remain fluid due to the different interpretations that other researchers may place on the same data. Labelling and categorising therefore remain subjective activities which should remain at the forefront when analysing the data. My analysis of the data therefore went through peer briefing, as described later in this chapter, to minimise researcher bias and ensure validity and reliability.

4.2.4 The limitations of using diaries in qualitative research

As with most methods, there are some limitations to using diaries, which have been well documented by qualitative researchers (Clarkson 2008; Alaszewski, 2006b; Bryman and Bell, 2003; Corti, 1993). On a broader level, there are issues about whether a trade-off exists between the rigour of using the diary and the richness of the data it can garner, the implication being that diaries, although useful for gathering first hand accounts, fail to meet the standards required for qualitative research (Clarkson, 2008). On a practical level, there are time issues related to completing diaries, as well as remembering to complete entries as soon as possible after the event (Alaszewski, 2006b; Bolger et al, 2003; Bryman and Bell, 2003). This was certainly evident in this research where practitioners stated that time was a barrier to them completing diary entries. In addition to this, it is well documented that the number and frequency of diary entries decreases as studies progress, partly through time available to complete entries, remembering to complete entries and commitment to the research project (Bryman and Bell, 2003). Given the reflexive nature of writing a diary, entries are always selective and retrospective (Weick, 1979), which calls for some analysis of the motivations for selecting and writing about particular events over others. There is also the possibility that participants may not give entirely truthful accounts of what they experience and their involvement in events (Bolger et al, 2003). Most importantly, normative research into the use of

diaries fails to mention that there is also a danger that the actual method is given more prominence than what it actually uncovers. In this chapter, the diary method has been given much prominence, as it is a relatively unfamiliar method within the field of corporate communication research. It is therefore appropriate that it is discussed in some detail before the findings are presented.

4.3 Developing the online diary format

The development of the diary format from something that is traditionally paper based into an online format is a particularly innovative use of the methodology and the technology available for the current research. Argenti (2006) sees technology as a significant and useful development that has not been fully utilised by researchers, as academics opt for more traditional or “safer” methods to gather data, particularly on the attitudes of multiple stakeholders. The online format was developed specifically for this study for a number of reasons:

1. **The success of the online element of the survey during an exploratory study.** Part of the success of the exploratory survey conducted for the CIPR (Ashra, 2006) was in setting the tone for honesty, which was done through asking practitioners to be as open and honest as possible and also through stressing the confidential and anonymous nature of the survey. The survey hyperlink took practitioners to another site not connected to their work or to the CIPR, which increased the level of anonymity, arguably making it easier for practitioners to write their most personal thoughts about their daily lives. Practitioners were asked to volunteer their phone numbers and emails if they wanted to take part in the current research, thereby making the responses completely anonymous for those who did not want to volunteer this information.
2. **Communication practitioners are already familiar with online technology.** Corporate communication today relies heavily on the use of emerging technologies to relay information to and from multiple stakeholders (Hiebert, 2005). Part of the technical skill set of a communications practitioner is the sound grasp of information

technology tools for web design, writing and editing web copy, overseeing online discussions boards and targeting media campaigns through creative use of online techniques such as blogging and viral marketing (see <http://www.corporatecommunicationsblog.com>). Online diaries therefore mimic techniques such as blogging, and are already part of the “cultural landscape” of corporate communications.

3. **Technology makes the diary user-friendly, accessible and confidential.** In a marked step away from traditional paper based diaries, the online diary eliminates the burden of carrying a diary around, thereby reducing the chances of it being read by someone else and of it being lost. In today’s technology driven age, the diary can be accessed at home, in the workplace or in public spaces with WiFi, placing it within easy reach at a time that suits the participants. Given that the software is designed so that only the researcher with a password can access and view the completed entries, the entries remain safe and confidential at all times.
4. **Technology is a useful tool for the researcher.** The online element presents many advantages for the researcher. Firstly, an electronic diary entry does not need transcribing and can be easily imported into coding software such as NVIVO. This presents a significant time saving for the researcher. Additionally, coding can begin with the first few diary entries and can be iterative as the number of entries increases and more phenomena come to light. Technology also offers a low cost option for the researcher, making the diary remarkably versatile in its range and reach. There is also versatility not only in how diaries fit into different methodologies, but also in their format and accessibility (Mann and Stewart, 2000), for example, the use of audio diaries for the visually impaired (Papadopoulous and Scanlon, 2002).

Within management literature Amabile et al (2005) used an electronic sampling method to assess the environment in which creativity flourishes, although it is not known to what extent this was fully online or whether entries were emailed to researchers. In their study, participants were asked to complete electronic questionnaires and diary entries about their work environment and time pressures.

The questionnaire was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information and the qualitative (narrative) entries were then coded and placed in the context of cognitive theory. The diary, in this study, was developed and piloted with particular consideration to the structure, guidance and training needed to implement the diary as a method (Alaszewski, 2006b; Corti, 1993).

4.3.1 Traditional guidelines for developing a diary

The body of diary research includes well documented guidelines for structuring a paper based diary (Alaszewski, 2006b; Corti, 1993). To some extent, these guidelines still apply irrespective of whether it is paper based or web-based. However, there are also some developments to the traditional guidelines as a result of the current research diaries being web-based.

4.3.2 Structuring the diary

In terms of the structure, the paper based diary has a limited amount of space for entries, but this is less of an issue with online diaries. What becomes more important instead is the user-friendliness and format of the diary webpage, which was highlighted during the pilot studies.

4.3.3 Guidance for the diary

In terms of guidance, it is important that the timescale is made clear to the participants, which was done at the initial meeting with each group of practitioners. Sample entries are also recommended for paper-based diaries, but rather than leading practitioners in what to write, I presented a variety of entries from a previous exploratory study (Ashra, 2006), making sure to remove all details which would identify the writers. Traditional guidelines also advocate using a checklist or set of instructions, which can be rather prescriptive depending on the type of information you are trying to gather. In attempting to avoid being prescriptive about what participants should write about, I designed some guidelines for the practitioners to write around, also making it clear that they could elaborate, explore or extend their thoughts as they saw fit (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2 further in this chapter).

4.3.4 Training for writing diary entries

Guidelines for paper based diaries also suggest training individuals to write diary entries. The time dedicated to training also allows participants to express the concerns about the wording of questions and the level of formality to be used in the diary. Training was covered at the initial meetings with groups, but what the paper based diary guidelines fail to mention is that this initial contact also helps form a unique relationship between the researcher and individual participants. It also gives an opportunity to set some groundrules in terms of how frequently the researcher can contact individuals for their completed entries, and through what media.

4.3.5 A note on blogging

Web-based or online diaries could easily be confused with blogging as both have similar properties. They both allow participants to write their thoughts and opinions into an electronic format and are reflective and retrospective in nature (Weick, 1995). There is, however, an important distinction between them, which applies to the current research; namely that blogging is in the public sphere, whereas online or web-based diaries are private and personal. With blogging, there is an explicit understanding that the audience could be made up of more than one person, whereas with the diary, the understanding is that I am the only person to have access to what the communication practitioners write. The sharing of private thoughts with people other than the researcher is therefore based on a considered decision by the individual communication practitioners. Additionally with blogging, the software used is designed for public access and participation. With diaries, the software chosen for the current research does not allow for such access and participation, in order to maintain confidentiality. Electronic data gathering methods are becoming more popular as they allow for a degree of flexibility in data gathering. However, it is important to differentiate between data collection methods through electronic devices, such as emailed questionnaires (Bolger et al, 2003), and a diary which is web-based or online.

4.3.6 Software for developing the online diary format

I used the same survey website that I had used for the exploratory study for CIPR, which was available on www.surveymonkey.com. This was an easy piece of

software to use as it makes constructing the web pages very easy and gives a host of options for the types of questions you want to use. It did, however, cost extra to use the University of Leeds logo, if you wanted to change the colour from their standard blue and also if you used more than nine questions. At the same time, it was brought to my attention that Leeds University has a site license for another piece of online survey software, which is available from Bristol Online Surveys (BOS) at www.survey.bris.ac.uk, which I felt I should experiment with, as this would cut down on costs for the duration of the diary studies. Although the BOS survey did not allow me to increase the size of the font to make the text easier for the participants, it came with the University of Leeds logo embedded on the webpage and gave me the same options for analysis and access to data as the surveymonkey website, but for free.

I also thought about not using the web-based software and using Word for Windows instead, and then people could email me their entries. However, the look of the website was seen as more professional than using word processed entries and sending them as attachments. There was also the question of confidentiality and how much access people would have to each others' diary entries in the work setting if they were writing entries in Word, storing them and emailing them from their computer hard-drives. After piloting the diary, I eventually opted for the BOS software based on cost, confidentiality factors, ease of use for the practitioners and ease of access it gave me to the data.

4.4 Piloting the online diary

The diary was developed into an online format for the reasons given above. In line with Clarkson's (2008) recommendations, the diary was piloted twice and the language went through many drafts before being used by the research participants. As the development of the online diary came before the final participants were identified, the first and second pilots were undertaken by two communication practitioners not related to the study and with one researcher well versed in using paper based diaries, and again, not related to the study. The pilots looked in detail at both the technological and linguistic aspects of the diary, the details of which are outlined below:

4.4.1 The first pilot

The first version of the online diary had the following text over four web pages:

Page 1 – Introductory page

Thank you for taking the time to write down your thoughts.
The purpose of this research is to understand how and why communication practitioners make the decisions that they do.

The thoughts and experiences that you record here are therefore an important part of the research and your honesty and participation is much appreciated.
Your identity will remain anonymous at all times.

To begin writing your thoughts and experiences, please enter your first name below:
Please enter your first name. You will be asked to enter your name each time you write in your diary:

Page 2 – Critical incidents

What happened at work today?

Please take a few minutes to write down what happened at work today; what you were involved in, what you saw happen, the kind of personal exchanges that you were part of, or anything else you would like to mention:

Please write down what you did in these situations...

Please give some reasons why you acted as you did (not necessarily the reasons you may give your colleagues)

Page 3 – Personal exchanges and networks

Your personal exchanges

Who did you talk to today about your work and why? Was it useful? Who else could you have spoken to about your work, but didn't, and why?

Your involvement in projects

How do you think your involvement in any project was perceived by others, and why do you think this?

Page 4 – Final page

Thank you

Thank you for your time and honesty.

We will talk about some of your diary entries when we meet soon. Our conversations will remain anonymous at all times.

If you have any questions about the diary entries or the research, please ring me on 12345 678 890 or email me at: n.ashra05@leeds.ac.uk

This first version containing four pages was tested on two communication practitioners and one qualitative researcher who were not associated with the research and worked for the University of Leeds. Each person took approximately 20 minutes to read, think about and enter brief diary entries into the spaces provided. I sat with each of the respondents as they completed their entries and noted what they had said about the structure of the diary, wording and writing process and also noted any technical hitches that occurred. The consolidated feedback from all participants fell into two main categories – that of content and structure.

4.4.2 Recommendations on content

Participants stated that there are too many questions to think about for each of the diary sections and there was additional confusion as they felt some of the questions overlapped. This meant that the process of writing in the boxes “closed off” or limited what they could write. Additionally, it was not immediately clear whether all the questions for each of the sections were compulsory. After considering this, I decided that they should not be compulsory, but rather used as guidelines, which then prompted me to design a prompt card to which practitioners could refer (see Figure 4.1).

When writing in the diaries, participants were not sure of the type of language to use, i.e. formal or informal language. This posed a problem as it was important that practitioners used their own language to complete the entries, and consequently led me to state that in the final version of the diary.

They also had suggestions about the wording of the questions. For example, on page 2, the question “what are you involved in?” was felt to be ambiguous and one participant didn’t know what was expected of them, i.e. daily work or special projects. It was suggested that if I was looking at critical incidents, then projects would be a useful focus. Also at the bottom of page 2, they suggested writing something along the lines of “have you covered everything/written down everything you want to?” to prompt participants even further.

On page 3, they suggested changing the question about “who did you talk to” should include “yesterday or the last few days” as an option, particularly if participants are being asked to complete the diary 2-3 times a week, as well as

changing the wording of the last question on involvement in projects to include “if you can, give some thoughts on why you think this.” As a general suggestion, they suggested that if I was interested in the types of relationships formed, then maybe I could ask about who people met for lunch and what they talk about, or ask participants to include formal and informal exchanges, which meant rephrasing one of the questions to “who did you talk to today in a work setting?”

4.4.3 Recommendations on structure

The practitioners and researcher stated that it was not immediately clear at any point within the format of the diary about how many other pages there were to complete before you came to the final page, which was a potential barrier to participants engaging with the diary, as they would not know how much time they would have to commit to for completing one entry. Additionally, the format was too long at four pages. The participants also suggested using one larger box for the first part of the diary, which asked what people did, and then another larger box on the next page, which asked about the personal relationships. This would alleviate the problem of “closing off” the natural stream of consciousness and also making it look more like a diary or personal journal.

4.4.4 Personal observations

Through my own observations, I noted that there were improvements that I could make to how participants engage with writing the diary. Whilst watching the participants, I noticed that people alter what they type in as they are thinking about what to write, which Weick (1979) would argue shows a clear revisionist process. The amount of revision extends to what they decide to include, what words they use to describe something, the grammar used and the length of what is written. I also realised that it is important for participants to see what they have written on the previous pages/sections, in order for them to reflect on the events described and for them to elaborate more in their writing. This is why it is important to have just one space for people to write in on each page, as too many boxes breaks up the narrative and is spread over too many pages. It could be argued that the breaking up of the written narrative process interrupts the natural flow of consciousness and speech.

It also came to my attention that some of the questions on the first pilot could be asked and explored at the interview stage and that perhaps the diaries were asking for too much information. It also occurred to me that some participants may want to write in long-hand, so I decided to present people with this option if they didn't want to engage with the web-based diary. I would then make arrangements for the diary to be posted to me through registered post each week, and transcribe the entries myself so that I could analyse them using NVIVO. However, when this option was presented to the research participants, all of them were happy with completing the web-based version of the diary.

The comments from the first pilot prompted me to think about developing some writing guidelines for the participants to print out, read and reflect upon before starting to write in the diary. This led me to design a small guide (see Figure 4.1) that participants could use as a reminder about what to write and also for them to keep nearby if necessary.

Figure 4.1: Sample prompt developed after the first pilot

<p>What should I write in my diary?</p> <p>Write about what happened at work today or over the last few days. Include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ what projects you were involved in ▪ the activities you performed ▪ the kind of personal exchanges that you were part of ▪ anything else you want to mention ▪ Also write about what you did in the situations you have described. Include some reasons why you acted as you did (not necessarily the reasons you may give your colleagues) ▪ Write about your personal exchanges. Include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ who you spoke to about your work and why ▪ whether it useful ▪ who else could you have spoken to about your work, but didn't, and why <p>Write about any projects that you are currently working on with other members of your organisation and team. Include how you think your involvement as a communication practitioner was perceived by others, and why do you think this?</p>
--

4.4.5 The second pilot

The second draft of the online diary was designed and developed in light of the suggestions made above. This time, however, the design was tested on both pieces of web software to see which one was preferred by the participants. I also tested both sites myself to see how much text I could fit into each section without the site crashing. The limit was approximately 1000 words of text for each section. The second version of the online diary had the following text over 4 pages (emphasis in original):

Page 1 – Introductory page

Thank you for taking the time to write down your thoughts.
The purpose of this research is to understand how and why communication practitioners make the decisions that they do.

The thoughts and experiences that you record here are therefore an important part of the research and your **honesty** and participation is much appreciated.

Your identity will remain anonymous at all times.

The diary is structured into 2 parts based on:

- what you did; and
- you personal exchanges with people in the work setting

Each section contains suggestions for what to include, but your writing does not have to follow the structure given. **Please write freely about your role and experiences as a communication practitioner and in any style you wish.**

To begin writing your thoughts and experiences, please enter your first name. You will be asked to enter your name each time you write in your diary:

Page 2 – Critical incidents

What happened at work today?

Please take a few minutes to write down what happened at work today or over the last few days.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, include descriptions of:

- what projects you were involved in
- what kind of activities you performed
- some of your personal interactions in the course of your day
- that decisions that you made and the reasons why you made these decisions (not necessarily the reasons you may give your colleagues)
- anything else you would like to mention:

Have you covered everything you want to?

On the next page, you will be asked to expand in your relationships with other people in your team and organisation, and how you think the role of communications is perceived by them

Page 3 – Personal exchanges

Your personal exchanges

Who were you in contact with, either by phone, email or face to face, and why?

IN YOUR OWN WORDS, include:

- whether you met them formally (eg meetings) or informally (eg bumped into them, met them for coffee)
- whether it was useful or not
- who else you could have spoken to about your work or for advice, but didn't, and why
- who you think influenced you (either positively or negatively) in your decision-making and why
- how you think other people view your role and input as a communication practitioner

Page 4 – Final page

Thank you for your time and honesty.

We will talk about some of your diary entries when we meet soon. Our conversations will remain anonymous at all times.

If you have any questions about the online diary or the research, please ring me on 12345 678 890 or email me at: n.ashra05@leeds.ac.uk

4.4.6 Comments from the second pilot

Feedback indicated that the format and guidelines continued to be cumbersome for the participants; in particular they felt that there was still too much to write about. The participants' comments echoed that of the researcher I consulted, who is well versed in using diaries. Specific comments included looking that the rationale for the length of the diary, as it needed to be much shorter, as well as looking again at the wording. In trying to gather rich data, I was making it unnecessarily time consuming and also trying to gather data in too many areas of organisational life. This "catch-all" approach had actually led me away from the research questions, and once I had revisited the research questions, I realised that a lot of what I was asking the participants to write about was not directly relevant to the study, and also that some of the themes would come out naturally in the diaries and interviews without obvious prompting. This led me to the third and final version of the diary.

4.4.7 The third pilot

Part of the reason why the first two pilots failed to be accessible to the participants was because I was trying to gather all the information for many areas of

organisational life from one source, i.e. the diary. Having realised this, and also after having gone back to the research questions, I designed the following version:

Page 1 – Introductory page

Welcome to your online diary
Thank you for taking the time to write down your thoughts.

The purpose of this research is to understand how and why communication practitioners perceive the situations that they commonly experience and how these perceptions affect the status and legitimacy of communication teams. The thoughts and experiences that you record are therefore an important part of the research and your **honesty** and participation is much appreciated. **Your identity will remain anonymous at all times.**

The diary asks you to write about events or situations at work, how you acted in these situations and the reasons for acting as you did. It also asks you to write about how other people in your organisation perceive the work of you and your team.

The questions are prompts to help you write, but your writing does not have to follow a particular structure. **Please write freely about your role, experiences and relationships in the work setting, and in any style you wish.**

You can take as long as you like when writing your entries and also write as many entries as you want each week. For research purposes, we ask that you try to keep to a minimum of 2-3 entries per week until an agreed date. Most importantly, enjoy it!

Please note that when you click on CONTINUE at the bottom of each page, you **can not** return to or amend that page.

Page 2 – What happened at work?

Name:

1. To begin writing your thoughts and experiences, please enter your first name or personal ID below:

You will be asked to enter your name or personal ID each time you write in your diary

What happened at work?

Please take a few minutes to write down what happened at work today or over the last few days. Try and focus on specific events, such as an activity related to a project, or any decisions, requests, conversations or meetings that may impact upon your workload:

Please write what you did in these situations:

Please give some reasons why you acted as you did (not necessarily the reasons you may give your colleagues):

How do you think others in your organisation perceive the work of you and your department in some of these situations you have described?

Page 3 – Thank you

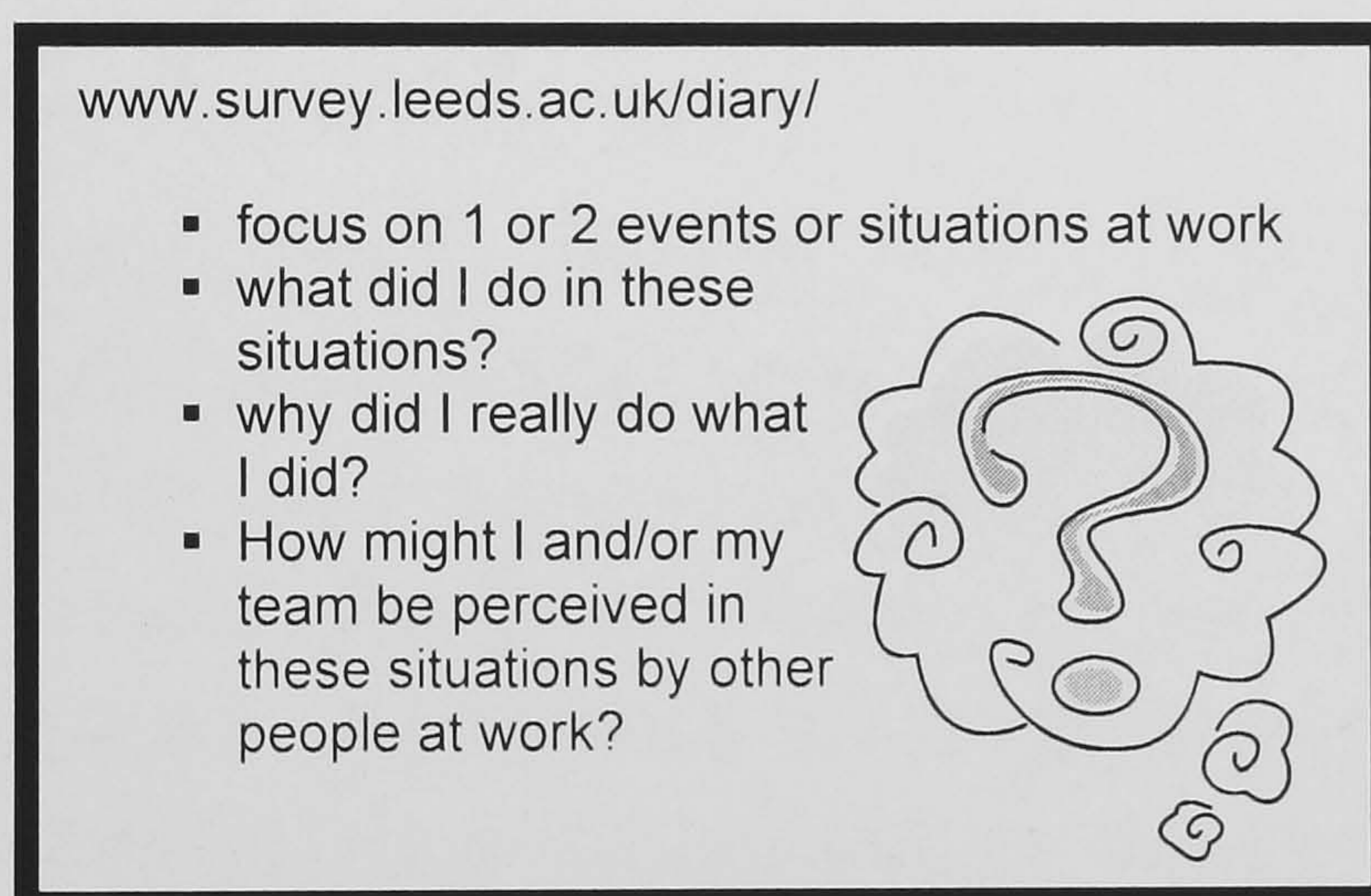
Thank you
Thank you for your time and honesty.

We will talk about some of your diary entries when we meet soon. Your diary entries will remain anonymous at all times.

If you have any questions about any area of the research, please ring me on 12345 678 890, or email me at: n.ashra05@leeds.ac.uk

Although page 2 of the diary was structured into 4 segments, most respondents wrote one, longer entry each time, which amalgamated all 4 areas, as well as other observations and thoughts. To help respondents think about what they could write about, I also redesigned the prompt card from Figure 4.1 for them to use whilst writing. The redesigned prompt card is shown in Figure 4.2:

Figure 4.2: Prompt card showing online link



4.4.8 Introducing the diary to the participants

I met with each organisation separately to introduce the research objectives and design, and to answer questions and ensure clarity amongst participants. At each meeting, the participants were taken through the diary website as a team and asked if they understood all the questions and whether some of the language needed to be changed. At that stage, the diary website had already been through three drafts and was changed each time, after it had been tested by three participants who, although not connected with the research, understood many aspects of communication work and qualitative research. There were no additional changes during the initial meetings with participants, so the website was activated shortly after each initial meeting, for participants to then begin writing their diary entries.

4.4.9 Maintaining interest and commitment to the writing process

One of the limitations of using diaries is the rate at which the frequency and number of entries drops as the research progresses (Alasweski, 2006b; Symon, 1998; Corti, 1993). Participants are eager to write and take part in the study at the beginning, but commitment begins to wane after the first few entries have been submitted. Qualitative researchers well versed in using diaries have remarked upon this, which formed my decision at the early stages to text, phone or email practitioners to prompt them to complete their diary entries, if I had not heard from individuals after three days, which amounted to a verbal or written weekly prompt for all the participants. After participants had completed 5-6 entries, I began scheduling interview dates in advance and used them as deadlines for completing 10 entries before the interview date. In addition, I decided that a financial incentive might be useful in this scenario, such as gift vouchers from a choice of stores.

4.4.10 Incentivising the writing process

In terms of administering the diary study, Walsh (1977) makes some important points about engaging and motivating respondents in diary studies, based on the consumer expenditure survey that was conducted in 1972-73. Households were asked to record all their expenditure over a 14-day period and results showed that an incentive did not improve response levels by a significant amount (Walsh, 1977). However, Walsh (1977) still advocates motivating and compensating respondents, a crucial factor for this being to make the purpose of the survey, use of data and benefits to respondents clear before beginning the study. He also recommends keeping “respondent burden” (1977: 351) to a minimum. The incentivising of the writing process proved to be a useful encouragement when combined with weekly prompts and setting interview dates as deadlines for them to complete the majority of their diary entries. Consequently, 15 out of 17 practitioners completed 10 entries or more for the research.

4.5 Conclusions about using diaries

The challenge in designing this diary was to maintain the participant’s attention and motivation (Clarkson, 2008; Alaszewski, 2006b, Corti, 1993). The

structure and content are therefore important and the researcher needs to distinguish between an open-ended questionnaire of 3 or 4 questions, a blog and a diary. They each serve different functions and have different slightly audiences which needs to be taken into consideration. In all cases, the structure and content needs piloting more than once in order to get the correct tone to motivate participants and maintain their commitment over the course of the research. The principles of designing web-based diaries are the same as webpage design, in that the wording should be minimal and in a large font, the design should have lots of white space (although this may be out of your control as a researcher) and that all the information is contained on one page. Having all your information on one page is an ideal only. It is however, important that participants have enough space on one page to write longer narratives.

4.6 Observed phenomena on using diaries

This chapter so far has elaborated on the development and piloting of the diary process as part of this research. Before moving on to discuss the pros and cons of interviewing, and the analysis of findings in detail, it is worth exploring the patterns and phenomena that were observed in using the diary as a data gathering tool.

Practitioners expressed that there were barriers to their writing entries, revolving largely around finding the time to complete entries, and to a lesser extent, remembering to write them, both of which relate to the workload of the practitioner. This is where reminders were particularly useful, either by telephone or email. There were also concerns about confidentiality, specifically about naming individuals in diary entries and during interviews, and also about how such information was going to be used. As Andy from Elco states:

the only thing I was a wee bit concerned about was identifying individuals [int: right] because I do a very specific thing and it would be very clear if somebody saw a little summary from my report that was sent back to them or something [int: yeah], who was talking about who, [int: right ok] so that was the only thing I was a wee bit concerned about

However, concerns about time and confidentiality appeared to do little to deter the candidness and richness of the diary content.

There were particular phenomena orientated around the selective content of the diaries, the narrative structure that was adopted by some participants (Pentland, 1999), and how they engaged in dialogue through a written format. All these observations add new thinking to the existing literature on using diaries as a research method.

4.6.1 Selective diary content

The interviews showed that participants were conscious of selecting specific content for the diary entries, as illustrated by Ralph at Elco, who writes “obviously I have chosen some of the more flattering remarks but there weren’t any that were overtly critical.” The process of actively selecting topics for inclusion suggests not only a desire to please, but also a desire to engage the reader, as illustrated by Victoria at Primecare, who writes “sometimes although you’ve been really busy, it’s like you can’t really say that, it’s boring and you’re trying to think of things.”

4.6.2 Structuring diary entries

One of the indications that participants were actively selecting topics to write about was evident in how some of the written entries were structured. Some participants structured their entries as stories, with a beginning, middle and an end. Entries which told a story had a point to them, or covered a single topic, as in Ralph’s entries which he structured around pre-determined themes that he introduced in the preceding entry, for example, “next week, the projects....” In Ralph’s case, it could be argued that he was demonstrating his knowledge in front of me, which brings to light interesting ideas about the identities that people are adopting in their entries, and the roles they then perform in the follow-up interview (Holman et al, 2003; Goffman, 1959). The beginning of the “story” could be identified by an acknowledgement of the reader (“Hi Nilam, apologies for not writing”), which also indicated the beginnings of a dialogue (Weick, 1979), as illustrated in the table below. The middle of the story was the detail of the event, along with their gripes, annoyances, opinions and perceptions, combined to form an engaging narrative. The end signalled the close of the story and also signalled the practitioners’ further engagement in dialogue, again illustrated in the table below. Examples of the constructed beginnings and ends of entries are illustrated in the table below:

Table 4.1: Illustrative examples of constructed beginnings and ends of diary entries

Diary section	Illustrative examples
Diary beginnings...	<p>I must apologise as I have meant to write in this diary for a few days now but time just flies by and before I know it, it's the end of the day (Victoria, Primecare)</p> <p>Hi Nilam, apologies for not writing. I have been sooo busy, the days just fly by (Victoria, Primecare)</p> <p>I'm finding myself saying: 'I'll do the online diary just as soon as I've completed this, that or something else' It's hard to find the time but here goes: (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>New Year, new diary. Have resolved to keep more than one diary this year so we'll see how that progresses (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>Not a lot to report as it's not been the most productive day. (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>My last diary (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>For my penultimate diary I thought I'd concentrate on budgets (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>This is my last online diary, and it's timely as I'm about to go on holiday so that fits in well (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>I'm finding it difficult to pick a specific topic for this week's diary. Perhaps I am conscious that this is my last diary entry and rather than concentrate on a single issue it might be better to give a personal overview of communications at the Society (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>Named and shamed eh? What an outrage! I'm suitably chastised so here's my latest entry (Damien, Barksdales)</p>
Diary endings	<p>So, on the whole a much better day and I'm going home with a much more positive outlook on the post. Thank goodness! (Victoria, Primecare)</p> <p>On that note I think that's today's update finished! (Sarah, Primecare)</p> <p>That's (sic) it for now. Need to lie down in a cool dark room now! (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>All's well that ends well. (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>A fairly negative input today – perhaps tomorrow will be better (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>That's it for today (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>Next week – improvement plan and implementation (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>More committee communications next week (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>Moan over (Damien, Barksdales)</p>

The most interesting data was around how a dialogue was being formed. It could be argued that in writing the entries, participants were conscious of who the reader was, i.e. me as the researcher. They therefore framed their accounts around a conversation with me, which occurred over a distance; they also spoke to me through their entries, addressing me, asking me questions and responding to my separately emailed or telephoned queries through their diaries (e.g. Damien's diary beginning). The same phenomena are evident in Stewart's (1968) early work (1968: 299). In writing a monologue, the practitioners were actually entering into a dialogue with me as the researcher (as I constituted their imagined audience) (Weick, 1995), albeit from a distance and without the expectation of a response. In engaging in

dialogue, this showed that the diary was used as a sensemaking and learning tool (Gioia et al, 2002; Stewart, 1968), which cultivated the phenomenon of individuals “talking to me” through the dairy format.

The overall experience for every one of the participants, without exception, was a positive one, as each participant saw the value of completing the diaries. Reading through their entries before the interview, practitioners stated that their entries showed personal growth and progress, and patterns in their behaviour and actions. This is further evidence that practitioners used the diaries for making sense of their experiences through reflection and analysis (Gioia et al, 2002; Stewart, 1968), which was instigated by re-viewing their entries in the context of an interview. It is uncertain as to whether this reflexivity influenced their answers during the interview.

Observations on the overall process revealed that it was a participative exercise, in that staff claimed they joked about what they should write about with other team members, shared anecdotes about what to include, and asked each other for prompts. This shows how entries can be co-constructed, whilst also allowing for personal, reflective space. This dual process extends notions of the writing process being a singularly reflexive activity (Stewart, 1968), as it acknowledges the creation of meaning as being embedded in social relations; just because a participant does not write about others prompting them for ideas, does not mean that the prompting and collective creation of entries does not occur. This links back to issues of selectiveness and why practitioners choose to write about certain aspects of their work over other aspects. It also emphasises that seemingly simplistic guidelines such as “focus on one or two situations at work” can be interpreted in different ways.

4.7 Semi-structured interviews

Interviews are a popular method of gathering qualitative data and come with their own advantages and limitations. Sims (2008) states that although interviews are popular, there is a risk that interviews become the default method for gathering qualitative data. However, interviews are an extremely valuable method of discovering an additional layer of richness to the data and in this study they were used to clarify and triangulate data from the diaries. Their flexibility is also proven

in the way in which they can be structured and used. This research employed semi-structured interviews to acquire more data and also to clarify events that were written about in the diaries (Zimmerman and Weider, 1977).

Whilst conducting the interviews, there were certain issues I had to take into consideration. An interview can be defined as “a conversation with a purpose, where the interviewer’s aim is to obtain knowledge about the respondent’s world” (Alvesson and Svensson, 2008: 118). Although my purpose was to unpack some of the diary entries and other organisational phenomena, I was also conscious that the practitioners might come to the interview wanting to promote their own views or agenda, as well as have an idea of how they wanted to be perceived by me (Sims, 2008). Some practitioners asked about my background in communications before we started the interview. This information may have influenced what the practitioners said to me; they could have tailored their image to what they thought my expectations were of them, or been more candid if they perceived me to be an insider to their industry. This emphasises just how dynamic and idiosyncratic the interview process can be and also suggests that the researcher has a degree of power and that the practitioners perform a role in front of the researcher (Goffman, 1959).

The semi-structured nature of the interview offered some guidance on what to cover, but also gave me some flexibility to follow any lines of enquiry about other issues as they arose. In exploring different themes, the interview could be seen as being a process of “concerns-construction,” where meaning is created together, rather than extracted or collected from the practitioners (Sims, 2008). This suggests that interviews are more than procedural, as they are the foundation of the concerns-construction of meaning, making them extremely relevant for discourse and sensemaking enquiry. As such, an interview can be seen as “interesting in its own right” (Alvesson and Svensson, 2008).

4.7.1 Disadvantages of interviewing

In terms of disadvantages, there was no guarantee that interviews would uncover a consistently rich source of data. For example, during one particular interview, the practitioner in question could not elaborate on the events that she wrote about, making the interview fairly stilted by comparison to other interviews. At this stage, it was important that I made the interview shorter so as not to put

words into her mouth. There was also the issue of the practitioners feeling that the interview was time consuming for them, particularly as they had spent time completing diary entries over a number of weeks. Time was a particular issue in one organisation, who allocated 30 minutes for each interview, which constricted on how much I could ask practitioners to elaborate on the themes that were emerging during the interview. However, I followed this up with phone interviews in the two instances where I thought this was necessary. Confidentiality was also a recurring theme and some practitioners asked for reassurances about their anonymity and confidentiality before they spoke about particular people or media contacts.

4.7.2 Advantages of interviewing

As previously stated, the interview offers an excellent method of triangulating and clarifying meanings and interpretations obtained through other methods (Zimmerman and Weider, 1977). It also allows discourse to be contextualised, as well as offering an insight into non-verbal cues which also shape sensemaking. All these advantages add to the richness of previously gathered data.

4.7.3 Guidelines for semi-structured interviews

I began each interview by giving the participant their diary entries to read while I was setting up the tape recorder. I then introduced the structure of the interview, stating that the interview would cover some of the things written about in the dairies, aspects of their organisational culture, their career history and what they thought about the diary process. I also emphasised that if there was anything they wanted to expand on at any time, or if they wanted to turn the tape recorder off at any time, then they could do so. The interviews were semi-structured and used the following guidelines:

1. **Is there anything that strikes you about your diary entries?** Go over some of the incidents and expand on what happened.
2. **Tell me a bit about how you got into the communication industry/this job?** This is to establish some rapport with the participant.
3. **How would you describe your organisational culture?** This question was used to help contextualise some of the situations they described in

their diaries and also to contextualise their interpretations and perceptions.

4. **Draw an organisational chart** showing where they feel their team:
 - really fits in (not necessarily the official chart)
 - should ideally be located (not necessarily the official chart)

This question was used to elaborate on the notions of position and location that were evident from the beginning of the study. This exercise was used at the end of the interview, so as not to prompt or lead practitioners to organise their articulations around further ideas of position or location.

5. **What did you think of the diary process?** Given that the diary method is rarely used in researching corporate communication, it was important to garner the opinions of participants whilst they were engaged in the research.

I concluded the interview by asking that participants did not tell anyone else about the interview structure or content until all the interviews for their organisation were complete.

4.8 Gathering the data

Each practitioner took part in both the diary and interview stage of the research. The diaries were administered from a distance and the interviews were conducted on the premises of the respective organisations. For the interviews that were taped, I transcribed them all verbatim and for those that were not taped, I wrote up field notes and any verbatim comments during and after the interview. The methods yielded the following data for analysis:

Table 4.2: Summary of data collected from Primecare

PRIMECARE				
Name	Job title	No of completed diary entries	No of interviews	Attendance at observed meetings
Helen	Communications Manager	5	2 (only one taped)	Team meeting
Sarah	Senior Communications Officer	11	2 (only one taped)	Team & Departmental meeting
Isa	Information Officer	10	1	Team meeting
Fiona	Communications Officer	10	1	Team meeting
Clare	Information and Communications Officer	10	1	Team & Departmental meeting
Victoria	Information and Communications Assistant	9	1	Team meeting
Pam	Admin support assistant	10	1	Team meeting
Totals		65 completed diary entries	9 interviews	2 meetings observed
Documents viewed = Draft Communications Strategy, Job description for Communications Manager, meeting agendas, production timescales, external communication material, corporate website				

Table 4.3: Summary of data collected from Elco

ELCO				
Name	Job title	No of completed diary entries	No of interviews	Attendance at observed meetings
Neil	Communications Executive	10	2	Mgmt meeting x 2 & Team meeting
Liz	Corporate Communications Officer	10	1	Mgmt meeting x 2 & Team meeting
Juliet	Corporate Communications Officer	10	2	Mgmt meeting x 2 & Team meeting
Ralph	Communications Manager	10	1	Mgmt meeting x 2 & Team meeting
Andy	Part-time writer	10	1	Team meeting x 1
Totals		50 completed diary entries	7 interviews	3 meetings observed
Documents viewed = Organisational chart, Branding Strategy, Branding and Communications background document, external communication material, corporate website				

Table 4.4: Summary of data collected from Barksdales

BARKSDALES				
Name	Job title	No of completed diary entries	No of interviews	Attendance at observed meetings
David	Head of External Affairs	10	1	Team meeting x 1
Ian	Senior Media and Government Affairs Manager	10	1	Team meeting x 1
Barbara	Senior Media Manager	10	1	Team meeting x 1
Brian	Senior Media Manager	10	1	Team meeting x 1
Damien	External Affairs Officer	10	1	Team meeting x 1
Totals		50 completed diary entries	5 interviews	1 meeting observed
Documents viewed = Organisational chart, Key Impact document, Shareholder Value document, external communication material, corporate website				

Table 4.5: Summary of data collected from all three organisations

Total number of interviews	21 (402 pages of transcripts)
Total number of diary entries	165
Total hours of interview tape	19 hrs, 33 mins and 13 secs
Total number of meetings observed	6

4.9 Ethical dilemmas for the qualitative researcher

A number of ethical dilemmas became evident during the design and implementation of this research, as highlighted throughout this chapter. Firstly, informed consent was an important factor in participant ownership and the article that went out in Profile magazine outlining what was expected of participants was a step towards informed consent. Opportunities for informed consent were further established by the material which was sent to potential participants after the follow up phone conversations, the initial meetings where the online diaries were piloted to all selected participants and through emphasising that participants were free to not take part in the study at any time (Oliver, 2003). Secondly, in terms of confidentiality of data, an oral agreement was introduced and accepted by all participants, with an additional guarantee about the anonymity of participants and

their organisations (Oliver, 2003). The importance of anonymity was a recurring theme in the diaries and interviews. For the diaries, participants were given the option of using another name when completing entries, but given that no one else could access the website to view their entries, no participants considered this necessary. However, all participants wanted anonymity when being written about in this thesis and in other, future publications. Additional assurances were also needed during some of the interviews before some participants felt they could say certain things about the people within their organisation and their media contacts.

Thirdly, data recording, whether online, on tape, or through handwritten notes also needed careful consideration (Oliver, 2003). With the online diaries, I was (and remain) the only person who can access them through a website with a secure password. With the tape recordings, I asked permission before taping interviews and meetings. All the participants agreed to be taped, however, I did make it clear that they could turn the tape recorder off at anytime, which no one did. Not all of the meetings were taped as permission to tape was not given at all meetings and for these meetings I took handwritten notes of my observations and as many verbatim quotes as I could manage.

Fourthly, incentivising certain portions of the research also presented potential ethical dilemmas which were not considered until during the diary keeping phase, when I saw the number of diary entries begin to slowly fall in all the organisations. I then decided to motivate everyone by emailing them individually with some potential dates for interviews and also suggested that they could complete more diary entries before the interview. At this stage, I also stated that they would receive a £10 book token for taking part in the research, which I would hand to them at the interview. So the message contained a deadline and the promise of a £10 book token on the assumption that they would complete more diary entries before their interview. Ethically, the financial incentive was small enough to thank participants for their time and effort in taking part without causing concerns about bribery or undue financial inducement.

In interviewing, I allowed the participants to read their own diary entries as an introduction into the interview process. I also stated that individuals could have copies of their interview transcripts if they wanted (these would have been uncoded transcripts) but to date none of the participants have requested this.

In light of all participants requesting total anonymity for themselves and their organisations, all names have been changed to protect individual and organisational identities.

4.10 Analysing the data: the unit of analysis

Previous research has a preoccupation with the “manager” as the unit of analysis (Argenti et al, 2005; Cornelissen, 2004, 2008; Argenti, 2003; Grunig et al, 2002). However, to focus solely on the communications manager would mean omitting the vital interpretations of other communication practitioners working at all levels within an organisational and team hierarchy. A critical analysis of using the manager as the unit of analysis highlights a number of assumptions that lay at the foundation of much normative research in communication related fields.

Firstly, the label of ‘manager’ has connotations of formal authority (Mintzberg, 1990), power and credibility, which are largely uncontested in the eyes of the researcher (Gergen, 2001). By focusing solely on the manager, other team members, by default, are deemed not to have the requisite authority, power or credibility as other communication professionals asked to take part in research. This suggests a bias on the part of the researcher, as much research tends to view the managerial role as one that unquestioningly holds the most important source of information for many variations of organisational research, largely through the privileged relationships that managers are party to (Mintzberg, 1990). Secondly, there are further assumptions based, again, around unquestioning faith that the manager can adequately, appropriately and accurately convey the key issues of the team and its related activities. This suggests that other team members, again by default, do not have the capacity to represent themselves, nor do they ‘manage’ as they do not have the label of ‘manager’ in their official title.

This thesis therefore contends that the idea of communication practitioners all sharing the same view as their managers is, as a premise, fundamentally flawed. As Miller and Rose (1994) state, “it stands to reason that...the opinion of those called upon to perform on a day-to-day basis should be taken into consideration.” (1994: 14). This emphasises the importance of asking all team members about their interpretations of events in their natural work setting.

By allowing these assumptions to underlie research about the roles, activities and the strategic value of communications functions, current debate has become somewhat reductionist in nature. Reducing the role or the remit of work down to individual components has meant that a certain amount of analysis has been stripped of human and “real world” elements (Robson, 2002) and, as such, current debate in corporate communications is failing to acknowledge the complexity, contradictions, conflict and dynamism that human interaction can bring to the working environment. However, research into human traits and their influence is widely acknowledged in the management literature (Gregory, 2008; Maitlis, 2005; Moss et al, 2005; Balogun and Johnson, 2004), which has yet to fully penetrate academic debates in corporate communications. In addition, by focusing solely on the “manager” of a communications function, existing research is in danger of alienating team members who come together to decide upon, implement and complete organisation wide projects.

In applying discourse analysis as a methodology, it can be argued that “some voices will be privileged over others” (Phillips and Hardy, 2002: 84). Whilst this is true to some extent, in that it is only communication practitioners taking part in the study, the current research actively moves away from the normative position of only involving managers in the research, to that of actively including the voices of communication practitioners working at all levels within a communications team. In doing so it reveals voices that have previously been omitted from existing research (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

4.11 Affecting reality: research and researcher intervention

An insider’s understanding presents certain dilemmas for the interpretive researcher. For example, there was a danger that, as a practitioner of 15 years, the results would parallel my own experience and my own biases would take over. With this bias came a danger that I would give prominence to the stories and experiences which I could relate to on a personal level and filter out the rest, even with all the checks and balances, such as member checking and peer briefing. There was also the danger that, as a practitioner with management experience, I would effect the group dynamic and attempt to impose management systems or learning from previous

projects onto the situation. However this would have been more likely with participant observation or with an ethnographic study and less likely with diaries, interviews and non-participant observation. However, this does not exempt the chosen methods from having an effect on the “social ecology” (Oliver, 2003: 84) of the research environment.

A study of this kind places enormous value on the opinions and rationales of the individual participant and for this reason it could be argued that this increased their self-esteem (Oliver, 2003), as they were seen to be important enough to be asked to take part in the research. Arguably, the specific research methods used in this study have given the participants the space to reflect upon some of the issues that have emerged as a result of reflecting on and writing about events (Oliver, 2003). In this respect, the diary method in particular contributed to how practitioners made sense of what they experienced (Weick, 1979; Stewart, 1968).

My presence may also have affected the dynamics of team meetings as a result of my involvement in meetings. For example, Sarah from Primecare asked for my feedback after we attended a meeting together, and in 2 other team meetings at Primecare and Elco, some practitioners pointed to the tape recorder or looked towards me, stating half-jokingly that they should not have stated what they had in front of the tape recorder or me.

4.12 Interpreting the data

Given the large volume of data generated by the 17 practitioners, it was important that any analytical process was robust enough to organise and manage the amount of data produced. To help in organising and managing the data, I used the software package NVIVO for some of the coding, which allowed me to move, re-categorise, expand and delete conceptual categories with relative ease throughout the entire research process. The actual analytical process was undertaken using open and axial coding (Lee, 1999), but with a particular emphasis on identifying “context-dependent variability in talk and text” (Talja, 1999: 461) to highlight any interpretive repertoires, as well as broader patterns and themes, as described below.

4.12.1 Identifying first order concepts

As a first step to analysing the data, I read through all the diary entries and interview transcripts to establish a sense of what the data might yield. I then used an open coding process to look in detail at each diary entry and interview transcript several times, to determine the naturally occurring conceptual categories within the accounts presented (Lee, 1999). This involved taking each line of the diary entries and interview transcripts, looking for and highlighting any interesting patterns, phrases and phenomena and then placing them under one or more loosely defined “provisional” conceptual categories (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). At all times, it was important that the conceptual categories accurately represented the events and other interesting phenomena described by the practitioners. Hence, the entire coding process was iterative throughout, so as to ensure reliability and validity. This initial open coding process yielded 178 provisional conceptual categories that were then further reordered and reconsidered after looking again at their context and the aims of the research, or they were amalgamated. This also presented an opportunity to delete any duplicate concepts and to further analyse any overlapping themes.

4.12.2 Developing second order themes

The open coding provided some valuable insights into how practitioners interpret their lived experience and the elements which they feel constitute the nature of their working lives. However, the broader themes alone are not enough to generate any theory from the data (Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007). To help generate theory from the open codes, I then used axial coding to further re-categorise and re-conceptualise the initial concepts under broader themes which “reveal[ed] an underlying structure” (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991: 442) or connections between the initial conceptual categories. Whilst the second order themes alone suggest much about the nature of the working lives of communication practitioners, it is in the extrapolation of the discursive patterns from these second order themes that highlight the interpretive repertoires of communication practitioners, and form the main contribution to knowledge. As Dervin (1997) states, given the changeability of reality and how practitioners make sense of it, it is important that sensemaking enquiry treats “every contradiction, every inconsistency, every diversity not as error or extraneous but as fodder for contextual analysis...and to anchor possible answers

in time-space conceptualizings” (1997: 129). It was therefore important that the particular focus whilst coding the first order concepts and developing the second order themes was in identifying interpretive repertoires evident from the raw data. For this, I used the guidelines set out by Talja (1999) and Gilbert and Mulkay (1984) which stressed the importance of looking for “interpretive variability” (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 2), or contradictions and juxtapositions in how the practitioners articulated themselves.

Once the second order themes were identified and labelled, these were grouped further to form three aggregate themes which will be elaborated upon in the following three chapters. Each of the aggregate themes can be connected back to the raw data, a connection that has been illustrated with examples throughout the following three chapters which detail and discuss the findings. The thematic findings, which show the first order coding and second order themes, are outlined in Table 4.6.

4.12.3 Ensuring reliability and validity

Once the data had been collected through the diaries, interviews and non-participant observation, the interviews were transcribed by myself and the notes from my observations were typed up. I then used NVIVO to help order the data, but not interpret it (Phillips and Hardy, 2002). In line with Lee’s (1999) and Daymon and Holloway’s (2002) protocol of ensuring a rigorous process for analysing the qualitative data, and also to ensure the reliability of my coding categories, I performed checks to ensure that my coding categories reflected the contextual reality of the communications practitioner and also to minimise any bias or personal influence over the coding. This involved conversations about the process of reliability with two researchers well versed in gathering and analysing qualitative data, as well as asking an additional two researchers from the field of public relations and communication to look through random samples of five diary entries and five interview extracts with my coding highlighted. There followed a discussion with one researcher about the use of the ‘war metaphor’ as a metaphor which practitioners drew upon in their sensemaking accounts, which we both agreed did not reflect the data adequately, hence the term ‘battle’ is used in this thesis to represent that particular finding. Other researchers concurred with the process used

to ensure reliability and validity, as well as the first order concepts and second order themes. The results from the open and axial coding are shown below in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6: First order concepts and second order themes

First order concepts	Second order themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual holds central position in the organisation • Communications is integral to the organisation 	Team or individual perceived as central
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is on the periphery of the organisation • Team or individual not included in the information loop 	Team or individual perceived as peripheral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is influential • Have access to senior management 	Communications has power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encountering resistance to involvement • Battling 	Engaged in battle for power
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is recognised and valued • Team or individual has good reputation 	Positive recognition and value of communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is not recognised or valued • Team or individual has negative reputation 	Negative recognition and value of communications
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time poverty • Unpredictable workload volume • Interruptions to workflow 	Barriers to progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating others • Advising others 	Education and persuasion role of communication practitioners
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others don't understand the purpose of communications • Others don't understand the processes involved in using communication channels • Practitioners want to increase understanding of communications 	Issues of understanding

The first order concepts typically reflect practitioner interpretations and descriptions of events, whilst the second order themes label the relationships between the first order concepts (Van Maanen, 1979). The first order concepts were elicited from an iterative process of moving to and from the contextualised data and they represent the labelled categories built around individual expressions. So, for example, the first order concepts of encountering resistance and battling are connected under the second order theme of “engaged in battle for power.” Individual expressions of encountering resistance include an apparent “resistance from some teams to have PR/communications support,” and for battling they include references to “battles” and “skirmishes.” In contextualising the data, it was evident that the resistance and battling was part of a struggle for power, hence the second order theme of “engaged in battle for power.” The iterative process can be seen in the next

chapter, where the second order themes are explained and contextualised using illustrative examples from all three organisations.

4.13 In conclusion

This chapter has outlined the elements that constituted the research design and implementation. It highlighted the methodology and methods used, along with their strengths and limitations, as well as considering the ethical concerns of the research. It concluded with the data analysis protocol used and the first and second order themes derived from the raw data. The data identified first order concepts and second order themes which have been presented in Table 4.6 at the end of this chapter. The concepts and themes elicited from the raw data can be viewed through more than one interpretive lens. The following chapter discusses the concepts and aggregate themes, which have been extracted from the raw data, in more detail.

Chapter 5:

Prominent themes in the daily lives of communication practitioners

5.0 Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have outlined how the data was coded using open and axial coding and the themes emerging from the coding were presented in Table 4.6. Whilst the table showed all the themes identified in the data, it is worth noting how the themes manifested themselves in all of the three organisations. This chapter elaborates on the themes unique to each of the three organisations. It then goes on to show how the themes can be clustered together to form two, important interpretive repertoires of communication practitioners, and also how the remaining themes represent how sense is made for the practitioners. In analysing the prominent themes, the chapter draws upon concepts of sensemaking (Dervin, 1997, 1999) and interpretive variability (Talja, 1999; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984), from literature that was identified in Chapter 3, but now used to elaborate on some of the themes in detail. Before developing each of the themes in detail, the chapter will begin by focusing on the themes as they emerged in each of the three organisations.

5.1 Prominent themes at Barksdales

Barksdales was one of the organisations where practitioners showed a particular preoccupation about their central position and high status within their organisation. Diaries and interviews revealed that their days typically involved setting up interviews and meeting people from the press, and preparing themselves and others for different types of meetings or press scenarios. Routine activities included “lengthy” processes, such as correcting mistakes, or rewriting copy for public relations agencies, writing press releases at short notice and responding to press enquiries. The actual activities (for all three organisations), however, do not give an indication of their complete responsibilities, nor do they indicate what type of approaches were promoted by their respective managers. The approach

encouraged by David at Barksdales was one of building relations and maintaining a good relationship and reputation with the press and senior managers. The most prominent barrier they faced was “time poverty” and workload related issues, which were seen as a hindrance to them “doing what we’re supposed to do” (Barbara). However, these issues were viewed as embedded within their overall responsibilities and consequently viewed as “just part of the job” (Barbara).

The sense of feeling central to the organisation and the events occurring around them stemmed from the practitioners believing that either the work of the team, or individual, or both, was recognised and consequently of value to the organisation. This meant close links to the senior management team, which also meant close proximity to senior managers. David describes this sense of closeness:

it’s all open plan, er none of our, er, senior guys, erm e, apart from maybe our chief executive, or our executive director, actually have an office, it’s all open plan, no barriers to communication, a call comes in to me from a journalist, if I don’t know the answer myself I’ll get someone else, if it’s a high level decision, walk across the office, ask the chief operating officer and straight back on the phone

This places the team at the core of the decision making circle, hence attributing them with the power to influence senior managers like no other department within their organisation. This type of power comes from having access to senior managers very easily and frequently. Barbara illustrates this whilst commenting on her relationship with a member of the senior management team, stating that “he actually physically sits close to me as well, erm, I have a day to day interaction with him, if I don’t see him, we’re usually on the phone.” Once again, this emphasises the core position that communications has within the organisation, as well as the close relations that this promotes.

With this closeness comes buy-in and cooperation for communication initiatives. As Brian states: “support from our top guy here is really supportive, he really gets what we do, really.” This is testimony to the communications team feeling valued within the organisation and also of the positive perceptions that senior managers have of the team. This also suggests that senior managers broadly understand the role of communications within their organisation. Issues of understanding were an overriding theme across all three organisations and will be dealt with later in this chapter, as the theme of understanding prompts an interesting

discussion about practitioner motivations to gain a central position, as well as presenting a basis for unpacking notions of sensemaking (Dervin, 1997, 1999, 2001).

With closeness to the top and buy-in for communication initiatives, there is a freedom and power to execute plans with authority. Practitioners at Barksdales largely believe that they have influence and therefore take the lead as “a lot of people come to [them] at the early stages looking for advice” which further cements their sense of importance within the organisation. The combination of a close relationship with the senior management team, a sense of power and influence and the belief that they are a valuable asset to the organisation is a self-fulfilling prophecy for them, as this elicits “positive” responses to their involvement. This resembles Morgan’s (2006, 1986) analogy of power being a “honeypot” whereby power “attracts” those who seek power, which gives the source of that power further strength.

5.2 Prominent themes at Primecare

The key themes identified in Primecare were mainly the experiencing of resistance and issues of time, coupled with the need to make others understand the value of communications through educating and advising other departments. The activities that Primecare oriented their narratives around included meetings with other departments, dealing with press and other enquiries and arranging external events.

Although the manager at Primecare, Helen, felt they had a central role in the organisation, this view fluctuated throughout her diaries and interview (see Chapter 7). The team as a whole felt resistance to a new initiative which saw each of the team members being allocated as the communications point person for another department. As Helen describes it, this served two purposes, which was essentially a two-way approach (Dozier et al, 1995):

I really just had to find a way to help the other teams to be clear about what the comms (sic) team do to support the functions of the organisation and to help us understand the business so that we could be more effective. Other teams weren't coming to us with information, developments etc so we had to go to them

The first purpose was to raise the profile of the communications team and the second purpose, parallel to this, was understanding what was happening in the rest of the organisation, meaning that information was conceptualised as flowing in two directions (Dozier et al, 1995). This notion of understanding presents itself in many ways across all three organisations and effectively positions the person who is attempting to understand, as possessing a gap in knowledge (Dervin, 1989, Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). On a practical level, this strategy led to practitioners experiencing resistance to their involvement in the work of other departments. As Sarah states:

Since I joined the organisation (sic) a few months ago it has been obvious there is a bit of resistance from some teams to have PR/communications support - I think because they feel it is not necessary and they can manage

In addition to the resistance felt by practitioners, they too, like Barksdales staff, had encountered issues of time which impacted on their daily workload. On an operational level, this meant chasing people for information against upcoming deadlines, and managing and negotiating deadlines. This was symbolic of two things; the first is of others' lack knowledge of communication processes and the time involved to complete tasks, and the second is of communications not being brought into projects early enough, therefore positioning them as being on the outer edges of key events, effectively placing them on the edges of the organisation. The notion that they were on the edge of the organisation is a direct contradiction to the notion of feeling central, which shows the variation in how practitioners interpret the events they experience (Talja, 1999; Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984). It also shows the polarity of "centrality" and "dispersion" that is evident in how sense is made (Dervin and Frenette, 2001).

In contrast to the resistance and time issues that staff members experienced, there was also a sense that they were seen as "experts" and "professionals" in their field, suggesting a positive perception of communication amongst certain staff.

There was also evidence that they actively cultivated relationships within their organisation, as described by Helen:

...so we're helping them out so they can release staff off for training and that'll come back, you know, I'll get that back at some point, erm, in terms of our relationship

In this extract Helen describes a motivation which is partly a measure to “educate” others about the role of communications and partly a measure to ensure compliance and a smooth process for the future, indicating some strategic forethought in her thinking.

5.3 Prominent themes at Elco

Elco had experienced a lot of change in the year prior to taking part in this research. Their communications team changed their name from the “press office” to the “corporate communications” team, suggesting a desire to raise their profile to a more prominent position. In addition to this, they were undergoing a major, organisational rebranding exercise and there had also been a significant reshuffle within the senior management team, bringing in new senior staff members. Consequently, their diaries and interviews reflected the change that they were experiencing on a number of levels. The activities that they orientated their narratives around included meetings with new and existing senior management and other departments, activities around the ongoing rebranding exercise, dealing with press queries, chasing copy, dealing with budgets and dealing with interruptions to their workflow. This type of interruption is described as reactive work which is “a necessary evil” (Liz) that is embedded within the working day of staff members.

The prominent themes at Elco were resistance to their involvement in projects, couched within a framework of a broader resistance to the rebranding exercise that was occurring. They also viewed the resistance to the rebranding exercise as a battle that they were engaged in, as Ralph explains, “the strategy does need a bit of a push to get it over the brow of the hill and even then the battles between the [two] wings will have to be fought.” Other references to being engaged in battle included “constant battling” and being “caught in the crossfire.” Within this battle, they perceived the senior management as allies in the rebranding battle, particularly the new deputy chief executive who was seen as being “on [Liz’s] side.” The themes of

experiencing resistance and feeling valued by senior management were therefore important aspects of these practitioners' interpretations, and manifested alongside each other, where the positive relationship with senior management could be said to act as a buffer to the negativity of the resistance they encountered from other departments. Their closeness to senior management could also be said to strengthen their position in the organisation in much the same way as at Barksdales (Morgan, 1986, 2006).

Practitioners described being on the "cusp of change" which they could see impacting on their position and remit within Elco. Individual narratives included interpretations on their perceived change in profile and perception by others, but with an acknowledgement that change is an ongoing process. As Juliet explains:

I think it'll just keep taking a bit of time, cos it's been a year since we had our name changed from media relations to communications, so that's only a year, [int: yeah] that's quite a short time really [int: yeah] for people to think oh, you don't just do the journal and articles, and [int: yeah] do all the press enquiries, but people are beginning to say oh yeah you do the ezine as well and it is changing

In this way, we can see change as an important event to be made sense of (Balogun and Johnson, 2004). Practitioners at Elco also felt they had to "educate," "cajole," and sell ideas to the board and other management groups which they saw as part of the battle they had to engage in, in order to raise the profile of communication and ensure a central position for their team. This also highlighted a perceived lack of understanding in others about the purpose and value of communications, which warranted the need to educate or cajole other departments about the work of their team.

5.4 Prominent themes across all three organisations

The previous section outlines the more prominent themes that reveal themselves, but were not exclusive to, each of the three organisations. It is important to note at this stage that the themes converged across the private and public sector organisations, as well as across the industry sectors that the organisations represented. The following section elaborates on the themes evident in all three organisations, as presented in Table 4.6, using illustrative examples in a table format at the end of each theme.

5.4.1 Positioning communications: the central and peripheral

There was an overriding emphasis across all organisations in respect to the position, or location of the team within an organisational hierarchy. This presented as either a conceptualisation of being “integral,” “central” or “quite high up” in the organisation, or being viewed as “peripheral” or an “add-on” to the organisation. These notions of central and peripheral are spatial dimensions for the practitioners (Kovecses, 2002; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). These dimensions help locate the practitioners and their activities within a bounded organisational space or hierarchy.

Being at the hub of an organisation positions the practitioners “in the centre of the traffic” (Liz, Barksdales), which is an important place for the practitioner, as it gives them access to privileges to which others are excluded. This associates a central position with that of power (Edwards, 2006), which affords inclusion to high level, decision making processes of the organisation. At Primecare, the central position also acts as a vantage point, where they are “very well placed [to]...scan the environment,” giving them a strategic advantage (Toth et al, 1998; Dozier and Broom, 1995; Lauzen, 1995), and emphasising the team’s initiative of reaching out to other departments by allocating communication point people to different departments. At Barksdales, theirs was a notion of centrality that emphasised a more normative stance of maintaining a “very strong working relationship” with key managers and the media, and therefore the importance of being part of the dominant coalition (Moss et al, 2000; Dozier et al, 1995). At Elco, there was a sense of centrality being viewed as relative to where they were before, i.e. the move from being a “press office” to “corporate communication.” Their name change appeared symbolic of their desire to become more central and this began the conceptual process of “being well placed with the organisation in terms of recognition and respect,” with the relational orientated proviso that they “had to battle quite hard to get there.”

In contrast to being at the centre of an organisation, some practitioners saw themselves as being “peripheral” in that they were perceived to be a “support function,” or a place where other departments can “lump irrelevant stuff” (Helen, Primecare) for which no-one will take responsibility. Being at the edge of an organisation does not give the same access to privileges as being at the centre of an

organisation, meaning that exclusion from the centre is associated with a lower status and level of power for the practitioner. At Elco, the emphasis fell on their feeling of being excluded from decision-making processes, resulting in individuals feeling peripheral to the inner, or central, information loop. In addition, their sense of periphery came from communication sitting at “item 11 on the agenda, just before any other business (by which time most people have switched off)” as opposed to communication running as a constant theme throughout the agenda that would have made it more central to issues. The idea of there being an inner and outer circle that were privy to information, was the defining element for peripheral interpretations. Practitioners at Primecare and Barksdales also interpreted their exclusion from projects, or being brought in at a late stage, as being symbolic of their peripheral position in the organisation.

These important, and one might say, dominant themes of centrality and periphery became evident very early on into the research and they infused the practitioner narratives throughout the research. They also represent polarities in practitioner interpretations, yet co-exist in relative harmony. What their prominence suggests is that there is a preoccupation with practitioners in gaining and maintaining a central status within their respective organisations. A cross-case examination of the themes also shows that these concepts of centrality and periphery can manifest themselves in different ways and, in this study, the practitioner narratives show that they are organised around spatial orientations (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and form a broader discourse to which other themes identified in this chapter can be linked. The table below gives illustrative examples of how the central and peripheral themes revealed themselves across the three organisations:

Table 5.1: Illustrative examples of central and peripheral themes

Themes	Illustrative examples
<p>Team holds central position in the organisation</p>	<p>We need to be there [int: in the centre?] absolutely there [int: right] driving it (Barbara, Barksdales)</p> <p>It's somewhere either central or overarching I'm just trying to work out [int: yeah] quite where you would put it it has a very broad role in terms of all aspects of the organisation (Andy, Elco)</p> <p>The communications team's very well placed for that [int: yeah] we do we do scan the environment, we're picking things up constantly because we're working across all the teams (Helen, Primecare)</p>
<p>Communications is integral to organisation</p>	<p>Corporate affairs is a key facilitator for helping out people in their communication programme [int: hmm] I think we are being seen as being more important these days (Ian, Barksdales)</p> <p>Team is seen as central to the efforts to reform the organisation and a pivotal player in the meetings so far (Neil, Elco)</p> <p>But in terms of the role that we play we are the one team that cuts across everybody (Helen, Primecare)</p> <p>Just becoming a department that is becoming more integral in terms of the organisation (Liz, Elco)</p>
<p>Team or individual is perceived as on the periphery of the organisation</p>	<p>They've actually put a thing in all their agendas that says number thirteen, or at the end of the agenda, media issues, are there any media issues, erm, and what we're trying to do is even take that out and say communication has to run through all [int: yeah] your agenda, from one to 12, everything you're doing you have to think about communication and not media (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>Think we're kind of a bit disjointed in the way we should be, I think, so, but, you know, if you look at where do we come, comms comes all the way down (Brian, Barksdales)</p> <p>So they just lump all sort of corporate responsibilities into communications (Helen, Primecare)</p> <p>I was also slightly concerned that I'd maybe get all the cast offs from, like, pardon my language, but all this shit that they didn't want to deal with (Damien, Barksdales)</p>
<p>Team or individual not included in information loop</p>	<p>The only thing is when you're trying to get the newsletter articles and things, it would be better if they were closer, maybe kept you in the loop a little bit more (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>I mean have no idea who they're talking to, what they're talking about, what they're pushing, that their projects are, what their goals are (Neil, Elco)</p> <p>Regular diarised meetings ensured I was kept in the loop and kept the lines (sic) of communication open across the varies - and varied - stakeholders (Barbara, Barksdales)</p>

5.4.2 Communications has power

As raised previously, the theme of power is associated with a central position in the organisation, as those who seek power desire a central position (Morgan, 1986, 2006). Across all three organisations, power was manifest in two ways. The first was a belief by the practitioner that they had a high level of influence in the organisation, which was emphasised through the second way, their close relationship and frequent access to senior management. The overriding factor to a powerful communications team could therefore be linked to a “strong working relationship” with the dominant coalition of an organisation (Moss et al, 2000; Dozier et al, 1995). Across the organisations, practitioners used their knowledge and position in different ways as a “lever” to get information from others (see Chapter 6).

At Barksdales, we can see a very direct link between influencing and managing relationships. This is entirely in line with the team’s preoccupation with building a positive reputation for themselves and a deliberate strategy to be “seen to help people.” At Elco, Ralph identified himself as the influential “voice” and the deputy CEO as the “mouthpiece” for Ralph’s opinions. This suggests a level of self-belief in Ralph that places him in a more powerful communications role than that of his line manager, who is the deputy CEO. At Primecare, there is a similar point of influence in the content of advice and therefore the power of the individual. The power of a team and individual is therefore linked to their central status within an organisation, and offers a fine example of distributed leadership in action (Spillane, 2005). The table below shows how notions of power through influence and access, were evident across the three organisations:

Table 5.2: Illustrative examples of communications having power

Themes	Illustrative examples
Team or individual is influential	<p>Our role is one of influence [int: yeah] and therefore managing our influence to maximum ability [int: yeah] and you can only do that by building relationships with people and being seen to help people or grateful when they receive help (Ian, Barksdales)</p> <p>[It] did bring it back to me just you know how much value [ceo] does place on my views and opinions (Helen, Primecare)</p> <p>But he certainly asked me about certain erm kind of working relationships [right] and background [hmm] to various things you know so I think what I'm saying will be influencing what he's thinking [yeah] what he's deciding and he'll probably speak to other people as well (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>I mean the only thing I'm doing is having a quiet word in [deputy ceo's] ear, but [deputy ceo's] pretty much taking on board what I'm saying and he's happy to go with it, and he's happy to be the mouthpiece for it (Ralph, Elco)</p>
Have access to senior management	<p>We have a very strong working relationship and I speak to him most days (Barbara, Barksdales)</p> <p>It would seem that we have an ally at the top who understands the need for comms excellence and sees the gaps that we are trying to fill (Neil, Elco)</p> <p>The CEO of the [umbrella organisation] is very receptive to me and so are her team (Helen, Primecare)</p>

5.4.3 Communications engaged in battle for power

Practitioners faced a number of internal battles and hurdles that had an adverse impact on their day, as well as their position within the organisation. They described “firefighting,” “infighting” and internal politics as some of the many hurdles they face. The battle for power takes two forms. The first is in the resistance experienced by practitioners to their involvement in organisational or departmental projects and the second is the feeling that they have to “battle” in order to be taken seriously. Together, this sense of embattlement means that they are *engaged* in battle, which in turn indicates an attempt to gain political power in an organisation (Morgan, 1986, 2006). Practitioners felt they encountered a lot of resistance to their involvement in projects. Their narratives show that they experienced resistance in different ways.

In Primecare, staff experienced teams being “a bit negative” about their presence and involvement in projects. This suggests that other departments were

protecting the boundaries of their work and, in effect, operating in silos. Staff members being assigned to different departments was therefore a strategy to “knock down some imaginary blocks.” In Elco, resistance manifested as a lack of cooperation from other departments who simply “do not want to communicate” and cooperate during the rebranding exercise. At Barksdales, the notion of others protecting their operational boundaries was again connected with the practitioners’ need to maintain relationships, which meant “massaging big egos” in order to win control over the situation.

Consequently, resistance has led to “constant battling to ensure that comms (sic) policy is adhered to” (Neil). Resistance can be situated within a highly political terrain which features power, personal agendas and alliances (Morgan, 1986, 2006; Lawley and Tompkins, 2000). For example, some internal relationships were seen as highly political, ranging from “a lot of competing power bases” through to perceived “machiavellian intent,” typically involving “much pushing and shoving.” Internal struggles were also evident in the frequent descriptions of frustration that manifested in “angry shouting sometimes.” The actual engagement in battle is emphasised through the use of battling metaphors which are evident in practitioner narratives across all three organisations.

If having power is associated with being central to an organisation, it follows that the battle practitioners are engaged in, is a battle to gain access to, and be situated within the powerful centre of the organisation. Being engaged in battle then situates the “embattled” practitioner on the periphery of an organisation. It therefore follows that the theme of battling for power is linked to being peripheral to the powerful core of the organisation in that same way that having power is directly linked to being at the very core of organisational influence. The table below gives examples of how communication practitioners feel they are battling for power.

Table 5.3: Illustrative examples of engaging in battle for power

Themes	Illustrative examples
<p>Encountering resistance to involvement</p>	<p>So it can be really difficult trying to kind of influence them to cos that was one of the things we talked about before in some of our team meetings was influence and impact I think it's quite difficult to influence things sometimes when they're so kind of against it (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>I think its about breaking down barriers and showing that we're here to support them and can add value to what they do. But it will take several months to convince some people! (Sarah, Primecare)</p> <p>I feel over the last couple of weeks we're begining (sic) to knock down some imaginary blocks that were there and by bringing in the expertese (sic) of the whole team as and when needed (Sarah, Primecare)</p> <p>I am getting thoroughly hacked off with our [other department]. The department simply do not want to communicate or work with us and it's becoming a real problem (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>I mean I know it's been having a lot of resistance with the [centres] [int: yeah] just big egos basically [int: yeah] but, erm, yeah it's very, a lot of it's massaging big egos or finessing (Damien, Barksdales)</p>
<p>Engaged in battle</p>	<p>And although the major battle is won, there are still plenty of little skirmishes with each department wanting to forge their own image and establish sub-brands (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>Sometimes it's such a battle, there are so many loud voices shouting (Helen, Primecare)</p> <p>I have had to fight so many battles on my own that I shouldn't have (Brian, Barksdales)</p>

5.4.4 Positive recognition and value of communications

Practitioners were generally concerned about whether their work was recognised and seen as valuable to the organisation. Where practitioners believed that their work was recognised and valued, this was directly articulated, and was linked to whether they believed they had a good reputation with the organisation. In the table below, we can see that at Barksdales, the positive recognition is linked to being a “key facilitator” which reinforces positive perceptions of the team. At Primecare, the “strong love of communications” and “supportive” board would witness the “high profile and successful events” resulting in positive feedback and strengthening the team’s positive reputation. Similarly, at Elco, the value of communications is linked to the buy-in of the deputy CEO and the head of another department, who are also party to the “successful” work of the corporate

communications team. The many aspects of a good reputation that came through in this study include the perception that management respect individuals, that senior management views the whole department favourably and that they have a good reputation within their organisation. Positive perceptions included being viewed as “approachable,” or “quick and professional.” The table below gives illustrative examples of how communications is thought to be recognised and valued across all three organisations.

Table 5.4: Illustrative examples of positive recognition and value of communications

Themes	Illustrative examples
<p>Positive recognition and value of communications</p>	<p>I mean the organisation is placing far, far greater importance on, on, on communications [int: hmm] and as corporate affairs is a key facilitator for helping out people in their communication programme [int: hmm] I think we are being seen as being more important these days (Brian, Barksdales)</p> <p>I think obviously our deputy chief executive is very pro what we do, erm, I think the chap who does [product] is very pro because well he can definitely see the use of it (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>The [board member] has quite a strong love of communications [n laughs], which is good she takes a very strong interest in it, but it's very, very supportive, I have to say, so is, so is the [board] (Helen, Primecare)</p>
<p>Team or individual has good reputation</p>	<p>Today was a great day for reinforcing positive perceptions of me and my team to our most senior executives (David, Barksdales)</p> <p>We run a lot of high profile and successful events which are seen in a positive way by those outwith (sic) the organisation (Isa, Primecare)</p> <p>The work of corporate communications was thought to have been successful (Andy, Elco)</p>

5.4.5. The lack of recognition and value of communications

The concern for recognition, value and reputation also focused on the negativity that practitioners experienced towards their work and how this effected their reputation. Examples across all three organisations show that the negativity experienced by practitioners was linked to a lack of engagement (“that’s not our remit”) and understanding (“the value of what we do isn’t seen”). At Primecare, Helen’s experience was that senior management put a surface value on communications. This suggests that the dominant coalition may evaluate the

legitimacy of what communication practitioners propose on the basis of whether it is “counter-attitudinal” (Erb and Bohner, 2007: 197) and therefore threatening to the status quo.

The lack of recognition and value perceived by practitioners extended to their reputations, which partly accounts for the resistance they experience in their working lives. Actions were guided by how practitioners felt others perceived their reputation. The majority of practitioners thought they were viewed negatively, such as “interfering.” Damien, at Barksdales, explains that he thinks his team is perceived as “a bunch of work shy fops who hammer expense accounts to have a good time.” Practitioners also felt they were perceived as “irritating people.” “bossy” and inflexible in their stance. This suggests that practitioners are aware of the identities that they actively adopt, and of the identities that others attribute to them. This further suggests notions of performance, either in performing a stereotype or of performing another role to aid their reputation (Goffman, 1959). The table below shows how the lack of recognition and value was articulated across all three organisations.

Table 5.5: Illustrative examples of negative recognition and value

Themes	Illustrative examples
Lack of recognition and value of communications	<p>The work that went into rewriting the releases and taking them through a process of internal approval to ensure all bases are covered, figures correct and quotes appropriate will not be seen by the end audience. I sometimes think the value of what we do isn't seen but is just part of the job (Barbara, Barksdales)</p> <p>We had a fairly dreadful start to a communications pilot meeting with chair of the [group] about the purpose of the pilot and the importance of communicating with the profession and other stakeholders – the response being 'oh, it's not in our remit' (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>They make a play of valuing it highly [int: yeah], erm, but only on their terms sometimes (Helen, Primecare)</p>
Team or individual has negative reputation	<p>Comms planning for the committee members is a new and alien thing and for the department concerned it is an old and irritating thing that should be carried out by those irritating people in the comms office. I exaggerate but not by much (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>I don't think that other departments realise how long it takes for the newsletter to be put together. I think they may seem (sic) the department as over bossy at times, when really we are just trying to get things done (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>Maybe they think we're a bit of a pain (Victoria, Primecare)</p> <p>I believe in doing what is right for my business each and every time. I feel our department head took on a task which was both an unreasonable (sic) demand on my time and returned no value to the business. My actions not only put my business first, but also demonstrated my views that we cannot keep taking on every request that knocks on our door. Probably not impressed, but I stand by my decision (Brian, Barksdales)</p>

5.4.6 Linking the themes to the centre and the periphery

What the first order concepts elaborated above illustrate, is that notions of value, recognition and reputation can be tied to the themes of power and position. Together, the three themes of central positioning, having power and having recognition can be combined and be said to represent a “centralist” discourse, evident in practitioner narratives. Similarly, the lack of power can be linked to feelings of “embattlement” and a sense that practitioners are on the outer edges of an organisation or key organisational events. Therefore, the remaining three themes of peripheral position, lack of power and lack of recognition can be combined and be

said to represent a discourse of “periphery” which are also noticeable throughout the practitioner narratives.

5.4.7 Barriers to progress

The data showed that there were a number of barriers that prevented practitioners from working at optimum levels. Frequent activities across all three organisations included “chasing up” people to meet “pressing deadlines,” as well as last minute changes to projects, affecting their deadlines and consequently their workloads. “Time poverty” was a continual barrier where “there’s never enough time in the day if you want to shine” (David, Barksdales). This suggests that time inhibits practitioners from showing their potential contribution to others, thereby acting as a barrier. With time being a precious commodity not to be wasted, practitioners were conscious of aspects of their workload which “consumed” their valuable time (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). They felt that “there was too much to do and very little that could be put to the bottom of the pile” (Sarah, Primecare) indicating a heavy workload which became “stressful to manage” (Juliet, Elco). As such, practitioners viewed themselves as resources that were “overstretched” as their workload was “already at its limit” (David, Barksdales).

Practitioners also felt that they were regularly interrupted from their flow of work to face requests which were either last minute attempts to involve communications on a fairly superficial basis, or were requests for immediate action, meaning that they were constantly having to reprioritise their already heavy workloads. This had implications for what they perceived as their already overstretched resources, time poverty and high workload volume. Interruptions to their day led to reprioritising of workloads for many of the practitioners, with the emphasis again on time being a precious commodity that was “consumed” (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980).

The theme of barriers was extremely broad, and could be rooted within some of the peripheral themes above, where the barriers stop the progress of work or the movement of practitioners within their organisation. The idea of movement is particularly important in this study, as it symbolises a desire in the practitioners to change their status and position within their organisations. Barriers therefore represent the conceptual elements which hinder this process for practitioners (Dervin

and Frenette, 2001). The idea of movement and the desire for change also situates the practitioner within a bounded time and space (Dervin, 1999). These are micro-level barriers, relevant and unique to the practitioners in their natural setting (Boje et al, 2004). However, some of the other themes identified in the research could be viewed as meso-level barriers. For example, the resistance practitioners experience to their involvement in the work of other departments, a struggle for recognition, and departments acting in silos to protect their boundaries could all be classed as meso-level barriers which practitioners have to overcome if they want to move towards the centre and increase their powerbase.

In addition to barriers representing a “blocked” path in the journey to the powerful centre of the organisation, the barriers experienced also suggest two things. First, it suggests that practitioners experience a stop and start motion to their work, making progress slow, as work is undertaken in a stilted fashion. Second, this confirms their peripheral status as, by being excluded from projects, they are effectively the wrong side of any boundary. The barriers identified through the thematic analysis also take on a new meaning when viewed through the sensemaking metaphor model (Dervin, 1999). The barriers form part of the “constraining” factors that counter the “propelling” (Dervin, 1999) forces which move the across the knowledge gap to create understanding. Sensemaking in this sense also “assumes that issues of force and power pervade all human conditions” (Dervin 1999: 142) and this study shows the importance of these barrier-like forces and how they are manifested in practitioner interpretations.

Table 5.6: Illustrative examples of barriers to progress

Themes	Illustrative examples
Time issues	<p>Time poverty is a constant conflict (hence I'm writing this early on a Saturday morning). There's never enough hours in the day if you want to shine (David, Barksdales)</p> <p>There's only so much I can do, so we will have to see what happens, but I can't 'waste' further time and effort at the expense of other work. Unfortunatley (sic), very frustrating! (Sarah, Primecare)</p> <p>I feel, although it is important, this is a very time consuming piece of work. (Victoria, Primecare)</p> <p>I did work overtime to do it, I started at five o'clock one night because I wouldn't have got the peace during the day to do it, and I finished it [int: yeah] by 7 so it didn't take me long to do (Juliet, Elco)</p>
Workload issues	<p>I find it hard to get thourgh (sic) my 'to do' list and find I turn my attention to budgets only when I've a deadline to meet (David, Barksdales)</p> <p>Basically there was just too much to do and very little that could be put to the bottom of the pile! (Sarah, Primecare)</p> <p>In the end, just had to do what I could do and ended up leaving a little bit of work for Sandra to do. I felt really bad about this, but had no option (Pam, Primecare)</p> <p>It has been crazily busy and very stressful to manage. I've worked additional hours just to keep on top of everything which needs to be done (Juliet, Elco)</p>
Interruptions to workflow	<p>My pre-presentation preparation kept getting eroded. My boss called me several time, in the open plan office I regularly have people appering (sic) at my shoulder ... two team members had problems they needed my advice on; so did the COO and [director] (David, Barksdales)</p> <p>I am brimming with ideas just now of how to progress the press function within the office and develop what we do in relation to media training and other things, but don't seem to get a clear run at any of them. (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>Today was great. Now that we've finally finished the [external event] and I got shot of that media enquiry I was able to plough on and catch up with laods (sic) of small out standing bits of work (Sarah, Primecare)</p>

5.4.8 Issues of understanding

Throughout the narratives, it was evident that practitioners experienced a broader lack of understanding by others in respect of the processes involved in implementing communication activities and also in the overall purpose or value of communications, as Barbara from Barksdales explains:

while the senior manager and immediate team understood the particular challenges of this situation, the colleagues I involved from other teams were not so understanding of how the media works.

In terms of understanding the purpose of communications, most practitioners felt that other departments felt it was a “slightly opaque area and do not understand it fully” (Ralph, Elco). This lack of understanding was viewed as a crucial gap in others’ knowledge that prevented them from doing their work. This conceptualises others’ lack of understanding as a barrier that practitioners have to overcome in order to implement communication initiatives.

The data also shows that practitioners actively want to increase awareness and understanding about communications, wanting to “build on [their] working relationships and turn negative thoughts into positive actions” (Isa, Primecare), which is done through educating and advising others. This again emphasises a desire to be recognised and valued in their respective organisations. The table below gives illustrative examples of how the perceived lack of understand in others was articulated.

This lack of understanding can also be viewed as “a gap that needs filling,” meaning that the practitioner is a container (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) filled with core knowledge (Dozier et al, 1995) that can be used to fill that gap in understanding. A metaphorical lens such as this evokes a sense of deficit (Dervin, 1989), where the gap can either be filled or traversed in some way. This is a more complex view of the communication process than the traditional transmission model of communication (Dozier et al, 1995; Shannon and Weaver, 1949; Laswell, 1948).

Table 5.7: Illustrative examples of issues of understanding

Themes	Illustrative examples
<p>Others don't understand the purpose of communications</p>	<p>What we do is a real mystery, it's a real black art [n laughs] the whole media thing is just a wooco (Brian, Barksdales)</p> <p>I think er it can be a lack of understanding about what it is [int: yeah] that a communication function, a public affairs function actually does [int: yeah] er, you know I look after external affairs, but, well what is external affairs, you know, to some people it could be rightly media relations [int: yeah] or public relations (David, Barksdales)</p> <p>The general feeling about comms is that it all relates to making large-scale media announcements rather than the work of a [department] (Liz, Elco)</p> <p>I think sometimes they can get confused as to what it is that we can do for them (Isa, Primecare)</p>
<p>Others don't understand the processes involved in communications work</p>	<p>The short timescale given to edit a large amount of copy suggested a lack of understanding how much work was involved. There may also have been an assumption that the work would have been done over the weekend if necessary (Andy, Elco)</p> <p>They do try to meet the scales [int: yeah] but erm often it can be like three four days before it's going out and they'll say oh I've got this thing that [int: right] and we always usually try to accommodate them but so by that I don't think often they see how we need it so far in advance that to go through the stages (Victoria, Primecare)</p> <p>However I do think theres (sic) a disparity with what some would regard as a story that the media would want (sic) to use and what really is a story that the media would want to use (Damien, Barksdales)</p>
<p>Increase awareness and understanding of communications</p>	<p>We often take it for granted that other departments understand us and appreciate the reasons that communications are so important. I think we sometimes forget that not everyone has had the communications function explained to them. I thought it was a good idea to almost start afresh and go over what we do, what good communications is and how the rest of the organisation can represent [Primecare] in the best way (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>I also want to build on our working relationship and turn any negative thoughts into positive actions (Isa, Primecare)</p> <p>Wanted him to understand that we were not being obstructive, but that we were limited in what we could do. Wanted him to understand how the media worked (Brian, Barksdales)</p> <p>People are coming to us now and understanding that you know comms is going to play a central role in what they do (Neil, Elco)</p>

5.4.9 Educating and advising others about communications

In addition to identifying the gaps in other people's understanding of communication, practitioners expressed a desire to educate and advise other people about the nature and processes involved in communicating across organisations, in an effort to better others' understanding of communications and to fill this perceived gap in knowledge (Dervin, 1989; Lakoff and Johnson, 1984). In expressing a desire to educate and advise, practitioners clearly viewed themselves as communication experts who "possess" the requisite core knowledge needed to fill any perceived gap in knowledge (Dozier et al, 1995).

Educating in the context of this research was about "changing people's mindsets" and "behaviours" but in a subtle way, so as to encourage greater consideration of communication in other teams, sometimes through persuasion, "convincing" or "cajoling." For some practitioners, educating was simply a case of "explaining" communication processes to others. However, education was firmly linked to creating an understanding:

it takes a while to understand that because we are asking them to do things, erm, doesn't mean they understand why they're doing it, so yeah, it's going through that kind of education process (Neil, Elco)

Demonstrating the value of communication was also an integral part of educating others, where demonstrating often involved "selling" ideas.

In advising others, practitioners are, to an extent, educating others on how to implement different communication strategies. However, advising is also a form of persuasion in that offering advice to others is actually a form of persuading the other person to act in a particular way and through it changing their behaviour. Communication practitioners have long been associated with persuasion tactics (Davies, 2008; Herman and Chomsky, 1994; Foucault, 1989), so their compulsion to persuade comes as little surprise. However, there is another element to the advisory role, which is that in advising and persuading others, particularly senior management, practitioners are consciously promoting a particular image of themselves (Goffman, 1959). In the context of this research, the advisory role is therefore a deliberate manoeuvre on the part of the practitioner to be perceived as an expert and therefore someone who is potentially a key contributor to organisational events, thereby making them central or integral to organisational events. In this way,

we can see that through making sense of information gaps and advising on gaps in knowledge, the practitioner maintains a preoccupation with their status in the organisation. Educating and advising therefore act as deliberate strategies to cultivate a positive reputation. The table below shows how notions of educating and advising manifested themselves across all three organisations:

Table 5.8: Illustrative examples of educating and advising others about communication

Themes	Illustrative examples
Educating others	<p>The intention was not to create communication experts but to get committees to give greater consideration to the communication implications of the work that they do and also to have some measure of communication planning (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>So it's really just cajoling them and getting them to question it themselves so they say, ah actually I've had a good idea, you know, rather than me having to tell them [int: sure], because we're trying to get them to help themselves, [int: yeah] so if I just spoonfeed them what's the point (Ian, Barksdales)</p> <p>I need to find better ways of getting them to take on board some of the information I am able to provide them with (Helen, Primecare)</p>
Advising others	<p>I've worked incredibly hard on creating a strong support base of senior managers in the business. I need to be visible, generate tangible results and offer respected advice and counsel. No matter what I'm asked I've got to give them a fresh perspective (David, Barksdales)</p> <p>I coached our project leader in the type of issues which would be of interest to the paper and suggested key issues to highlight (Neil, Elco)</p> <p>Gave advice on what external organisations could do to help promote the events, how the promotional flier should look, what info it should contain, who its should be sent to and how it should be distributed (Isa, Primecare)</p>

5.5 Making sense of the daily lives of communication practitioners through the themes

The themes presented in this chapter enable an understanding of the nature of the modern communication environment. Through highlighting these themes, this research presents new and valuable empirical information into the lived experience of the modern communications practitioner. The themes presented then, allow us to move beyond existing notions of public relations and corporate communication research, which concern themselves with excellence in communication departments, symmetrical models of communication, practitioner roles, integrated approaches and the construction and maintenance of organisational reputations. The themes, when clustered into particular groups, could be said to represent one of three aggregate themes. The first is the interpretive repertoire of centrality, the second is the interpretive repertoire of periphery and the third is the sensemaking and sensegiving strategies of practitioners. Table 5.9 illustrates how some of the second order themes can be clustered together to represent the interpretative repertoires of practitioners and how the remaining themes can be clustered together to represent the sensemaking strategies of communication practitioners:

Table 5.9: First order concepts, second order themes and aggregate themes

First order concepts	Second order themes	Aggregate themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual holds central position in the organisation • Communications is integral to the organisation 	Team or individual perceived as central	Interpretative repertoires of centrality
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is recognised and valued • Team or individual has good reputation 	Positive recognition and value of communications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is influential • Have access to senior management 	Communications has power	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is on the periphery of the organisation • Team or individual not included in the information loop 	Team or individual perceived as peripheral	Interpretative repertoires of periphery
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Team or individual is not recognised or valued • Team or individual has negative reputation 	Negative recognition and value of communications	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encountering resistance to involvement • Battling 	Engaged in battle for power	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time poverty • Unpredictable workload volume • Interruptions to workflow 	Barriers to progress	Overlaps with repertoires of periphery and sensemaking strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating others • Advising others 	Educating and advising others about communication	Sensemaking strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Others don't understand the purpose of communications • Others don't understand the processes involved in using communication channels • Practitioners want to increase understanding of communications 	Issues of understanding	

5.6 The themes as interpretative repertoires

In elaborating upon the themes, I have shown that the identification of an underlying premise of *location* or *position* connects the themes. Nearly all the themes identified can be placed under one of the broader categories of centrality and periphery, as practitioners are concerned primarily with their position, recognition and its associated power, within their respective organisations. If practitioners envisage themselves as being either central or peripheral to the organisation and the events they experience, then the themes can be said to symbolise feelings of centrality and periphery. In this way, we can see that the themes can be clustered together to represent the verbal, or interpretative repertoires of centrality or periphery. What is also evident in the themes is that there is a desire on the part of the practitioner to gain centralist powers and position. This desire represents the *journey* that practitioners wish to undertake in their working lives, in order to “progress” in their organisation.

5.7 The themes as sensemaking strategies

In addition to dealing with issues of position, recognition and power, practitioners regularly encounter situations that reveal a stark lack of understanding in others as to the nature, value and processes involved in communicating across a large organisation. As such, issues of understanding and educating others connect some of the themes presented in this chapter. Viewing these issues through a sensemaking lens as connected in some way allows us to see the nature of their relationship and emphasises the importance of context. Through Dervin and Frenette’s (2001) sensemaking model, we can conceive that the bridging gaps in knowledge form part of the journey from the periphery to the centre. In this context, the notion of attaining influence, a positive reputation, power and other privileges associated with being at the centre then act as the motivators for educating others about the value of engaging with and accepting the practitioner as an expert in communications.

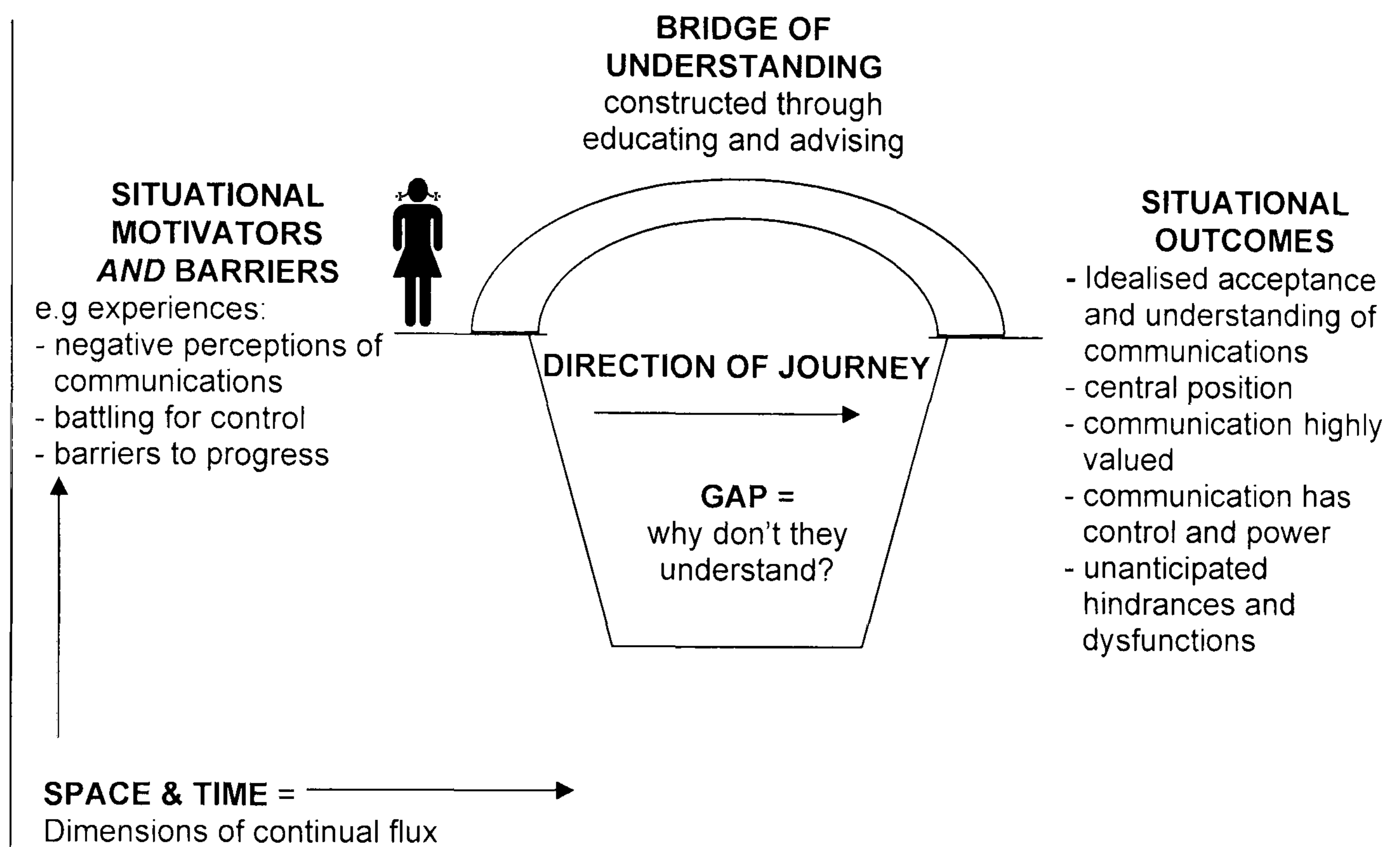
It should be noted, however, that in using such a lens as sensemaking, this does not exclude other interpretations of potential relationships and underlying structures

between the themes (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991). What this thesis presents therefore is a detailed interpretation of the themes that form two, important interpretive repertoires of communication practitioners; namely the repertoires of centrality and periphery, which will be elaborated upon in the next two chapters. Before moving on to detail the two interpretive repertoires, it is important to expand on the sensemaking strategies of practitioners.

5.8 Practitioner sensemaking

The literature in Chapter 3 introduced the Sense-Making Metaphor Model (Dervin and Frenette, 2001) as a contextualised process of bridging gaps in knowledge. This is a particularly useful model for this study, as it helps us gain insights into the context in which sensemaking and sensegiving occur. In order to expand on notions of practitioner sensemaking, I have adapted Dervin and Frenette's model to help comprehend some of the themes presented in this chapter. Although the adapted model below is not as complex as their original, it nevertheless offers a tool for contextualising the themes. In the process of using this adapted sensemaking model, this thesis also offers a critique of the original model. The adapted model is below in Figure 5.1:

Figure 5.1: Practitioner sensemaking as bridging a gap in understanding



Adapted from Dervin and Frenette (2001: 74)

Conceptualising through Dervin and Frenette's (2001) sensemaking model, we can see that the situations described by the practitioners occur in *space and time*, thereby contextualising their interpretations and acknowledging the dynamic and ongoing aspects of interpretation (Weick, 1995). By acknowledging the time and space surrounding the situation, the model suggests an undefined space or void within which the practitioner can move. However, we know from the repertoires of centrality and periphery that their space is bounded by notions of organisational hierarchy. The space and time continuum acknowledges that practitioner interpretations are embedded within a continually moving state and that they are not the static, strategy driven, outcome focussed individuals that traditional research portrays. It also acknowledges the importance of the working environment in which their interpretations occur, which is particularly important in a study embedded within a social constructionist worldview. Crucially, it also takes into account that the situations that they describe, although articulated as minute instances in time, are part of the continual flux that is so characteristic of their working environment. This applies equally to more abstract "situations," such as resistance, or change, which

are also embedded in space and time and where the practitioners sensemaking does not remain static.

Dervin and Frenette's original model (2001) identified *situations* as stemming from experiences and history. Themes such as negative perceptions of communications, battling and resistance, and barriers to progress are the situations; the practitioner being at the centre of the situation in a position where they need to make sense of it, thereby symbolising the need to progress from that situation. However, their model does not acknowledge that the situations can also act *both as motivators and as barriers*. For example, issues such as the negative perceptions of communications could be seen to hinder an understanding of communication, as they actively stop the bridge of understanding from being constructed. They therefore act as a barrier. However, practitioners are aware of this barrier and use it to motivate them to educate others, and change how communication is perceived. In this, we can see how such an issue can be both a motivator and a barrier.

The lack of understanding serves as the *gap* which needs to be overcome or traversed in some way in order to reach the situational outcomes. The mental question practitioners are asking themselves when they experience particular situations is *why don't they understand?* which creates "angst" (Romanello et al, 2003) or frustration for the practitioner, their enactment being their attempt to fill this gap in knowledge, firstly to satisfy themselves, and secondly to actively bridge others' gap in understanding.

By viewing how sense is made as a process of *bridging a gap in knowledge* sensemaking then becomes the way in which individuals actively construct bridges to traverse that gap. By looking through the sensemaking lens, it has been shown that educating and advising are actions that *propel* the practitioner to bridge that gap in knowledge. In this sense, we can see that there is a clear *journey direction* that needs to be followed to make sense of experiences. This presents a need for clarification in Dervin's original model, in that the space and time continuum does not acknowledge whether the direction of the journey is one way (linear), or whether you can move back through a cyclical process to the original situation by whatever means if, say, you encountered unanticipated barriers whilst attempting to bridge gaps in understanding.

5.8.1 Practitioner sensegiving

In educating and advising others, practitioners articulate their arguments by legitimising their actions to others (Weick, 1979). However, what is articulated does not often represent the sense that is made, but a smoothed out version that actively omits the contradictions and confusions that will have featured in individual sensemaking interpretations. What is articulated is therefore close to the smoother *sensegiving* process (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007; Maitlis, 2005) that acts as a public face to the chaos of *sensemaking* (Dervin 1989). Given that language is the tool of the communication practitioner (Motion and Leitch, 2007), it stands to reason that they are acutely aware of its power. When educating, it could be argued that they are “selling” ideas to gain support (Hill and Levenhagen, 1995), and in the process legitimising not only their personal agenda, but also the value of communication within an organisational setting. This borders on Sonenshein’s (2006) influence tactics where practitioners employ a “publicly legitimate language to justify an issue they privately think about in different terms” (2006: 1160). The disparity between “public portrayals...[and] private understandings” (2006: 1169) show the importance of sensegiving and its capacity to hide confusion, complexity and contradictions, particularly where personal agendas are concerned. Sonenshein (2006) also suggests that selling issues is not about getting attention, but to do with gaining credibility and power, which is entirely in line with how the centralist repertoire is employed by the practitioners taking part in the research. The deliberate construction of messages which form the education and advisory process could also be said to actively employ “language framing” (Fiss and Zajac, 2006).

Returning to the sensemaking strategies, in the context of this research, the *situational outcomes* are more specific than in Dervin’s original model. The situational outcomes and motivators represent polarities in understanding, where the outcomes embody an idealised acceptance and understanding of communications, characterised by a central position, high value, control and power. Contrastingly, the motivators or barriers can be said to embody the experiences of periphery, such as negative perceptions, battling for control and barriers to progress. However, arriving at the situational outcomes assumes an end to the journey, which is a rather simplistic and linear interpretation of sensemaking. Dervin’s original model, however, does acknowledge that the likely outcomes could hold dysfunctions and

hindrances, and their inclusion in the adapted model provide some acknowledgement of the unpredictability and instability inherent not only in practitioners' interpretation but also in their working environment.

Through the adapted sensemaking model developed in relation to the identified themes, it has been shown how practitioners perceive a lack of understanding in other people as a gap that prevents them from progressing toward the powerful centre, and where the education and advisory process is seen as bridging that gap.

5.9 In conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown that a number of themes are prevalent in the working lives of communication practitioners. These themes provide new empirical data on the nature of the working environment for the modern communications practitioner. In particular, this research shows that rather than being preoccupied with formulating strategy, practitioners are concerned with their position within the organisation, their value and recognition, and increasing or maintaining their power base. An analysis of the prevalent themes across all three organisations shows how issues such as the perceived position of the practitioner, the power that they desire and the recognition that they desire can manifest in positive and negative ways. Practitioner accounts show that their interpretations vary and this interpretative variability can be grouped together to form two interpretive repertoires that are orientated around feelings of centrality and periphery, suggesting a level of uncertainty as to where practitioners believe they "fit" into an organisation. This is close to Dervin and Frenette's (2001) assertion that:

comparing sense-making across time, space, and people will yield patterns of centrality and dispersion. Any comparison of sense-making activities will necessarily yield patterns of centrality (homogeneity and agreement) and patterns of dispersion (diversity and disagreement) (cited in Dervin et al, 2007: 240).

In the last section of this chapter, I have shown how some of the themes can be clustered together to represent the sensemaking and sensegiving strategies of practitioners, which help bring clarity to practitioners' interpretations (Weick, 1979) and bridge gaps in understanding (Dervin, 1989), and where "gap-defining" and "gap-bridging" are central tenets of how sense is made.

The next two chapters elaborate on the remaining themes by illustrating the repertoires of centrality and periphery in action, using extended extracts from the data.

Chapter 6:

Interpretive repertoires of centrality

6.0 Introduction

As stated in the earlier literature review, the key debates dominating corporate communication research are communication excellence, practitioner roles and integration. The dominance of these research themes over the last few decades has shaped the discourse of communication practitioners. The existing discourse is one of “strategic value” which incorporates the dominant research themes. The strategic value discourse will be illustrated further in this chapter as part of presenting the interpretive repertoires of practitioners. The previous chapter explored the themes that were evident in practitioner narratives. However, in order to understand their meanings, it is important to move to a higher level of abstraction and examine the variability that exists in practitioners’ interpretations.

By examining the variability in talk and text, references to the strategic value discourse are indeed present, but they do not exist as the dominant discourse. Instead, what exists are two interpretive repertoires which infuse practitioner narratives throughout. The two interpretive repertoires are the 1) repertoire of centrality, and 2) repertoire of periphery. The findings show that practitioners make sense of the events they experience within a bounded organisational space, hence the notion that they are either central or peripheral to what is occurring. The repertoires practitioners employ therefore depend upon a centrally or peripherally conceptualised space within their organisation. These two key interpretive repertoires, or practitioner discourses, are present across all three organisations. Additionally, the repertoire of periphery evokes metaphors of battling and barriers, which are continually reproduced to further strengthen and perpetuate a sense of “being on the outskirts” for the practitioners.

This chapter details the first of these interpretive repertoires – the repertoire of centrality – and its associated characteristics. In doing so, this chapter first introduces and defines both repertoires, and offers a model that illustrates the

movement from one repertoire to another and the characteristics of each repertoire. The chapter then offers an explanation of the model, beginning with the repertoire of centrality and its characteristics. This includes examples from the current data that show how the strategic value discourse manifests, as well as the instances in which the notions of centrality can be linked to feelings of value, recognition and power, as felt by practitioners. In each of the examples quoted, and in line with how such narrative data is presented by Potter and Mulkay (1985), the diary extracts used have each sentence numbered to allow for ease of reference, whilst the interview extracts are numbered line by line, as people do not speak in clear cut sentences.

6.1 Introducing interpretive repertoires of centrality and periphery

Prior research has so far failed to acknowledge the variability that exists in interpreting the daily lives of communication practitioners. By promoting a discourse of strategic value, linear processes and integrated activities for existing and future practitioners, it is argued that research has ignored (and therefore devalued) the “copious interpretive uncertainties” (Gilbert and Mulkay, 1984: 11) which constitute the daily lives of communication practitioners. The examination of interpretive repertoires is therefore crucial in identifying any ambiguities, contradictions and assumptions that may exist in the narrative explanations of the communications practitioners. Interpretive repertoires in the context of this research can be defined as:

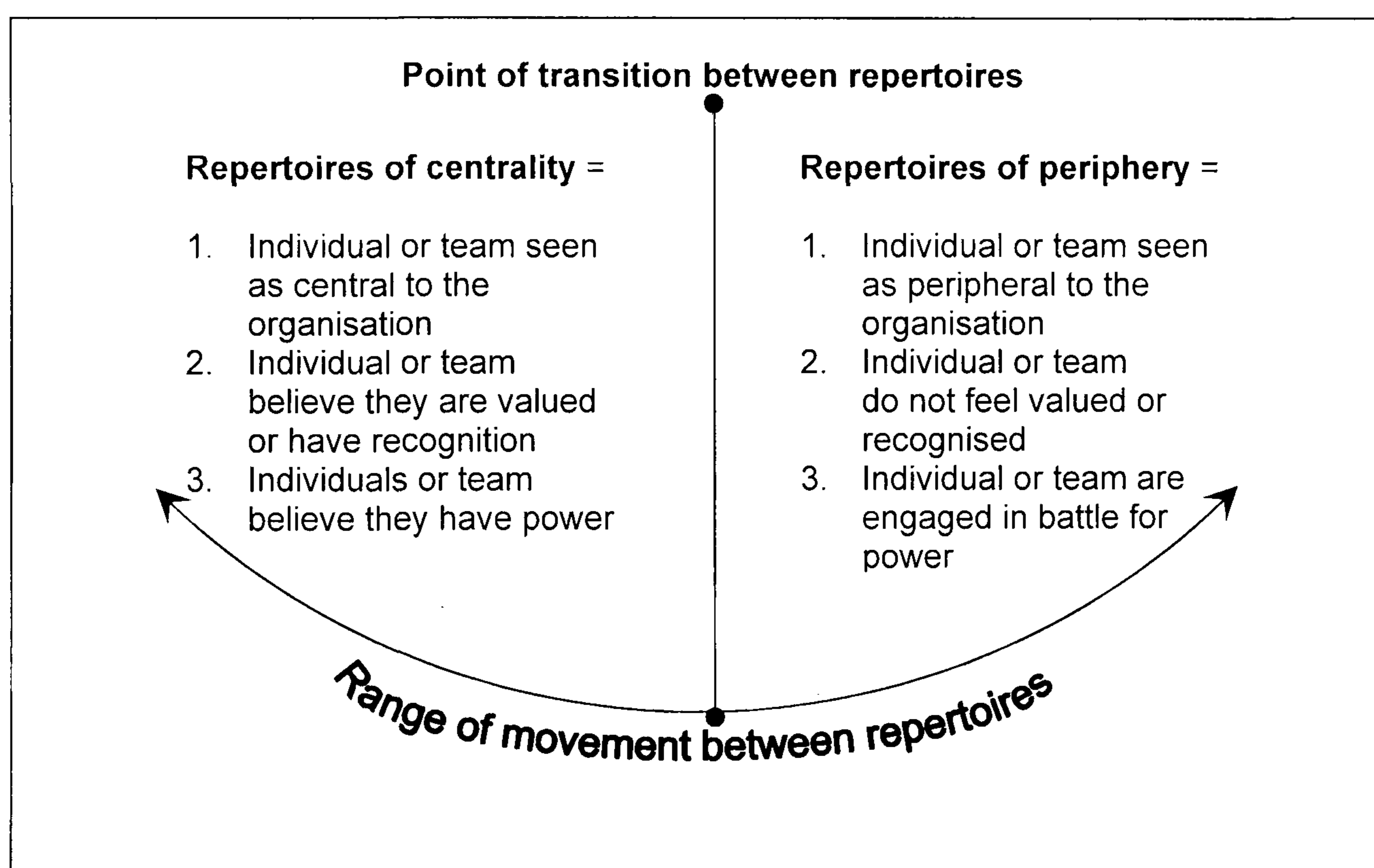
the building blocks speakers use for constructing versions of actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. Any particular repertoire is constituted out of a restricted range of terms used in a specific stylistic and grammatical fashion. Commonly these terms are derived from one or more key metaphors and the presence of a repertoire will often be signalled by certain tropes or figures of speech (Wetherall and Potter, 1988: 172)

Each repertoire therefore will have its own set of unique discursive patterns and characteristics, evident within the context of this research. This makes an understanding of context essential to understanding the nature of what practitioners experience.

This study shows that whilst the discourse of strategic value exists across all three organisations, it is not the sole prerogative of the “manager” of the team.

Elements of the strategic value discourse are present in practitioner narratives, but are less frequent than a previously unrecognised interpretive repertoire, identified here as the “repertoire of centrality.” Given that the interpretations of practitioners are unlikely to be univocal or consistent over the duration of the research (Wetherall and Potter, 1988; Gilbert and Mulkey, 1984), the repertoire of centrality is evident together with another, also previously unrecognised interpretive repertoire, identified here as the “repertoire of periphery.” The following model has been developed to represent the two interpretive repertoires and their associated characteristics:

Figure 6.1: Movement between practitioners’ interpretive repertoires



The model shows that not only do repertoires of periphery evoke more metaphors of battling and barriers than repertoires of centrality, but also that practitioners oscillate from one to the other. There does not appear to be a consistent starting point for practitioners, but in articulating a position of centrality, it could be said that practitioners represent a more “smoothed out,” or public message, as they are sensegiving (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007; Maitlis, 2005), and then move to a peripheral repertoire when they experience alienation from the core of the organisation, or vice versa. The model presented in Figure 6.1 represents the practitioners’ process of oscillating from one repertoire to another whilst making

sense of the events they experience. Practitioners' narratives also show that the movement between each repertoire is relatively frequent and occurs without any obvious awareness by the practitioners. This repeated oscillation between the two repertoires indicates a sense of uncertainty and ambiguity around where they "fit" into the organisation.

6.2 Defining interpretive repertoires of centrality and periphery

To understand fully the nature of the two interpretive repertoires, it is first necessary to define them. In defining the repertoires, I will elaborate upon the model in Figure 6.1. Broadly, the reference to centrality and periphery relates to where communication practitioners conceptualise themselves within their organisation, which have notions of value, recognition and power embedded within them. A centralist repertoire sees communication as integral, or central, to the functioning of an organisation, and by association possessing a high degree of power at a functional level. This translates down to the practitioner who possesses a high degree of confidence and the belief that they are influential within the organisation. As such, both the team and the practitioner feel that there is recognition for the work they do, thus elevating their power and influence further (Morgan, 1986, 2006). Given that communicating to stakeholders is conceptualised as a linear activity that promotes crafting messages to an external audience, it could be said that practitioners are conscious of the relatively public domain within which they describe their work and its purpose. In the context of this research, the public domain is defined as anyone who they are trying to influence, such as senior managers, colleagues, media contacts, and me, as the researcher. It is therefore argued that practitioners employing a centralist repertoire consciously adopt a "public face" (Goffman, 1959) about their work, which evokes aspects of a normative discourse and actively excludes negative or contradictory perceptions about work (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007).

Repertoires of periphery have contrastingly different notions of power and influence. Periphery in the context of this research refers to the communication team or the practitioner perceiving themselves to be on the outskirts of the main organisation. Where the practitioners see themselves as peripheral to the

organisation, they feel they have little control over the events they experience, and consequently feel they have little power or recognition. The reference to being on the periphery stems from a belief by practitioners that the communication function is not seen as important within the organisation and therefore struggles to get the recognition it deserves. Embedded within this is the notion that others lack a full understanding about the benefits of using communication from an early stage in organisational initiatives, and that others have negative perceptions about the communications function, which forms a body of resistance toward the function. Furthermore, it could be said that repertoires of periphery represent private narratives, which are not shared with senior management or media contacts, but are shared amongst a few colleagues and me as the researcher. It could be argued that writing the diaries was the catalyst for this type of repertoire. However, the thoughts and analysis of practitioners had been gestating before my arrival and this study therefore takes a snapshot of a much longer and continual analytical process on the part of the practitioner (Phillips and Hardy, 2002).

As Wetherell and Potter's (1988) definition of interpretive repertoires indicates, the interpretations of practitioners rely on a number of key metaphors. For example, in analysing practitioners' narratives, we can see that there is a heavy use of metaphors which represent time as a commodity, references to barriers, or impediments to progress through the interruption of flow as described by practitioners, and also the notion that they are engaged in a battle to move from the periphery of an organisation into the centre. These will be elaborated upon mainly throughout Chapter 7 which illustrates repertoires of periphery in action.

6.3 The strategic value discourse in practitioner interpretations

The strategic value discourse advocates ideal communication scenarios as broadly strategic, linear in process, centralised in its organisation and symmetrical in its relationship with stakeholders; it represents an ideal that is articulated largely by communication managers. What constitutes sound communication practice, and, by association, the working lives of practitioners, therefore comes from normative research, thereby setting a benchmark for practitioners to aspire when engaged in communication work in terms of activities and final outputs. As a dominant and

long-standing discourse, it stands to reason that the discourse of “strategic value,” as promoted by the key debates, should be present in the interpretive repertoires of the communication practitioners.

This research shows that it is indeed present, however, it is not the only repertoire used to interpret the events experienced by practitioners. As stated by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), the talk and text of the practitioners is unlikely to be as uniform, static and univocal as researchers often portray in much discourse-centred research. This means that in all likelihood, an alternative to the strategic value discourse is likely to exist, but may have been previously overlooked for any number of reasons. If this discourse serves as a benchmark for researchers to make sense of the working lives of communication practitioners, then anything other than that could represent a contradiction to the discourse. However, a contradictory discourse may not necessarily represent the polar opposite of normative discourse, but can add another dimension to the dominant view. As stated by Gilbert and Mulkay (1984), variability in talk and text need not mean incompatibility.

The two repertoires identified in the current research help us to make sense of the daily lives of communication practitioners. In particular, it allows us to move beyond notions of communication practitioners being mainly preoccupied with activities and processes, such as reputation management or communicating with stakeholders, as identified in normative research. In identifying these repertoires, we can begin to look at the totality of the practitioner world (Mintzberg, 1994), how they interpret events and the broader discourse that represents their lived experience.

More than half of the practitioners involved in the research showed a tendency to move between the two repertoires, depending on how they perceived their position within their organisation. This is in line with Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) research into scientists’ discourse, which emphasises that discourse is context specific. The following section illustrates how the dominant discourse of strategic value revealed itself in practitioners’ narratives.

As detailed in Chapter 2, the key debates of communication excellence, and the integration of communication functions and processes have dominated research over the last few decades. The excellence debate places importance on symmetrical processes, whilst the integration debate places importance on the bringing together

of disparate voices to a central point. Both debates have a common theme of “communicating with stakeholders” and “demonstrating the strategic value” of communication to multiple stakeholders. These debates have contributed to a broader discourse of “strategic value” which can be seen in official organisational documents (see www.cipr.co.uk or www.cib.uk.com) and throughout academic research (Argenti et al, 2005; Lauzen, 1995).

Within public relations, the strategic value discourse draws upon notions of “excellence” which sees communication of any strategic or organisational value as derivative of three factors that act as a whole to move towards an end result. These three factors of core knowledge of the practitioner and their associated role, shared expectations, and organisational culture act as reference points for practitioners engaged in communication activities. Similarly, the symmetrical approach to communicating with stakeholders, favoured by the excellence theory, incorporates rhetoric that is familiar to anyone working in communication and has come to symbolise what communication teams contribute to strategic management (Grunig et al, 1995). For example, communication practitioners across industry sectors could easily relate to the following statement:

Communication helps to create a climate for you to engage with your stakeholders and, and it opens up various channels and it's also there to help you scan the environment to help you, you know, look at a variety of different things. I mean communication, the communications team's very well placed for that. We do, we do scan the environment, we're picking things up constantly because we're working across all the teams and with other external teams (Helen, Primecare)

The rhetoric used here is familiar to any scholar and practitioner of communication. Helen, from Primecare, is telling us that communication has a clear role in her organisation; it creates a climate for things to happen between the organisation and the people it calls its stakeholders. It also opens up previously blocked pathways and monitors the broader environment for other departments. The usefulness, or value, of the communication department is inherent in this narrative. This type of rhetoric, one which emphasises the purpose of the communication function and one which features familiar management terms, such as “stakeholders,” “channel,” “environment” and “engage,” form part of the dominant discourse of

“strategic value” which has come to dominate the public relations and corporate communications disciplines.

The following interview extract gives us the same sense of purpose about the value of the rebranding exercise at Elco:

I stood up and said, you know, this is here. this is why we're doing it, consolidate what the image is, should help save some money, erm, freshen things up, more fitting, let people know, let the wider stakeholders know that change is coming (Ralph, Elco)

The rhetoric used here is strategic; it draws on language that justifies the actions of the communication department. The points arguing for the rebranding exercise are framed within the same dominant discourse of strategic value as the previous interview extract. It is a discourse which favours tangible results that ultimately save the organisation money and therefore increase profits for the organisation. The familiar term of “communicating with stakeholders” is also used as a further justification for the rebranding exercise. Similarly, the following example from Barksdales shows the manifestation of normative rhetoric when talking about how the approach of communication has changed:

And collaborative approach [int: yeah sure], you know, we're seen as part of, we're seen as all these people's partners, [int: right ok], as opposed to someone who, I mean certain divisions within the [organisation] everybody hates you know, [names departments] [int: yeah – n laughs], you know, for obvious reasons because they're black and white, cos you either can do it or you can't do it, [int: yeah], you know, whereas we tend to kind of take the collaborative partnership approach (Ian, Barksdales)

This interview extract draws attention to the use of a collaborative approach to communication, evoking notions of symmetry, as advocated by the excellence theory (Dozier et al, 1995). The symmetry of power associated with partnerships is conjured here to give a smooth version of the role and position of the communication function, hence identifying it as a centralist repertoire, which omits the tensions that exist when working with others. To add further emphasis, Ian compares the approach of his team with other teams who he perceives as “black and white” in their approach, suggesting a rigidity that is not present within the communications function. The “collaborative partnership approach” is therefore another example of normative rhetoric that conceals any negative issues arising from such an approach, such as power struggles and personal agendas.

What is evident about these three interview extracts is that by using the dominant discourse of strategic value, Helen, Ralph and Ian identify with, and become members of a professional group, marking themselves out as experts in their field through their explicit use of such familiar and dominant rhetoric. They understand that their arguments should be worded within a discourse that emulates management rhetoric, particularly if they are to capture the ear of senior management. Edwards (2007) states that such explicit use of a shared language results in “symbolic power that permits membership of dominant groups” (2007: 371). Communication practitioners therefore use a familiar management rhetoric of “strategy”, “communicating with stakeholders” and “partnership” as terms which not only justify their actions to senior management, but also to encourage their acceptance into an elite group of decision makers. However, the use of this language ultimately masks any contradictions and complications that practitioners may experience.

Within organisational communication research, prior research focuses upon the integration debate, which is evident in the discourse of practitioners. The practitioner discourse sees a pulling together and coordinating of communication processes, as well as functions, such as public relations and marketing. Practitioners recognise this debate and use the rhetoric of “integration,” “coordination” and “consistency” to control messages and processes. It could be argued that this discourse is used to exert and maintain power over other departments, particularly when the communications function is threatened with encroachment from the marketing function (Lauzen, 1991).

What the discourse of strategic value shows is that the traditional theories of communication excellence and integration are interpreted within the same conceptual framework, where these seemingly different academic debates that are embedded in different disciplines, overlap in the enacted world of the practitioner. Both academic debates draw broadly upon the same terms to elaborate on their respective arguments; terms such as *strategy*, *integration*, *coordination*, *stakeholders*, *partnership* and *communicate* are all familiar concepts in the enacted world of the communication practitioner that share the same interpretive space.

However, in spite of the overlapping concepts that frequent each debate, the parallel paths that these research themes have followed means that they rarely work

in harmony to complement each other. Instead, their development and promotion over the decades has led to a separatist approach to researching communication. The findings of this study show that this separatism is not matched in the practice of communication, as practitioners draw upon a blended rhetoric of both debates to interpret some of the events they experience.

Given the influence that this discourse of strategic value has had upon the practice of communication, it stands to reason that it should be present in the narrative of the communication practitioners. The examples above show that it does indeed exist. However, a deeper analysis of practitioners' narratives show that normative theories of communication excellence and integration are not interpreted as separate issues. This suggests that viewing the key academic debates as separate discussions is not adequate in understanding the daily lives of communication practitioners as it de-contextualises their lived experience.

6.4 Identifying repertoires of centrality

6.4.1 Being at the centre

The belief that the team is situated at the centre of the organisation and is influential during significant organisational initiatives is at the very core of the repertoire of centrality. The perception of communications being at the very core of an organisation is an overtly spatial metaphor (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). The depth and breath of potential space that is associated with a spatial metaphor provides a useful springboard for analysing the range of movement that practitioners feel they have within an organisation, where they position themselves currently in the organisation and where they would ideally like to be situated.

6.4.2 Moving between the central and the peripheral

As stated earlier in this chapter, most practitioners oscillated between feeling central and feeling peripheral to the organisation and its activities. A clear distinction between the two repertoires was more apparent with some practitioners, such as Neil and Liz from Elco, than it was with others:

A1 Team is seen as central to the efforts to reform the organisation and a pivotal player in the meetings so far. All bodes well for the future. (Neil's diary, Elco)

A2 We want to get to the stage where, you know, comms becomes central to any kind of performance issue or measurement [interviewer: yeah] that goes on within the society (Neil's interview, Elco)

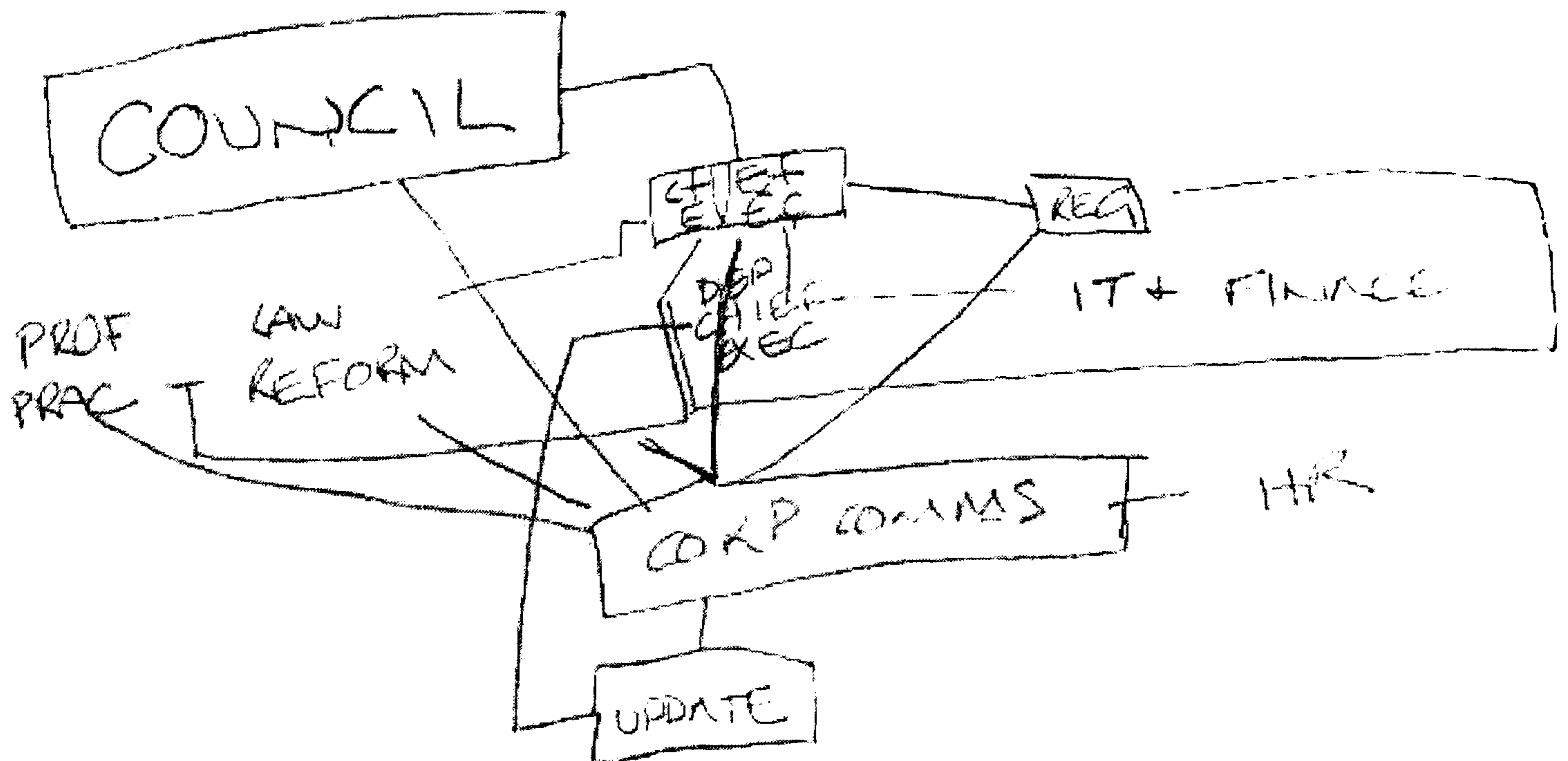
The first is a diary extract which, it is argued, is a conscious and public narrative which meets normative standards about where the communications team should be positioned in an organisation, as advocated by Grunig et al (1995). Not only is the team central, but it is "pivotal" (A1) suggesting that activities rotate around the team; it is the axis around which all other organisational activities revolve. This is met with a positive prediction for the future ("all bodes well"), which also draws on the spatial metaphor that takes the notion of time as propelling *forward* into the future in order to predict the fate of the communication team. In Neil's interview, contrary to earlier notions of feeling central, he indicates that the centre is where "we want to get to" (A2). What the two extracts show is that it is possible to interpret a formally "fixed" element, such as your position in a hierarchy, in more than one way, and even as a polar opposite of earlier perceptions. This variability in interpretations is evident with other colleagues in Elco. In narratives from another colleague, Liz's diary entries initially situate the communications team as peripheral to organisational activities, where there is a clear distinction between what is "integral" (B1) and therefore central, and what is viewed as an "add-on" (B2):

B1 "It is difficult to counter such negativity when 'communicating' is seen as a peripheral activity rather than as integral to the work of the committee itself." (Liz's diary, Elco)

B2 "All four (three committees and one department) have had initial meetings but there are still issues of comms being seen as an add-on rather than being central to the workings of the committee." (Liz's diary, Elco)

During the interview however, whilst talking about where the communications department is situated, Liz moves from one repertoire to another, in apparently contradictory narratives. This can be seen in her explanation of the organisational chart she draws:

Figure 6.2: Liz's organisational chart



- C1 Liz ...I think we're kind of mulling around here [indicating bottom of organisational hierarchy]
- 2 Nilam Kind of on a level to HR?
- 3 Liz No
- 4 Nilam No?
- 5 Liz Not really, sort of in between it all, almost [int: oh ok] I'd say
- 6 bypassing finance almost. [int: hmm] it's not, it's sort of
- 7 underneath it, the, all of them feed into us

Referring to an organisational chart she has drawn (Figure 6.2), she places the team at the bottom of the organisation “mulling around” (C1) thereby indicating a lack of clarity about the team’s formal position, as well as indicating the potential for movement within that conceptual space. The freedom that the vagueness of the conceptual space allows then prompts her to explore different locations within that space. She *feels around the space*, trying to locate communication “in between it all” (C5), or assessing the possibility that it could forge its own path (to the centre) by “bypassing” (C6) the finance department, or even that it is “underneath” (C7) acting as a foundation for others, and finally suggesting that it is central in how operational systems “feed into” (C7) the team from different locations. Further into the interview, the same movement between the two repertoires emerges again:

- C8 Liz And I think we are viewed as quite central, I think
- 9 Nilam Right, I was just going to ask you that actually, yeah cos. that,
10 that actually says to me that you are quite central [indicates organisational chart]
- 11 Liz We're quite far down the chain but we are [int: yeah] and I think
12 we're being used more, you know, particularly with links into the
13 staff group and the, and hr with internal comms, and there's much
14 more thinking on how to use corporate comms [int: yeah] to make
15 it work better

In this extract, she clearly states that the team are central (C8) and it appears that she has either come to a conclusion from *feeling around*, or is reverting to a normative rhetoric. However, when I agree with her, she swings back to a peripheral repertoire and places communication near the bottom of a linear chain, as seen in her drawing (C11). This swing suggests a prolonged ambiguity that exists within her lived experience. It could also suggest that ambiguity is embedded in the practice of communication. Liz continues to move rapidly between the repertoires once again by suggesting that as they are “being used more” (C12) through the links established between the departments, there is much more awareness about the work of the communications team, which will once again shift their position towards the centre, as well as strengthen their power base.

When viewing the complete extracts (C1-15) through the spatial metaphor lens, it allows us to see that Liz uses the interview as a place to *feel around* for what she believes is the appropriate team location. This notion that we *feel around* within our articulations partly explains the variability of discourse. In the context of this research, the interview process therefore offers “emancipatory potential” (Gergen, 2001: 10) and the freedom to explore conceptual space. It also forms part of the sensemaking process, which for practitioners such as Liz, helps gain some clarity (Weick, 1979, 1995) and make sense of their shifting position in the organisation during a period of organisational change.

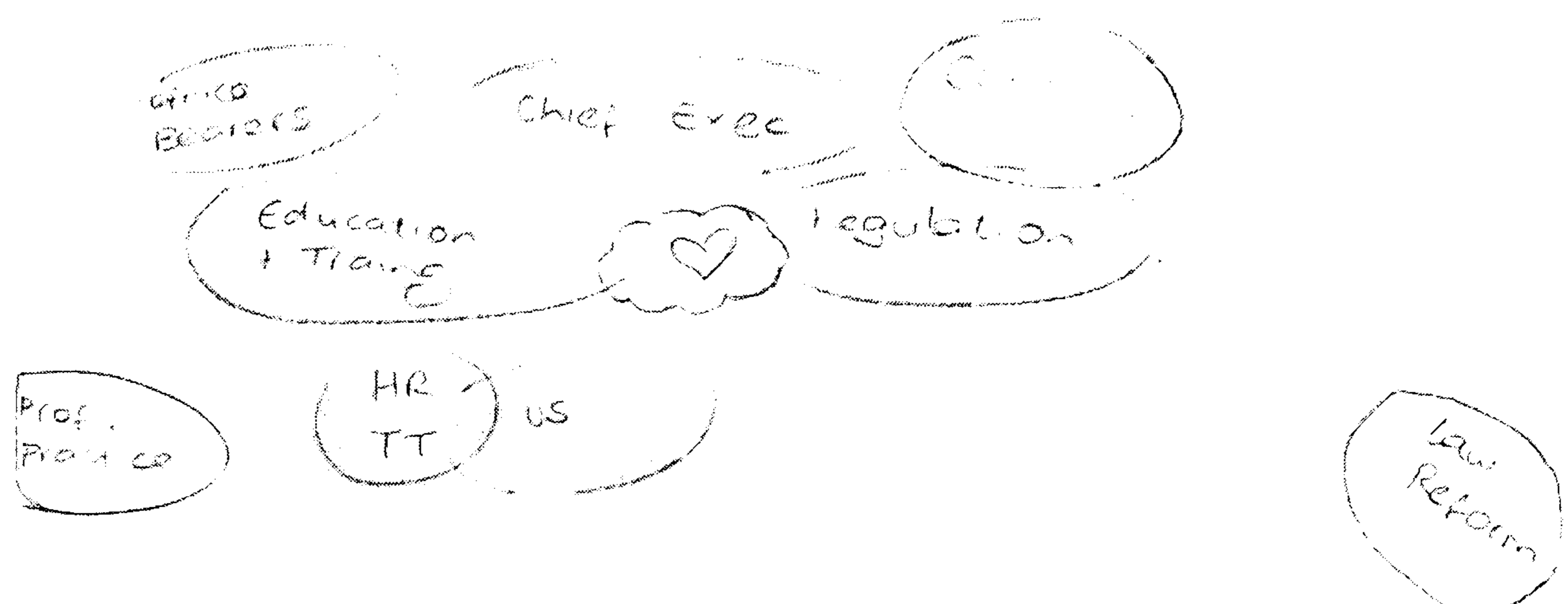
These diary and interview extracts (A-C) represent relatively straight forward distinctions between the central or peripheral repertoires and the notion that practitioners move from one to the other without any obvious awareness of the variability of their interpretations. There are, however, more complex narratives

which show that practitioners are motivated by wanting recognition, a positive reputation for themselves and power.

6.4.3 Centrality and team recognition

The more obvious aspects of positioning oneself at the hub of an organisation partly constitute a repertoire of centrality. Another key feature of this repertoire is the recognition that individuals feel they or their team have as a result of their work; essentially that people value what they do. The positive recognition that practitioners feel they receive is closely linked to a central position in the organisation and closeness to those who are formally at the centre of the organisation, i.e. senior managers.

Figure 6.3: Juliet's organisational chart



This extract from Juliet's interview at Elco, shows how recognition is embedded within the centralist repertoire. In this extract, she is commenting on the organisational chart she drew:

- D1 Nilam:** And where does the comms team fit in to all this change that's happening?
- 2 Juliet:** Well there was quite a lot of debate about that and if we should
3 fit into a certain department, [int: yeah] but decided that we really
4 work across, across with messaging, so we're really much wider.
5 so we've not been put into a department, [int: yeah] erm, which I
6 think is right, [int: yeah] erm and I think we've been very much
7 put in the centre of the organisation, [int: ok] the chief executive
8 is our overall department head [int: yeah] although we've got a
9 deputy now who we'll be working with much more closely, [int:
10 yeah] that's been good for us because we're then, we're then
11 being put into more, we're recognised as important [int: yeah] to

12 communicate, and the change of name which was about a year
 13 ago as well, erm this is all indicating that we're being
 14 repositioned, we're not just stuck out on the side wing and told
 15 when people think we need to know things, [int: yeah] probably
 16 much more involved in, in planning

In explaining how the communications team “fit[s] into a certain department” (D3), the other department is viewed metaphorically as a container into which the communications team would be subsumed or enclosed (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). This can also be interpreted as an early indication of the possibility of encroachment of communications by another department (Lauzen, 1991). The proposed enclosure of the team, however, is viewed as too small to house the expansiveness of the communications team (D4), with particular reference to the wideness and horizontal spanning of communications “across” the organisation (D4). Hence, instead of being enclosed, the team manoeuvre themselves into a central position (D5), partly through their relationship with the new deputy CEO. This is in line with an organisational chart Juliet draws (Figure 6.3) which places all other departments as separate units around theirs, with no apparent structure aside from the obvious emphasis on the centrality of the communications team. The link between centrality and positive recognition by the right people, is signalled with the mention of closeness to the deputy chief executive (D8-9). The emphasis on closeness is built upon and linked to influence, and therefore importance, and importance is a sign of recognition (D11). The manoeuvring to the centre is temporal and dates back to a year ago with a rebranding exercise, essentially a name change, of the communications team (D12-14). This highlights the power of labelling and the connotations about practitioner roles and capabilities associated with labels. Juliet recognises that since the name change, there has been movement within a given organisational space (D14), raising their profile in the process and resulting in more recognition. The movement has taken the team from being “stuck out on the side wing” (D14), a clearly peripheral interpretation of a prior position, to being more “involved” (D16), a term which suggests inclusion, acceptance and recognition. There is also evidence of what life was like at the periphery: being “told” things at the behest of others and being at the receiving end of instructions (D15) suggests a lack of control over their working day and implies a lower level of influence and recognition. Finally, the heart shape at the centre of the chart indicates where Juliet would ideally like to be situated (slightly

higher than where they are currently situated), suggesting that the team has been undertaking a journey to the centre which is not yet complete.

6.4.4. Centrality and personal recognition

As illustrated in Table 5.9, feelings of being valued are linked to perceptions of a positive reputation. The findings show that across all three organisations, practitioners articulate thoughts about how they are perceived by others, particularly senior managers. Some practitioners expressed doubts or anxieties about how they are perceived, which was evident through the use of a peripheral repertoire (see Chapter 7). A number of practitioners, however, did not articulate these thoughts as doubts, but as a motivation for undertaking certain actions. David, from Barksdales, showed a particular preoccupation with maintaining a positive personal reputation in front of his senior managers and media contacts, which was a theme throughout his diaries and the follow-up interview. The theme of personal reputation is evident from his very first diary entry:

E(1) Perceptions are paramount in the role my team and I perform. **(2)** I've worked incredibly hard on creating a strong support base of senior managers in the business. **(3)** I need to be visible, generate tangible results and offer respected advice and counsel. **(4)** No matter what I'm asked I've got to give them a fresh perspective. **(5)** Every time I do, it reinforces their willingness to engage me early in key decisions and to hold me in high regard. **(6)** As I'm fairly new to the business and don't have any baggage I've been able to come in fresh with real energy and help foster the same approach in my team. **(7)** There's no doubt my team is better thought of now than a year ago though it can be harder for some of them to shift past perceptions.

From the outset, the reader is aware of his thoughts about how perceptions shape his experience; for David, “perceptions are paramount” (E1). The attainment of positive perceptions is therefore placed at the top of any list of outcomes, and they also provide a motivation for an action. There is also the suggestion with this comment that he is “performing” when in role (E1), a notion Goffman (1959) would ascribe to the drama of organisational life, where an actor “performs” on stage and is acutely aware of the role they “act out” in front of a particular audience. David continues by suggesting that he has spent energy on deliberately fashioning “a strong support base” made up entirely of senior managers (E2). This gives us an interesting insight into how it is only the perception of senior managers that is cultivated.

suggesting a high level of personal ambition. What is also interesting is that David views the senior managers as the foundation for his success, and not the other way around, where he supports senior managers as they climb to greater heights. His diary entry then makes another reference to performance through being “visible” (E3), emphasising a link between the dramatic performance and how that shapes personal reputations. He also points out a personal motivation for him to “generate tangible results,” thereby referring to normative rhetoric on the value of communications. By interpreting his role as one which generates tangible results, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) would argue that he views himself as a machine that “produces” something of value for the organisation. This presents a paradox in David’s interpretations, as by viewing himself as central, he is essentially drawing attention to the high level of power and influence he has over the events he experiences. However, by “generating” things in a mechanistic way, he is actually at the mercy of senior managers, thereby actually possessing relatively little power over the activities he engages in. This type of paradox can only be highlighted through acknowledging the variability in interpretations that exist in the lived experience of practitioners and hence shows the value of the current research. Much discourse analysis would give prominence to the dominant theme presented in this diary extract, that of David working hard to maintain the positive perceptions of managers and how his hard work has helped change how people perceive the communications team (E7). However, a fine-grained discourse analysis allows us to see how our first impressions can often mask contradictory interpretations and, in this case, a clear paradox in David’s sensemaking process. In the same sentence (E3), however, he places himself at the centre again, as someone who “offer[s] respected advice and counsel” (E3), thereby elevating his position above someone who is a “technician” (Dozier and Broom, 1995) on the basis that the offering of information is from a “respected,” and therefore senior source. The notion of offering advice again draws attention to another paradox in interpretation. Offering advice suggests a one-way, linear process: an asymmetrical approach (Dozier et al, 1995). On the surface, it is implied that his advice was sought, suggesting a two-way relationship, as well as a high level of relatively equal power distribution. However, the motion of offering advice moves in one direction and its therefore symbolic of an unequal relationship, as David is unlikely to get anything in return, apart from the possibility that it *could*

enhance his reputation, but of this there is no guarantee. This linearity surfaces again in the next sentence (E4).

The entry continues with an indication that not only is there little compromise in David's job ("no matter what I'm asked" E4), but also highlights, once again, that contradictions exist within the lived experience of communication practitioners. On the surface, it appears that David responds positively to what is asked of him, thereby maintaining the positive perception that senior managers may have of him. However, taking Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) view of the practitioner as a generating machine, David's uncompromised response could be viewed as a mechanical reaction to instruction. This is further highlighted by the compulsion ("got to") to "give them a fresh perspective" (E4), emphasising the need to "produce" a new viewpoint each time he is instructed. Responding to instructions is justified by being included "early in key decisions" (E5), where a particular moment in time ("engage me early") is seen as an indicator of inclusion into a high ranking group. Not only that, but the "key decisions" (E5) taken by that high ranking group implies a level of importance, and with that a high level of power for which David is aiming. The "willingness" (E5) shown by senior managers further strengthens the foundation that David has been cultivating (E2). The ultimate aim of his actions are for David to be held "in high regard" (E5), positioned here as an outcome of his actions, i.e. "every time" he does something, he is held "in high regard." Holding David in high regard not only objectifies him, but also places him at the top of a conceptual hierarchy, on the same "paramount" level as perceptions. Again, the spatial element of the centralist repertoire allows the practitioner to *explore* ideals in terms of where they perceive themselves, in much the same way as other practitioners *feel around* for their ideal location. David then emphasises his newness to the organisation (E6), in particular that he doesn't have baggage, i.e. there is nothing from the past holding him down; he brings nothing that is negative to the organisation. In fact, it is quite the opposite, what he brings is "real energy" as opposed to energy that is weighted down with negative baggage. Finally, when the extract is read as a whole, it is clear that he places himself as the central character responsible for the change in how the team is now perceived (E7). The "real energy" (E6) that he has cultivated has placed him in "no doubt" (E7) about the positive

change in perceptions about his team and consequently his importance in the organisation, placing him at the centre of key events.

This extract is typical of the focus David places on cultivating personal relationships to strengthen his personal reputation. Extracts from his interview continue along the same theme, and part of this extract (E14-30) offers an insight as to why David feels compelled to work so hard for his line manager:

E8 David: I enjoy the interaction [int: yeah] and it is scary cos it can go
9 wrong, er it's a bit of a risk [int: yeah], erm, you could hide in this
10 role if you wanted to [int: yeah], but you'd achieve nothing if you,
11 you've got to take some risks [int: yeah, yeah]. Every time you put
12 a journalist in front of one of your people, or you speak to a
13 journalist personally, you take a risk [int: yeah] it is all a risk

Firstly, there is a suggestion of performance, as there was in his first diary entry, when he states "you could hide in this role if you wanted" (E9-10). The key here is the link to visibility which David made in his diary entry (E3), which represents a continual theme of others being aware of his presence and consequently him being aware of how he presents himself (Goffman, 1959). There is also the recurring theme, in this interview extract, of the risk of being visible (E9, E11, E13). David, in the context of all his narratives, equates visibility with a certain amount of risk, where the journalists are objectified as risky or unpredictable environments that people are put "in front of" (E12-13). The interview continues:

E14 Nilam: Do you think people at Barksdales trust you because of the
15 reputation you had before you came to the [organisation]?

16 David: Er well, actually I think certainly for the chief operating officer,
17 yes

18 Nilam: You said he recruited you in a similar fashion?

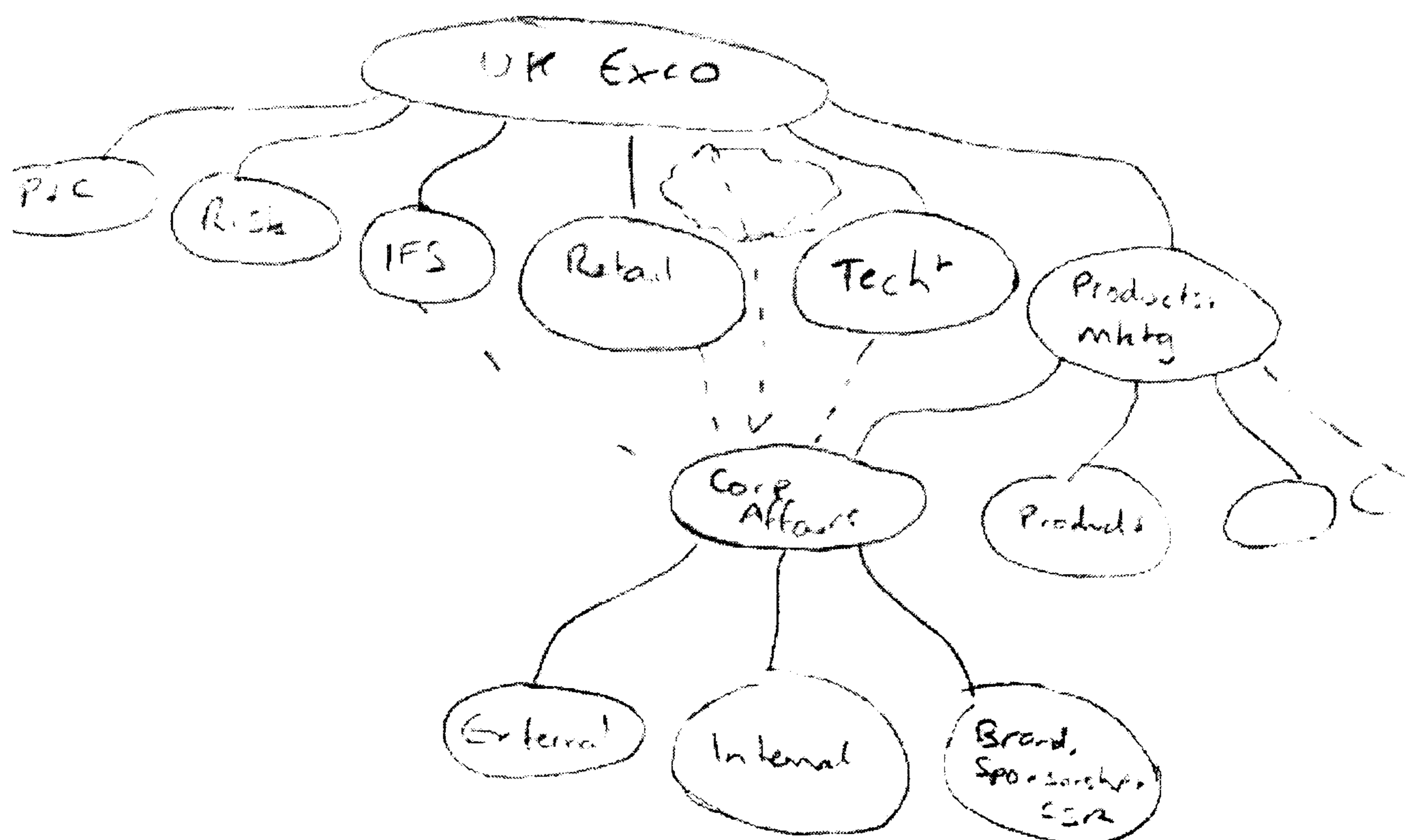
19 David: Yeah he did, he bought in a head hunter [int: yeah] who made all
20 the approaches [int: yeah], but unbeknownst to me he'd also
21 approached a number of journalists himself directly, so he's done a
22 bit of research, so he certainly had a bit of comfort, which is good
23 cos you get a halo effect from him [int: sure] and he's somebody
24 that's seen as hard to impress [int: right] so that's, that's a good
25 honeymoon period [int: sure, yeah]. You're only as good as your
26 last performance really [int: yeah, yeah, yeah], I mean your
27 reputation could be shattered [int: yeah] because perception is
28 more than anything in this role, it's a thief, and it's the same with
29 journalists, and it's the same with people in the business. so you
30 know that helped me get in the door.

David's reputation preceded him, in that he was "head hunted" for his current position (E19), a term which has aggressive overtones. What is interesting about this part of the interview is that David talks about how his COO ventured into David's territory by asking journalists (David's peers) for a character reference (E20-22). This could account for the apparent loyalty David shows this line manager (the COO), and could also account for why David feels compelled to respond to all the COOs requests, which another staff member had commented on separately in their interview (E23). The "halo effect" used to describe the COO's first impression of David strengthens this notion further, as the first impression is a good one and therefore must be maintained by David. The suggestion is that David's entry point into the organisation is a high one which must be retained. The stresses of this are implied in the statement that the COO is "hard to impress" (E24), signifying that there are barriers to gaining credibility in the eyes of the COO. The notion of loyalty is dealt with further with the mention of a "honeymoon period" (E25) which indicates a particular period of time in which to cement positive reputations and relationships. Reputations are objectified in this extract as goods which "could be shattered" (E27), making them fragile and vulnerable. This perception of reputation could also contribute to David's compulsion to work hard to maintain a positive image, as David's actions could be interpreted as an attempt to create a buffer zone around his reputation to protect it from shattering. Additionally, we see another reference similar to "perception is paramount" (E1) when David states that perception is "more than anything" (E28), giving it a presence which is unquantifiable, and certainly one which does not fit into any realms of space which he has attempted to conceptualise throughout his narratives. Reputation is then personified; it is "a thief" (E28), someone who can take away your precious belongings. This again gives us an insight into the value David places on his personal reputation. Finally, it is made clear that his close relationship with the COO and his positive personal reputation have allowed him to "get in the door" (E30) and gain entry into the organisation; with this he has moved from one space to another, from the outside (the periphery) to the inside (the centre).

6.4.5 Centrality and power

In addition to placing notions of recognition and value at the centre of their interpretations, centralist narratives also evoke suggestions of power and influence. The findings show that there are interpretations about the levels and nature of influence embedded within each repertoire. The level of influence mimics the movement between the repertoires; practitioners display a high level of confidence in their abilities to influence others, and in doing so they place themselves at the centre or near senior managers in their narratives, essentially employing a centralist repertoire. Conversely, a peripheral repertoire sees practitioners articulating a lack of power or influence over the events they experience. At Barksdales, Ian's narratives showed a high level of self-belief for the influence he thinks he has over staff throughout his organisation, which he articulates whilst explaining the organisational chart he drew:

Figure 6.4: Ian's organisational chart



- F1 Ian: I mean certainly, external, we have what one, two, three reporting
 2 lines before we hit the board [int: yeah], erm, or certainly
 3 management layers, er, I'm sure if you go two management layers
 4 down in finance or hr or another department, they wouldn't have

5 that level of influence [int: right] or that closeness to the board as
6 we do [int: yeah] and that's why formally we're quite far down
7 [int: yeah], but unofficially we're a lot more senior than [int: sure]
8 than perhaps our ages or positions belie

In this interview extract, Ian talks me through the organisational chart that he has drawn (Figure 6.4). He indicates that communications is on the third tier of a four tier organisational hierarchy by counting the “one, two, three reporting lines” for me (F1-2), but also labels their team as part of a “management layer” (F3) thereby assigning a management “title” and, by association, a management role and level of authority to his team. He then makes a crucial distinction between the communications team and other teams on the same hierarchy, on the grounds of a “level of influence or...closeness to the board” (F5). Influence with, and closeness to the board are important indicators of power in Ian’s interpretative repertoire; for Ian, these terms are synonymous. The fact that he places importance on elements such as closeness, and himself links this with influence, indicates just how strong an association there is between a centralist repertoire and its embedded notions of power. He continues to promote the communications further up the ranks of the hierarchy, by using a disclaimer, which is a common rhetorical device (Cheney et al, 2004b). He states, “unofficially we’re a lot more senior than perhaps our ages or positions belie,” (F7-8) indicating that seniority of the communications team would be formally noted, were it not for the organisational chart ignoring the varying levels of influence that permeate throughout the organisation. Throughout this extract, it is clear that Ian perceives communication as much higher and more influential than any formal structure promoted throughout the organisation. The interview continues along a similar theme of influence and its link to centrality:

F9 Nilam: Do you think other departments see that about you

10 Ian: Erm, I think so, yes [int: yeah], yes simply because of the issues
11 that we deal with, issues that we grapple with, [yeah] erm, the
12 language that we use

Ian states that other departments recognise the high level of influence that the communications team has because of the issues it “grapples” with (F11). There is a suggestion here that communication assumes the role of the trouble-shooter, wrestling with issues on the frontline which others will not have to deal with. The

grappling of issues therefore elevates the power and influence of the communications team. Ian closes this statement with a reference to the language that communications team uses (F12). As mentioned previously, practitioners, by the very nature of their work, are conscious of the language they use. Ian's indication toward the language he uses is one such example of how practitioners are conscious of influencing through language (Herman and Chomsky, 1994). When asked to elaborate (F13), he continues:

F13 Nilam: What do you mean by that?

14 Ian: I mean, I don't like, use name dropping, [n laughs] but
15 occasionally you have to

16 Nilam: Yeah, with other departments?

17 Ian: With other departments [int: right ok] and

18 Nilam: Name dropping internally or?

19 Ian: Yes in terms of [ceo] has asked me to to this [int: right ok] now
20 you don't use that regularly [int: no] you use it as a last resort [int:
21 yeah – n laughs] otherwise you look a complete prat [int: yeah] but
22 if you're not getting the traction that you're needing [int: yeah]
23 that's what you can do

The language Ian refers to is actually the name of the CEO, which means that he is referring to an assumed set of ties he has with someone more senior in the organisation. Ian implies that by using the name of the CEO (F14), he is using his influence, and by using his influence, he is clearly indicating the high level of power that has been conferred upon him. He first qualifies this with another disclaimer by stating that "name dropping" is not the norm (F14, F19-20), but justifies such an act by suggesting that he is representing the CEO in asking for specific information. This extract closes with a phrase indicating that name-dropping is acceptable leverage when "traction" is needed (F23), which serves as a disclaimer for actions. Throughout this interview extract, he continues to emphasise his closeness to management and the inherent influence and power that comes with that closeness. What is interesting in terms of variability is that he elaborates and makes justifications for his perceived higher position *after* earlier in the interview he states: "too many people allow themselves to be bogged down by formal structure, erm, I think working in corporate affairs you can't allow yourself to be bogged down by

such issues.” When the interview extract above (F1-23) is analysed in this context, the variation and contradiction in Ian’s interpretations become even more apparent.

Further examples of the characteristics, which constitute a repertoire of centrality, are illustrated in Table 6.1. These show that the repertoire was evident across all three organisations taking part in the study:

Table 6.1: Further illustrative examples of repertoires of centrality

Characteristics of repertoires of centrality	Illustrative examples
<p>Discourse of strategic value <i>(This is not a characteristic of the repertoire of centrality, but has been included for completeness)</i></p>	<p>There are plenty of channels of communication but they are not necessarily co-ordinated and they don't always say the right things. (Ralph, Elco)</p> <p>Communicating with [clients] is very important. It is essential that we communicate with this group in a clear and concise way (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>It is imperative that we have a uniform style in all media releases, even in those not generated by ourselves (Barbara, Barksdales)</p>
<p>Being at the centre</p>	<p>We need to be there [int: in the centre?] absolutely there [int: right] driving it (Barbara, Barksdales)</p> <p>it's somewhere either central or overarching I'm just trying to work out [int: yeah] quite where you would put it it has a very broad role in terms of all aspects of the organisation (Andy, Elco)</p> <p>it's still as a support role but at the centre [ok] because it cuts across all of the teams erm so I would probably put communications erm in a circle here [indicates centre of organisation] (Helen, Primecare)</p>
<p>Centrality and recognition</p>	<p>I think we are being seen as being more important these days (Ian, Barksdales)</p> <p>The work of corporate communications was thought to have been successful (Andy, Elco)</p> <p>We run a lot of high profile and successful events which are seen in a positive way by those outwith the organisation (Isa, Primecare)</p>
<p>Centrality and power</p>	<p>a lot of them will take on board what we say (Neil, Elco)</p> <p>We have a very strong working relationship and I speak to him most days (Barbara, Barksdales)</p> <p>that was quite a positive team meeting we had some influence in there but not huge amounts (Isa, Primecare)</p>

6.5 Summarising centrality

Centrality is one of the two repertoires identified in this research and one that embodies certain characteristics. Prior public relations and corporate communication research promotes a discourse of communications needing to demonstrate its “strategic value.” The strategic value discourse relies on familiar terms such as “stakeholders,” “strategy,” “channels,” “identity” and “engage,” terms that have permeated the language of communications practitioners. As seen in the extracts

from Helen, Ralph and Ian at the beginning of this chapter, this rhetoric is fairly generic and mimics a broader management discourse. Practitioners are aware of its close and deliberate link with management, and therefore use it with a tacit knowledge that in doing so, they are using an accepted management discourse. Using this discourse identifies them as a manager and, by association, part of the management team (Edwards, 2007). However, as these findings show, this rhetoric does not adequately reflect the nature of the communication practitioners' lived experience. This thesis therefore contends that the dominance of the key debates has served to mask the changing nature of communications work over the last few decades. Given the dominance of this type of rhetoric, this thesis also contends that looking at the variability of practitioner interpretations give us a stronger empirical understanding of the working life of the modern communications practitioner.

This chapter has also shown that whilst drawing upon repertoires of centrality, practitioners show a concern with maintaining a positive personal reputation, which links directly to feeling valued. Practitioners' beliefs in their powers of influence are also another characteristic of a centralist repertoire. These characteristics are linked by the underlying notion that practitioners perceive themselves at the very core of what is happening in an organisation, and are therefore located within the organisational hierarchy, and metaphorically, at the centre. Part of being in the centre includes believing there is recognition for what practitioners do. Where recognition is forthcoming by senior managers, this feeds the cycle of maintaining a positive reputation and having influence, thereby creating a self-perpetuating discourse of centrality and positivity about the nature of communications work. However, the fine-grained discourse analysis has illustrated a paradox that exists in the practitioners' quest to be valued. In striving to be valued, practitioners may actually be compromising their reputation in favour of mechanistically reacting to instructions by senior managers. What is perceived on the surface as an expert role with relatively equal power relations, may actually mask a power imbalance, the extent of which is difficult to ascertain unless the nature of that role is contextualised. Additionally, the enactment of a mechanistic role serves to perpetuate a limited perception of the individual by others (Weick, 1995).

Repertoires of centrality, however, do not work in isolation. Far from identifying and promoting a singular discourse, as advocated by much discourse-centric research, the repertoires identified in the current research highlight the variability and inconsistencies of practitioner interpretations. Notions of centrality are clearly spatial interpretations of the events experienced by practitioners and are closely linked to another spatial interpretation; repertoires of periphery. The variability in practitioner interpretations connects these two repertoires through how practitioners move from one repertoire to another with apparent ease. The findings show that rather than employing one interpretative repertoire and with it a singular viewpoint, practitioners move frequently between each repertoire depending on where they perceive themselves, and the activities they perform, within a bounded organisational space. This oscillation between the two repertoires is depicted in Figure 6.1, which also details the characteristics embedded within a repertoire of periphery. The next chapter deals with the repertoire of periphery, and in order to understand the repertoire fully, additional practitioner diary and interview extracts, across the three organisations, have been used to illustrate how the repertoire of periphery is employed.

Chapter 7:

Repertoires of periphery

7.0 Introduction

The previous chapter introduced the model of movement between repertoires (Figure 6.1). The model illustrates the two interpretive repertoires revealed as a result of the current research and, in particular, shows how practitioners move from one interpretive repertoire to another with apparent ease. The model shows the characteristics which are evident in each repertoire. For the centralist repertoire, there is clearly a focus upon the central, both conceptually and organisationally. Practitioners employing a centralist repertoire are concerned with whether they are valued in their organisations, believe they have a high level of influence and largely feel that their work receives the recognition it deserves. The previous chapter illustrated how the centralist repertoire manifests in practitioner narratives, using extended examples that showed a fine-grained analysis, as well as examples across all three organisations. This chapter therefore deals with the remaining part of the model presented in Figure 6.1. In doing so, the chapter shows how the characteristics of a peripheral repertoire manifest in practitioner narratives. These characteristics are illustrated using extended extracts and analyses of diaries and interviews.

7.1 Identifying repertoires of periphery

This chapter deals with the second of the interpretive repertoires identified in Figure 6.1 – the repertoire of periphery – and its related characteristics. The model developed in this research shows that the interpretive repertoires of communication practitioners oscillate between repertoires of centrality and repertoires of periphery. Repertoires of periphery evoke metaphors of “battling” and “barriers.” With repertoires of periphery, both the battling and the barrier metaphors are more prominent than when practitioners use repertoires of centrality. As outlined at the beginning of Chapter 6, embedded within a peripheral repertoire are notions that the

practitioner or the communications team are located on the outskirts of an organisation, either as part of the formal organisational structure, or informally, and also that they are on the periphery of organisational events. As such, practitioners adopt a verbal repertoire which reflects their perception of the peripheral. The peripheral repertoire is therefore organised around metaphors that accentuate the conceptual boundaries within a given space. For example, the findings show that whilst *feeling around the conceptual space* in an effort to locate themselves, practitioners are often met with barriers to movement, and feel that they are engaged in a territorial battle. This manifests as concerns about the lack of recognition toward their work and the negativity and resistance they encounter to their involvement in organisational projects. Consequently, in employing a peripheral repertoire, practitioners are signifying that they are experiencing a lack of control over a particular situation, which indicates a fundamental lack of power and influence with the people they are dealing with.

7.1.1 Being on the periphery

As detailed in Chapter 6 and earlier in this chapter, the peripheral repertoire stems from an underlying belief that the practitioner is on the outer edge of significant organisational activities or that the communications team is not given access to the dominant coalition, who are located at the centre of an organisation. The repertoire is therefore structured around notions of feeling on the periphery or on the outside of a group. Being on the periphery can apply to more than one element of organisational life and brings to light issues of placement and trust. To explore this further, we first need to revisit an earlier diary extract to define the peripheral.

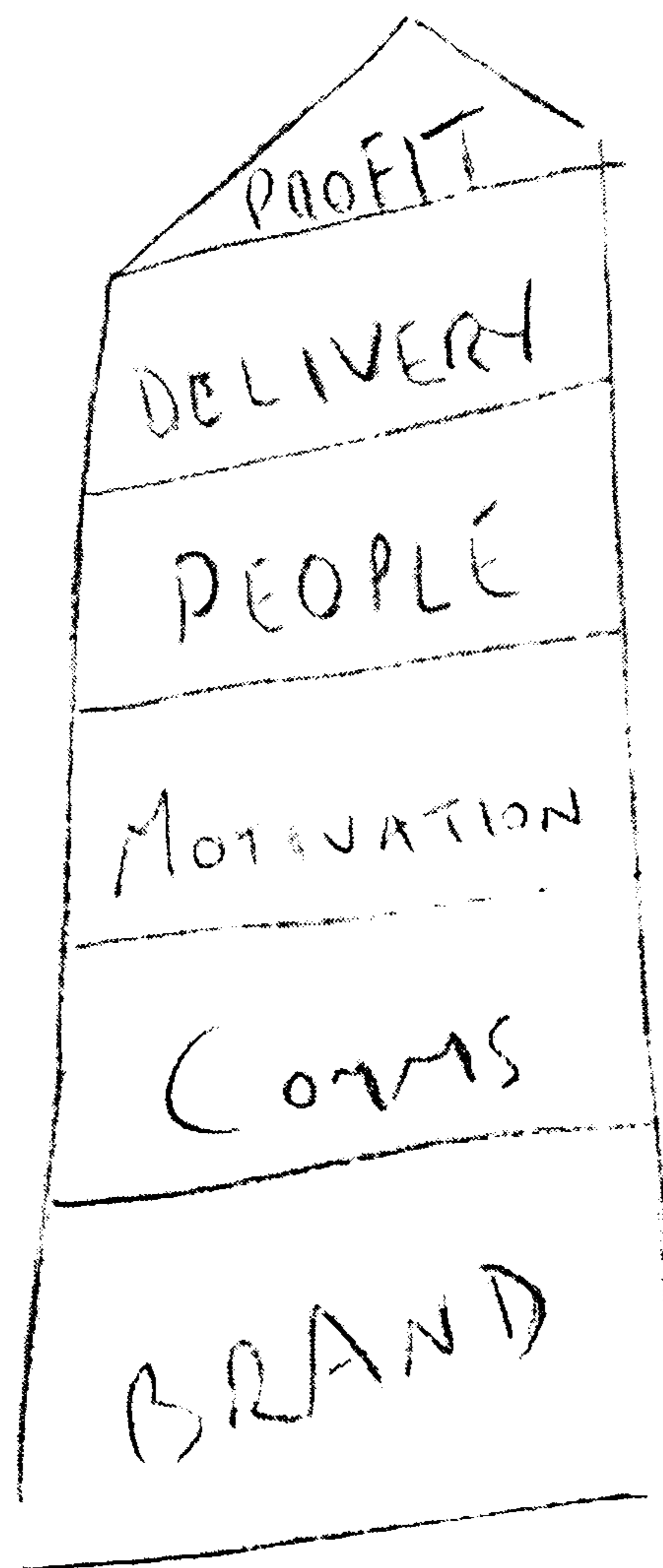
Liz from Elco states in extract B1 (Chapter 6) “It is difficult to counter such negativity when ‘communicating’ is seen as a peripheral activity rather than as integral to the work of the committee itself.” As stated in the previous chapter, Liz situates the activities of the communication team as peripheral to the workings of the project team. The distinction that Liz makes between the central and peripheral is fairly straightforward as she juxtaposes the activities of the communication team with that of the project team’s activities, and highlights the “negative” environment cultivated by the project team as the grounds for experiencing the peripheral. This

aspect of peripheral represents one interpretation of being on the edge or on the outskirts through the use of the spatial metaphor. The previous chapter made the link between central and peripheral repertoires acting as spatial or orientational metaphors (Kovecses, 2002; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980) and with it, the idea that practitioners *feel around* a bounded space in an attempt to locate themselves. This notion of space and orientation is therefore the underlying theme connecting the two repertoires and serves to help delineate between practitioner orientations, thereby helping us to better understand their interpretations of events. As with the centralist repertoire, the spatial orientations attempted by practitioners are evident within a peripheral repertoire, where some practitioner orientations, such as Liz's, are more obvious than others.

7.1.2 Periphery and the value of communications

Liz's diary extract (B1) gives us just one example of the more obvious demarcations between the central and peripheral, whereas Brian, at Barksdales, presents us with a different spatial orientation that acts as the peripheral.

Figure 7.1: Brian's organisational chart



At first glance it appears that Brian has placed the communications team at the bottom of the linear hierarchy (Figure 7.1).

- G1** Brian: It's what the business is about, you run a business, it's all
2 about getting profit and that's what we're trying for [int:
3 yeah], then going down you've got the actually delivery,
4 how is it delivered and
5 Nilam: Is this, is this how it is now?
6 Brian: This is my view of what's important

In explaining what he has drawn, he sets the scene, where his visual interpretation represents “what the business is about” in its entirety (G1). The goal of the organisation is obtaining profit, meaning that all work is geared towards the attainment of that goal. This positions the organisation as a machine which “generates” activities to produce “profits” (G2). With “profits” firmly placed at the top of what looks like a tower like structure, it is clear that this is not a conventional organisational hierarchy, but one where formal departmental labels have been replaced with value based labels. The emphasis on value then begins to emerge throughout this interview extract. He is asked to clarify his interpretation (G5) and gives an indication that his interpretation is based on his “importance” i.e. his value system (G6). The interview continues with clarifying Ian's previous comment (G7):

- G7** Nilam: What's important, ok, so this is an ideal for you?
8 Brian: No, no, this is how it is [int: ok ok ok] not my ideal not by
9 a long shot, your people then probably come after that,
10 [int: yeah] erm, we put a reasonable amount of stock on
11 our people, [int: yeah] I would swap those two around,
12 that's cos we're more obsessed with the system, erm what
13 does our business model look like rather than who actually
14 delivers it [int: hmm] we're not overly great at motivating
15 people, but it's there, and we like to say comms comes a
16 bit down there, [int: hmm] erm previously it would have
17 been way down to there, it's gradually coming up the order
18 [int: yeah] I don't think we're proud of our brand and I
19 don't think we know what to do with our brand at all
20 Nilam: Oh ok
21 Brian: It has, you know, in any company it has to be way up there,
22 you know, so I think we're kind of a bit disjointed in the
23 way we should be, I think, so, but you know if you look at
24 where do we come, comms comes all the way down

Ian states that the drawing does not represent his ideal, but rather, it represents “how it is” (G8), which is a “long shot” (G9) from his ideal. This “long” distance

draws attention to the *large space* that exists between Ian's reality and his ideal situation. He then outlines the other value based, organisational concepts, following the linear path downwards. This includes people, who are positioned as economic investments in which "stock" is placed (G10-11), but indicates a potential contradiction when he admits that Elco is not "great at motivating people" (G14-15). This suggests that there may be contradictory forces or sentiments working within the organisation to retain and develop staff. He then places the communication team as being situated below motivating staff, which is fifth in a six-tier value based hierarchy. The low position of communications is then actually positioned as relatively high, through the use of a rhetorical disclaimer, which states that "it would have been way down there" (G16-17). This *relative positioning* and use of a disclaimer serves to highlight that communications is *moving within a bounded organisational space*; that it is "gradually coming up the order" (G17) and therefore increasing in value. Brian concludes with a summing up, in the same fashion as he set the scene before beginning to explain the drawing (G1-2). He states that communication has to be "way up there" (G21), identifying an ideal position for communication, where the top is seen as tantamount to being central. In explaining the overall structure, he suggests that the value system has mixed priorities, as it is "disorderly in the way we should be" (G22-23). Finally, he draws attention to the low position and value that Elco has of communication, which is "all the way down" (G24).

As Brian explains the drawing, it becomes clear that there are two interpretations working alongside each other in this extract, each of which relate to notions of periphery. The first interpretation is a spatial one where, although a linear hierarchy is represented by Brian, the top of that hierarchy is synonymous with being at the centre, as being at the "top" has the same high level of power associated with a central location. The second interpretation involves Brian's belief in the inherent *value* placed on communication, where the attainment of "profit" is placed at the top, indicating that profit-generating activities are the most valued in Elco, and by contrast, communications comes second to last in terms of the value it has within the organisation. Both interpretations rely on their concepts being organised around the *relational*, where one indication of value sits *in relation to* another on a linear path to the top. In this way, both the spatial and relational, value based interpretations

blend together to become one coherent explanation of the how communications is seen as a peripheral function.

7.1.3 Valuing communication as a rubbish bin: a paradox

In identifying the peripheral, Liz's diary extract (B1) makes a clear distinction between the central and peripheral and with Brian's interview extract (G1-24) we can see a relational interpretation begin to emerge, alongside the notion of communication not being valued as *highly* as other organisational factors. However, on closer analysis of narratives, and continuing on the theme of valuing communication, it appears that paradoxes exist in how the value of communications manifests in organisational life.

The narratives of Helen, from Primecare, show that her interpretation of being on the edge of an organisation are based on her perception that others view the communication department as a "dumping ground" for work which the other departments of the organisation does not want to deal with. This theme begins to emerge in her second diary entry:

(H1) However, they do seem to lump irrelevant stuff into comms.
 (2) Comms can't achieve a perfect word (sic). (3) Only help to create the right climate for that work to happen. (4) They weren't particularly up for hearing that though!

Helen indicates that other departments seem to group things together and give the responsibility for these things to the communications department (H1). There are a number of connotations at work here, which highlight that a) communications is viewed as a container, as things are put "into comms," and that b) the container is used to house inappropriate or extraneous material, things which are "irrelevant". Both these interpretations work together to conceptualise the communications function as a "rubbish bin" where material that is superfluous to the main body of the organisation is placed, ostensibly making communications peripheral to the organisation. The *container for rubbish* metaphor is juxtaposed against the notion that communications should be viewed as a greenhouse that cultivates the "right climate" (H3). The contrasting images Helen uses to locate communications within the bounded organisational space emphasis the polarity of purpose for the communications team; a rubbish bin is linked with decay, whereas a greenhouse is

linked with growth. We also see the first signs of the type of resistance Helen encounters in this extract (H4).

The theme of communications being a container for rubbish continues in Helen's fourth diary entry. Here, she sets the scene for the reader:

(H5) [CEO] seems to be saying that I'm to have responsibility for [high profile project]! (6) Will need to discuss. (7) It wasn't the right time to say anything. (8) I was rather taken aback about the [part of the project]. (9) While I would expect to feed into that, I wouldn't expect it to be my responsibility but [the CEO] may have meant something else. (10) [Another part of the project] may be good though. (11) Will help with issue management and that's important for my role. (12) Colleagues respond well to communication issues in this arena. (13) However, there is a tendency to deposit items under communications when really, they need to be addressed as part of the business as a whole. (14) Tried to respond positively to the [high profile project] bombshell.

Helen is describing a meeting in which she is handed responsibility for a high profile, organisation wide project (H5). She clearly wants clarity on this (H6) and the additional responsibility leaves her feeling "rather taken aback" (H8), indicating a *backward movement into an unknown space*. The added responsibility has therefore stopped her *moving forward* or *progressing*. The metaphorical nurturing first seen in her diary (H3) is then reprised, as she expects to "feed into," and therefore nourish, a larger organism (H9). This brings to mind Morgan's (1986) metaphorical take on the organisation as a living organism, where Helen's interpretations of her function place her within the *body of the organisation affecting its health*. This links to her previous polar images of communication being used to encourage health or decay (H1-3). She does not, however, expect to be the sole source of nourishment (H9). In this extract, Helen is attempting to make sense of the new information and the implications of this, and is exploring potential scenarios and possibilities ("[the CEO] may have meant something else"). The next two sentences see contradictory interpretations, where communications is well received (H12), representing a centralist repertoire, and where communications is a container to "deposit items" (H13) that should ideally be dealt with by the whole organisation, which is a peripheral repertoire. This illustrates two points; the first is that these remarks reveal something about how work is distributed at Primecare. The second point is that this

shows, once again, how practitioners can move from one repertoire to another with apparent ease and unaware of the contradictions in their interpretations. Helen then articulates the impact of the additional responsibility, that it feels like a “bombshell” (H14), indicating that she feels she has just been attacked. The news of her additional responsibility then continues to effect her sensemaking:

(H15) Bit stuck over the role of comms still and will get some time at my next supervision with [CEO] to see if we can be a bit clearer about my role and the role of my team. **(16)** Sometimes feel like the highest paid proof reader! **(17)** That being said discussed with colleagues about the new structure with dedicated comms leads and we really do seem to making progress. **(18)** Victims of our own success! **(19)** We do have to be careful that some colleagues don't see this as an opportunity to offload work or give us responsibilities that are not ours to have.

As the diary extract continues, it is clear that her added duties have derailed her and that she cannot *locate herself within her immediate space* anymore, and she needs to seek clarification (H15). This suggests that a change in circumstances will force practitioners to *explore and move around their space* in an effort to situate themselves again in a stable or predictable location. Her reference to being the “highest paid proofreader” (H16) indicate a feeling of being devalued and therefore a sense of being peripheral to the organisation. However, her feelings of periphery are immediately countered by describing how she is, to all intents and purposes, penetrating the barriers put up by other departments, by assigning each of her team members the responsibility of working with a department to help them with communication issues (H17). The result of this is that the communications team are seen to be “making progress” (H17) indicating not only a move from the periphery to the centre, but also a stealth like penetration of departmental boundaries, which is a move towards acceptance of communications by other departments. However, the apparent success of this strategy does not appear to be anticipated, as they become “victims of our own success” (H18). The need to be at the centre of communication issues for each of the organisational departments has therefore had unforeseen consequences in terms of workload and the expectations that others have of the communications team. This links directly to the adapted sensemaking model presented in Chapter 5 of this thesis (Figure 5.1), which acknowledges the unanticipated events of bridging gaps in understanding. This also poses questions

about the relative merits of normative stances that advocate integrating or coordinating communication activities. In promoting such models, what are the real implications upon the working lives of the communication practitioners, and how is such information gathered within normative research framework? She then attempts to anticipate what she can about the future of this stealth strategy, linking the “rubbish bin” metaphor to her current sensemaking of the situation. In “offload[ing] work” (H19) Helen recognises that other departments are protecting their boundaries and continuing to use the communications function as a “dumping ground,” thereby ensuring that communications remains on the periphery of the organisation. The theme of being a container for rubbish continues in the interview:

- H20** Helen: That does happen [int: yeah] we’ll get lumbered with things
21 nobody else knows what to do with them
22 Nilam: Yeah yeah
23 Helen: And I think it’s really common
24 Nilam: That was it, they seem to lump irrelevant stuff into comms [h
25 laughs] that was what you said [quoting the previous diary extract]
25 Helen: But I used to get that in my last job, [int: yeah] you know, I think
26 that’s something that is a bit of a theme, oh - that comes under
27 public relations, we’ll throw it in there, [n laughs] or
28 communications, and [int: yeah] it’s really maybe cos they’re not
29 entirely sure how to deal with something, or you know, there just
30 is no other obvious home for it [int: yeah, yeah] sometimes

In this interview extract, Helen talks about being “lumbered with things nobody else knows what to do with” (H20-21), indicating that what communications has to deal with carries a burden with it. It also indicates that the “things” they have to deal with are inanimate objects which lack definition, form or substance, making them difficult to categorise and therefore deal with. Additionally, there is clearly a pattern in Helen’s experience of communications being used as a container for rubbish or for miscellaneous activities (H23, H25-26). There is also a useful indication in this extract of a paradox which exists in how communication is viewed at Primecare. If “nobody knows what to do with them” (H20-21), there is clearly a gap in knowledge (Dervin and Frenette, 2001), where no one can make sense of unpredictable or unstable events. This positions Helen and the communications function as the sensemakers of the organisation. The sensemaking theme emerges again in the interview extract, when Helen tries to make sense of *other peoples’* lack of sensemaking capacity, and in doing so, articulates two possibilities that may

explain the situation. The first is “maybe cos they’re not entirely sure how to deal with something” (H28-29) and the other is that there is “no other obvious home for it” (H29-30). Both explanations are indications of the inability of others to make sense of a new or unstable situation that could be neatly housed within formal organisational boundaries or departments. The result is that, in this case, the work is then housed within a function which itself is difficult to define, much like the work for which it ends up taking responsibility. So, as the department is classified as miscellaneous, so to is the work they undertake.

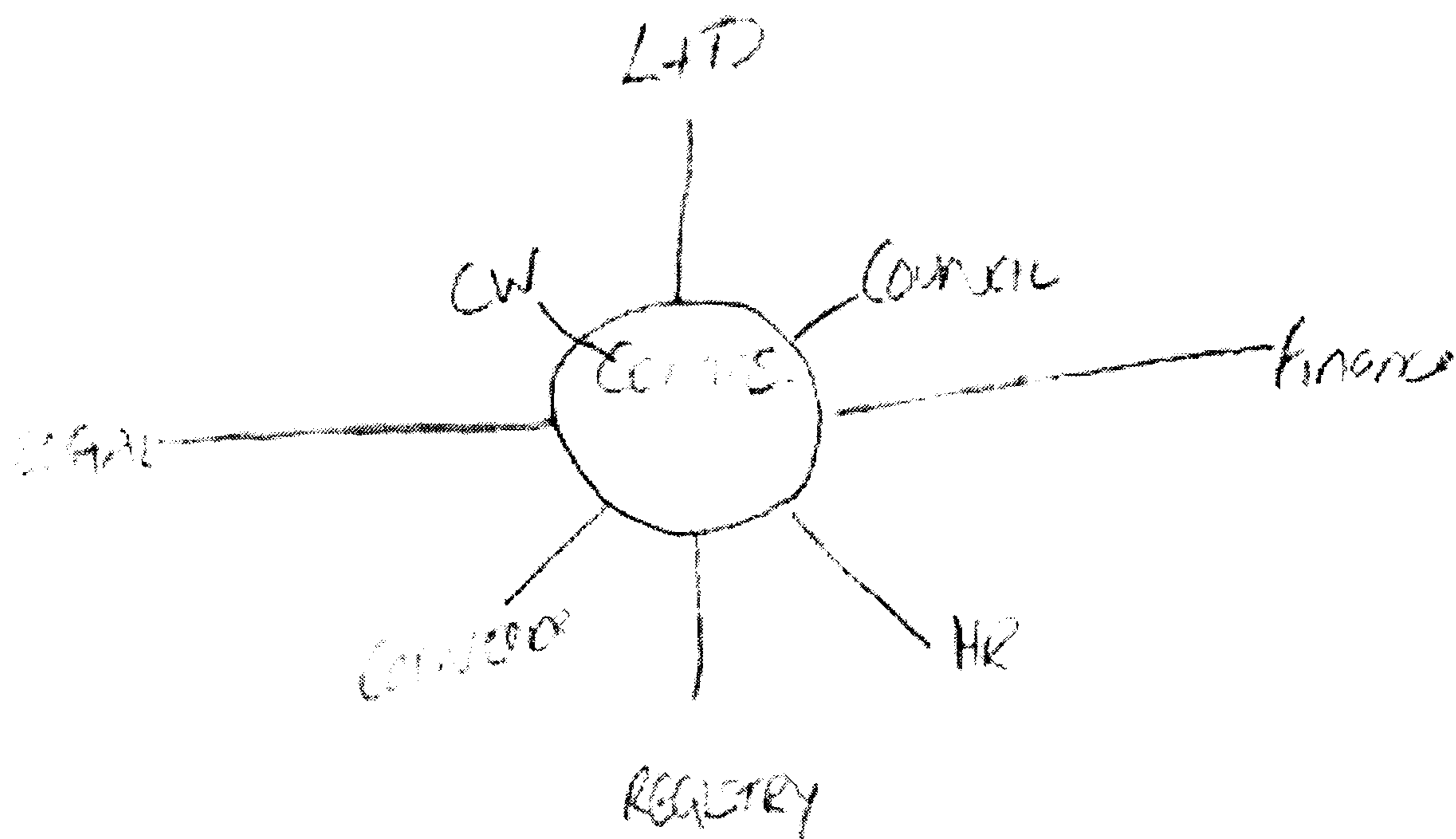
The key to the paradox is the varying perceptions of the communications function that result in multiple sensemaking efforts across the organisation. Helen believes that others view the communication function to be a dumping ground for rubbish, meaning that any work that is difficult to categorise or operationalise ends up being handed to the communications function. However, in dealing with all the work which has been labelled as “difficult,” the communication team is helping the rest of the organisation make sense of new and unpredictable circumstances, thereby placing themselves in an extremely important and central role. The communications function can therefore be seen to act as a buffer, as they protect the organisation against newness and unpredictability which is something that is intangible. To some extent, Helen does indeed recognise that the communication team is valued and has a central role, which can be seen in the following interview extract and her representation of the organisational chart:

H31Helen: Yes, yes it is about, it is a support role, and [ceo] said something
32 about that the other day, about us being a support role like finance,
33 [other department] etc, but I know [ceo] also means with a
34 strategic responsibility [int: right], and I know that because of the
35 way [ceo] use the other support services, so we’re all, there’s
36 [other department], finance and hr, and us, we’re all classed as a
37 supporting, [other department], er, yeah, what’s it called [another
38 department], [int: hmm] which are two primary functions [int:
39 yeah], so we’re seen as supporting that, but each of us has a
40 strategic role in that [int: right], so [ceo] would, [ceo] would say
41 that we are support services, but I do know that [ceo] means with a
42 strategic responsibility [int: right], we are expected to contribute to
43 strategic processes [int: yeah] as well so

In this extract, we can see references to Helen attributing a strategic role to the communications team (H33-34, H39-43). As such, it is very centralist in its open

assumption of a strategic role. The strategic role is identified by comparing similarities and differences in how other departments are used (H35), and it is the process of comparison which helps form an identity of a strategic team (Brewer and Gardner, 1996) and illustrates another example of the *relational*, as seen in Brian's interpretations (extract G). The centrality of a strategic location is confirmed in Helen's drawing of where communication "sits" within the organisation, and also in her explanation of her drawing:

Figure 7.2: Helen's organisational chart



In this interview extract, Helen, much like some of the other practitioners, is attempting to *feel around* the bounded organisational space to locate the communications team:

H44 Helen: I'm just thinking, I know how I want it to look, how, where I want
45 us to be

46 Nilam Do that then [ni laughs], do that first, do where you want it to be
47 first

48 Helen: Right, it's quite, erm, it's still as a support role, but at the centre
49 [int: ok], because it cuts across all of the teams, erm so I would
50 probably put communications, erm, in a circle here

51 Nilam This is your ideal scenario

52 Helen: Yeah, [int: ahuh] probably with everybody else either spiking off
53 of that, [int: ok] or a circle with everybody else around it

In *feeling around the space* (H44-45), Helen eventually locates the communication team “at the centre” (H48) and also as cutting across the organisation (H49). This is in direct contrast to the peripheral function where communication is perceived as a rubbish bin. Through a fine-grained analysis of Helen’s narratives, which emphasise communications as a container for rubbish, and through her visual representation of the location of the communication team, which places the team as central to the organisation, we can see that her interpretations oscillate from the peripheral to the central. In addition, Helen appears to be unaware of this stark contrast in her interpretations, emphasising the relative ease with which practitioners can move between repertoires and therefore move between apparently contradictory interpretations of the same event.

She then continues to explain the drawing, but in explaining her ideal scenario, her explanation allows her to move from an ideal situation (H45-46, H51-52), to reflecting Helen’s “lived experience.”

H54 Nilam: So that’s your ideal scenario?

55 Helen: Yeah, and I wouldn’t, like, I wouldn’t say that it’s actually too far
56 off that, erm, I think we are, we are, and maybe that’s why I’m
57 struggling a little bit, because I think we are fairly like that, [int: ok]
58 erm, yeah, I would say we are fairly, fairly like that, we are the
59 centre of everything [int: yeah] what I, what I struggle with is, erm
60 the responsibilities that are put onto communications sometimes,
61 [int: yes] as oppose to what communications is actually there to
62 achieve

This extract illustrates how, in attempting to locate the communications team, Helen is able to reconcile both the peripheral and central perceptions of the team by *closing the distance between them*. Through a comparative process (Brewer and Gardner, 1996), Helen eventually adopts the ideal scenario she articulates as representing the “real” location of the team. Helen highlights a perceived initial distance between the ideal and the real location of the team, and then states “I wouldn’t say that it’s actually too far off that” (H55-56). This statement marks the beginning of the process to *close the distance* between Helen’s ideal and real locations. The closing of that distance then continues by Helen twice stating that they “are fairly like that” (H57, H58) and then finally we see the ideal and the real *share the same location and merge into one space* with the statement that communications is at “the centre of everything” (H59). The theme of

unpredictability that comes with additional responsibilities surfaces once again (H59-62), as she continues trying to make sense of the shifts she encounters when the communication team are asked to take on something new. The “responsibilities” (H60) she speaks of are for the indefinable “things” (H20) that are not a natural addition to the traditional communications remit that normative research has come to promote, such as press relations or crisis communication.

In both the diary and interview extracts, there is a clear emphasis on communications being a container for rubbish. However, Helen also sees her team as being central to the organisation through the way they “cut across” departments, assuming a “boundary spanning” role (Broom, 1982). This highlights a paradox within Helen’s interpretations of events, which shows that whilst Helen perceives her team to be a container for rubbish, and therefore peripheral to the body of the organisation, her CEO actually perceives the communication team to be capable enough to make sense of new projects, hence the added responsibility, which ultimately places Helen and her team at the centre of the organisation. What is also evident is that Helen is only aware of a central role when environmental cues from other departments are not contaminating her centralist perceptions with notions of the communications team being a container for rubbish.

7.1.4 Moving from the periphery: barriers to movement

In the previous extracts, we have seen that practitioners make sense of events through a process that helps position the practitioner within the organisation. These sensemaking interpretations are inherently spatial, and as such, represent the oscillation between the central and peripheral locations which practitioners move between. The movement between the repertoires not only represents the variation in where practitioners locate their actions, but also represents a broader desire by practitioners to move from the periphery to the centre. In attempting to move from the periphery to the centre, however, practitioners are often met with barriers which impede their progress into the centre. At this stage, it is worth considering why practitioners think it is important to be at the centre of the organisation, both metaphorically and organisationally. As stated in Chapter 5, being at the centre brings certain privileges and has certain connotations attached to it. What is evident from practitioners employing a centralist repertoire is that being central to an

organisational initiative means that their work is valued and that they have influence, and with it a good reputation; this represents the holy grail for practitioners, as it does for much existing research in public relations and corporate communications. Being on the outskirts of an organisation is therefore not an ideal place for practitioners. It therefore follows that in attempting to move from the periphery to the centre practitioners are attempting to gain a positive reputation, increase the level of influence they have over others and help others understand the value that communications can bring to an organisation. In addition, through the adapted sensemaking model presented in Chapter 5 (Figure 5.1), we can see that the attainment of centralist privileges acts as the motivation for progressing toward the centre.

What is clear from the peripheral verbal repertoire is that any attempted movement away from the periphery is met with different types of barriers, which manifest themselves in different ways. Barriers signify a block in the movement of practitioners towards the centre; it stops them being valued, stops them being influential, and has a negative effect upon their personal reputation.

7.1.5 Time as a barrier

Some barriers, such as lack of time, are articulated as ingrained in the working lives of practitioners, where the lack of time impedes progress toward the centre, as it stops practitioners working on strategic (centre-led) initiatives. Other barriers, such as others' lack of understanding about the purpose or value of communications are articulated as barriers that are erected by others, in an effort to protect their departmental boundaries and workloads from infiltration. The notion of time being a barrier to progress was present across all three organisations.

Table 7.1: Illustrative examples of time as a barrier

Time as a barrier - illustrative examples	Fine-grained analysis
<i>Time poverty is a constant conflict</i> (hence I'm writing this early on a Saturday morning). There's never enough hours in the day if you want to shine (David, Barksdales)	Time poverty is a reference to lacking time and therefore being in deficit. David's lack of time is stopping him from "shining," meaning it has a negative effect on the good reputation he is cultivating. The "constant conflict" indicates a longstanding battle with time issues
My pre-presentation preparation <i>kept getting eroded</i> . My boss called me several times, in the open plan office I regularly have people appearing (sic) at my shoulder ... two team members had problems they needed my advice on; so did the COO and [director] (David, Barksdales)	Time is a tangible thing that is susceptible to erosion, as it is being chipped away by unforeseen forces (people appearing from behind). Other people therefore <i>wear away</i> the time available, suggesting that time is tangible and finite.
<i>It is time consuming</i> and can still be changed once my line manager has reviewed.... <i>It's a time consuming way</i> to get publicity and positively influence the market. (Barbara, Barksdales)	Time is likened to a food where it is consumed. This also emphasises that it takes time to create change, in the broader sense.
Unfortunatley 4 days later we receive an email saying the timings we have agreed have changed for the communications activity....there's only so much I can do, so we will have to see what happens, but <i>I can't 'waste' further time and effort at the expense of other work</i> . Unfortunatley, very frustrating! (Sarah, Primecare)	The last minute change of circumstances have led Sarah to abandon her involvement as her time is a precious commodity and finite and, as such, can not be "wasted."
I feel, although it is important, <i>this is a very time consuming piece of work</i> . (Victoria, Primecare)	Time is likened to a food where it is consumed, and it takes time to do something correctly.
I am brimming with ideas just now of how to progress the press function within the office and develop what we do in relation to media training and other things, <i>but don't seem to get a clear run at any of them</i> . (Juliet, Elco)	There are too many interruptions on allocated time, which act as a barrier to "progress the press function" thereby impeding movement from the periphery to the centre.
Once the phones stop ringing <i>it's the easiest time to get writing work done</i> and in a very short space of time I've been able to finish something that I'd started more than once today. (Liz, Elco)	There is a continual stop and start motion to the daily lives of communication practitioners

What these extracts show is that practitioners feel they lack adequate time to do their work. Their narratives describe daily lives where interruptions and disruptions to the relatively smooth flow of work are commonplace. In these extracts we can see that practitioners appear to interpret barriers such as time and workload issues as embedded within their working day. As such, these types of barriers to

progress pose a relatively acceptable level of impediment. However, these interruptions are symbolic of the barriers in their journey towards the centre of an organisation, as well as symbolic of a lack of control throughout their working day. Unsurprisingly, time and workload issues result in some practitioners experiencing frustration.

As barriers can defend territories as well as stop movement, the notion of time provides a flexible rhetorical device, which can be used to defend departmental workloads (I don't have time to do that) and therefore defend their boundaries from penetration. As such, time is a relatively acceptable barrier in the daily lives of communication practitioners and serves the dual function of *hindering and protecting* a department, depending upon the circumstances within which practitioners articulate issues of time. Another barrier that poses more complex problems is that of encountering resistance to ideas and involvement from the communication team.

7.1.6 Encountering resistance: battling at the periphery

Encountering resistance and being engaged in battle was a recurring theme across all three organisations. The metaphors evident in practitioner narratives show that practitioners are more likely to feel embattled if they feel they are on the periphery of an organisation, resulting in interpretations where the practitioner is engaged in battle. The diary entries of Neil, from Elco, show a recurring theme of encountering resistance and being engaged in battle:

(J1)The past week has been one of constant battling to ensure that comms policy is adhered to. (2)There seems (sic) to be a point when directors decide that there (sic) comms are 'special' and as such deserve to deviate from structured approaches (sic). (3)In reality it seems that by 'special' you can read adverse to change.

(4)I feel as though I am on a treadmill at present simply going round in circles having to defend and push for strategy to remain on course. (5)I am also have (sic) to unpick some of the dead ends that others have led themselves down.

(6)The perception of the work will be perceived (sic) as interfering and obstinate. (7)This has not been a good week for coherent and coordinated comms.

Here in Neil's fifth diary entry, we see an immediate reference to being engaged in battle ("constant battling") to make sure that "comms policy is adhered to" (J1). This gives us an indication that Neil views the communication policy as central enough to warrant exerting some control over how it is implemented. The "constant battling" is therefore one which concentrates on moving towards a centralised reference point for broad communication issues through exerting control, which keeps it at the forefront of peoples' minds (making sure it is "adhered to"). The next sentence gives us an indication of the type of resistance Neil regularly experiences. Neil is fairly derogatory about how directors perceive communications; his interpretation of events is that they believe they are too "special" (J2) to "adhere" (J1) to communications policy. The attitude of the directors therefore represents a barrier to communication initiatives being valued and used across the organisation. There is also a suggestion that directors tolerate the communication function voicing their initiatives up to a certain limit, at which point they dismiss communication initiatives by giving Neil the impression that they do not need to be actively included in the protocols of the organisation. In giving that impression, their "special" position gives them the right "to deviate from structured approaches" (J2). In adhering to broader communications policy, directors would have to defer to the communications function for advice, thereby relinquishing any autonomy and control they have which makes their department stand out from the others. Neil's interpretation of this is fairly cynical. He views their resistance not as an indication of their special position or authority within the organisation, but as a barrier which they have placed around their departments to prevent themselves from exposure to

new initiatives, particularly communication initiatives; they are “adverse to change” (J3).

Neil’s frustration manifests itself through the metaphor of movement, as he struggles to articulate what he experiences. The use of the word “treadmill” (J4) evokes images of walking an endless and straight path, one that has no beginning (implying that resistance existed in the organisation before Neil’s tenure), and no visible end. The phrase “going round in circles” (J4) also expresses a similarly endless experience to being on a treadmill, emphasising that Neil interprets the resistance he experiences as having to return to the same place to repeat the same journey. The journey, in this context, indicates an attempt towards making the directors value communication, which further symbolises attempting to *move away from the periphery*. In addition to repeating the same journey, Neil points toward a battle embedded within that particular journey, where he has to “defend” for communication to be involved and “push for strategy to remain on course” (J4), indicating that force has to be used to control the situation. This one statement is extremely telling of the types of resistance experienced by Neil and the movement metaphor seems to work well here, as we also get a sense of the repetition that he experiences. There is a further sense of the movements that cause frustration as Neil articulates having to “unpick some of the dead ends” (J5). In this context, a “dead end” is the result of other people not knowing that they are following the wrong path. Neil then has to lead them out of the dead end, stating that he has to “unpick” (J5) and therefore untangle a complex and interlinked set of threads. Finally, Neil believes that his efforts to untangle interlinked threads is met with negativity and seen as a breach (“interfering”) of departmental boundaries (J6). His final reference to “coherent and coordinated” (J7) represents what Neil is striving towards, which is a very normative notion of communication, indicating that he wants to move to the centre.

The theme of battling continues in Neil’s next diary entry, where there is a sense that he is “preparing for battle”:

(J8)The 'battle' with some of the organisation will develop in the coming weeks. (9)This period is being spent trying (sic) to sell the benefit of the direction we are taking. (10)At present there is much holding back in anticipation of what is to come. (11)This is a deliberate ploy so that we have something to offer rather than a negative 'no' answer. (12)We will have a viable alternative to provide.

In this diary entry, Neil is clearly anticipating a battle in the near future (J8). Tactics for the battle involve trying to “sell” ideas, where communication initiatives are pitched as part of a broader direction and seen as a commodity to be sold, and one which has tangible benefits. The selling tactic works in tandem with “holding back” (J10), which is seen as a “deliberate ploy” (J11) so that communications is seen as offering a “viable alternative” (J12) as their solution to a problem. What this shows us is that there is a broader “battle plan” at work here, which is employed in an effort to move to the centre and control how communications policy is implemented.

7.1.7 Defending your territory: encroachment by marketing

In battling, there are areas to attack and areas to defend. The communications function is one area that some practitioners feel need defending, particularly from encroachment from marketing departments (Lauzen, 1995). At Barksdales, a traditional opposition with marketing (Kotler and Mindak, 1978) is expressed in Barbara’s interview:

- K1 Barbara: ...they're just like breeding, it's like every time you see
 2 them they're like hundreds more, and it really galls us. and also
 3 they circle us like wolves trying to get access to our bloody
 4 budgets that we use to provide much needed agency support,
 5 and they're always so, it's like a real trust factor issue [int: yeah]
 6 between the two, [int: hmm] and, erm, yeah
- 7 Nilam Has that always been there?
- 8 Barbara: It's always been there as long as I've worked in corporate
 9 comms [int: yeah] it's always always been there, it's just no
 10 understanding between the two functions, [int: hmm] I mean, I
 11 just think if you want to save some money cut all your
 12 marketing people out, cos I don't know what they do, and they
 13 will think the same thing about us [b laughs]

In this interview extract, the marketing department are portrayed as an organism that is breeding rapidly (Morgan, 1986, 2006) (K1), as well as a pack of wolves (K3) that circle and want to attack their prey. The communications team are therefore positioned as the prey being hunted by marketing, and therefore as potential victims of a pending attack. From this extract, we can see that at Barksdales, communications and marketing are engaged in a battle over resources, where one department (marketing) is larger in size but needs resources (K3-4) and the other department (communications) has the resources and wants to protect the unique service these resources offer, especially as the communications department claim ownership of these resources (K3-4). The additional budget that the marketing department covets is therefore the “meat” that the “wolves” desire. This extract is a vivid example of encroachment, and how it manifests as a battle between departments, who are perceived as attackers and victims. Barbara does recognise that the relationship has fundamental issues of trust and understanding (K5-6, K9-10) which suggest a long prevailing silo mentality within the two departments and a staunch defending of territory that consists of a lack of compromise. Barbara cements her assessment of the marketing department by assigning them a lower value than her team and justifying this with a financial argument: “I just think if you want to save some money cut all your marketing people out” (K11-12). By linking her views on marketing with a monetary benefit, she is correspondingly assigning communications as bringing high monetary returns to the organisation. In this, we can see once again the use of relational interpretations using a comparative process (Brewer and Gardner, 1996). Other examples of battling at the periphery include

describing events as skirmishes, tactical manoeuvres (as above), the use of stealth tactics and actively manipulating the situation.

As stated earlier, repertoires of periphery were evident across all three organisations taking part in the study. Further examples of the characteristics, which constitute a repertoire of periphery, are illustrated in Table 7.2:

Table 7.2: Further illustrative examples of repertoires of periphery

Characteristics of repertoires of periphery	Illustrative examples
Being on the periphery	<p>They've actually put a thing in all their agendas that says number thirteen, or at the end of the agenda, media issues, are there any media issues, erm, and what we're trying to do is even take that out and say communication has to run through all [int: yeah] your agenda, from one to 12, everything you're doing you have to think about communication and not media (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>The only thing is when you're trying to get the newsletter articles and things, it would be better if they were closer, maybe kept you in the loop a little bit more (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>You need that support for what I want to achieve, cos I've got to work with these people day in day out [int: hmm]. I'm the one in there saying no, my relationship with them is shot to pieces, [int: yeah] it needs to come from up above, which is, you will do what you're told [int: yeah], and that's not happening and it's getting dangerous (Brian, Barksdales)</p>
Periphery and value	<p>We're kind of floating around at the moment and not really erm we know we're doing some good work, we don't know if anybody knows we're doing some good work (Neil, Elco)</p> <p>The rest of the organisation probably don't realise all the work that goes into our publications (Fiona, Primecare)</p> <p>The work that went into rewriting the releases and taking them through a process of internal approval to ensure all bases are covered, figures correct and quotes appropriate will not be seen by the end audience. I sometimes think the value of what we do isn't seen but is just part of the job (Barbara, Barksdales)</p>
Battling at the periphery	<p>It would have been fine but I was stuck in the crossfire between the President and Chief Executive (Juliet, Elco)</p> <p>I believe the team were a bit negative about me being there and couldn't see the reason why comms should be involved. They cannot see the importance/or they believe that communication doesn't impact on their work at all (Isa, Primecare)</p> <p>What I'm finding out quite quickly is that, erm, within the organisation, you know, you're going to have to, as an individual, be quite assertive and defend your own position quite well, cos otherwise you can get pushed around (Damien, Barksdales)</p>

7.2 Summarising periphery

Periphery is the second of two interpretive repertoires identified through this study. As a repertoire, it collaborates with notions of centrality, and the two repertoires represent one discourse used by practitioners in making sense of the events they experience. The spatial metaphor which permeates throughout both the repertoires is important in understanding that practitioners make sense of the events they experience by attempting to locate themselves within the bounded organisational space whilst engaging in different events. Through the spatial lens, we can see that periphery is, by definition, not central, and that being on the periphery has negative connotations for the practitioners. For example, Helen, at Primecare, viewed being on the periphery as symbolic of her team being container for rubbish, although the extract presented shows that this can also contain a paradox, in which that container becomes the place that makes sense of newness and unpredictability for the organisation, thereby placing the communications team in central position. Also important to notions of periphery is the perception that the work of communications is not valued throughout the organisation. Value-laden perceptions are developed using a comparative process, whereby the relative value is decided using its relative position with other departments. This was illustrated in Brian's extract which showed how value-laden hierarchies can promote a sense of alienation and low worth or prestige. Also crucial to repertoires of periphery is the desire of practitioners to move away from this position, to one which is symbolic of an increase in value and reputation, essentially a desire to move toward the centre of an organisation or be at the centre of events. What this research therefore shows is that movement towards the centre is met with resistance, in the form of institutionalised and operational barriers, such as lack of understanding and lack of time, respectively. Other forms of resistance include being engaged in different battle like tactics to either defend encroachment from other departments, or attack defences put up by other departments. By using repertoires of periphery, this is an indication that practitioners are locating themselves on the outskirts of an organisation or event, and that they then feel they have to fight a battle or overcome barriers to move back into a central position within the organisation and to get some recognition for their work.

7.3 The importance of the repertoires of centrality and periphery

The importance of these repertoires is three-fold. Firstly, the repertoires show that the normative discourse of strategic value is not as prominent as one would expect. The literature review presented in this thesis, along with the extract from The Independent newspaper, shows the power of strategic value discourse to completely omit the difficulties, issues and contradictions that can arise in the modern communications environment. It could be argued that it serves industry interests to not portray the difficulties, as admitting to such contradictions and inconsistencies would mean drawing attention to the industry's vulnerable points. The importance of these repertoires illustrates that practitioner enactment is therefore not univocal or particularly consistent within their natural work setting. The repertoires are also important in that they show that issues which preoccupy the existing research agenda, such as strategy, integration and stakeholder relations, are not as great a concern to practitioners at the micro level.

Secondly, the repertoires show that there is a very real sense of *dislocation* felt by practitioners. The movement from one repertoire to another is important on a number of levels. The movement represents a degree of momentum in the search for a location; in essence, a journey from a place they do not want to be, to where they ideally want to be situated. The movement is therefore indicative of a sense of *dislocation*, in that the search to place themselves is continual, where a space is often disputed by others, and where the continual oscillation represents the variability of interpretation, as opposed to a static understanding of the role of practitioners in communication work. Additionally, the variability illustrates the paradoxes embedded within the individual interpretations of events and the nature of communications work. The idea that the repertoires reveal a *sense of dislocation* brings a new contribution to existing knowledge, which moves away from traditional discourses of strategic value.

Thirdly, it emphasises the importance of contextualising the practitioner experience, in order to fully understand the sense of dislocation that they experience. The movement is important in that it represents a desire to be situated elsewhere, suggesting a relational interpretation of the events practitioners experience. Additionally, the themes evident in the practitioner narratives can be viewed as

related or connected across time and space. This notion of contextualising the practitioner experience brings a new contribution to current thinking, as it moves away from the de-contextualised approaches of normative research.

7.4 In conclusion

The previous two chapters have elaborated on the characteristics that constitute the repertoires of centrality and periphery. In doing so, the chapters have illustrated the model of movement between the repertoires of centrality and periphery (Figure 6.1) using extended extracts from practitioner diaries and interviews. The model was developed after close analysis of the themes which revealed themselves through practitioners' interpretations, which were identified in Table 4.6. The next chapter brings this thesis to a conclusion by discussing how these themes and repertoires contribute to current thinking, as well as considering the limitations and possible future directions of the research.

Chapter 8:

Moving beyond existing public relations and corporate communication theories

8.0 Introduction

This research has argued that the overwhelming body of research over the last three decades has focused broadly on the three areas of practitioner roles, excellence in communication and issues of integration. These areas have nurtured the exploration of the types of activities and processes that constitute the practitioner role (Toth et al, 1998, Dozier and Broom, 1995; Broom, 1982), and wider ranging aspects, such as their perceived power and status (Moss, 2005) and how roles may differ for women (Cline et al, 1986). Other dominant areas of research include notions of what defines excellence in communication departments (Dozier et al, 1995; Grunig et al, 1995), which has led to an overriding preoccupation with shifting towards symmetrical models of organisational communication. Further dominant areas of research include exploring the role boundaries affected through the integration of public relations and marketing functions (Lauzen, 1991), as well as the integration of organisational communication processes (Cornelissen, 2000). Given the proliferation of these dominant areas of research, it could be said that such topics represent the normative body of research, which has shaped, and to an extent, limited the boundaries of normative research.

Throughout the thesis, I have shown how particular limitations to existing research, such as automatically adopting a positivist approach to research design, have set up boundaries that exclude more interpretive approaches to examining notions of roles, excellence and integration. Positivist approaches to research have served to de-contextualise aspects of roles, excellence in communication and integration, as well as portray processes as broadly linear and relatively one-dimensional. Research has focused on what are usually top-down approaches, occasionally they are bottom-up approaches, but they are rarely conceptualised as something that occurs in more than one dimension. Additionally, the rhetoric of

prior research promotes a discourse of strategic value, which advocates that communication functions produce tangible benefits and contribute to the “bottom-line” for organisations.

This thesis therefore contends that by promoting an overtly singular discourse that is aimed largely at promoting the strategic value of communication, existing research does not adequately reflect the depth and breadth of the practitioners’ lived experience, and in particular, the variability in how practitioners interpret the events they experience. This is partly due to how the domination of positivist approaches to previous research, and its associated discourse of strategic value, has underplayed the importance of examining the *nature and complexity* of the lived experience. In order to address the disparity in prior research, this research moved away from traditional positivist approaches to adopt a social constructionist approach. This marked move away from positivism also extends to moving away from the more conventional methodologies that focus on easily identifiable factors, to one which advocates a deeper understanding of the discourses and sensemaking processes of communication practitioners.

8.1 Concluding the research: an overview

This research set out to answer three questions; the first was to explore what the interpretations of communication practitioners suggested about the nature of their working lives and the second to explore the interpretive repertoires employed by communication practitioners in making sense of their working lives. Further to this, the research also aimed to explore how communication practitioners made sense of what they experienced as part of their working lives. In answering these three questions, this thesis has shown that firstly, there are specific themes that define their working environment and secondly, that practitioner interpretations can be viewed through the broader discourse, or interpretive repertoires of centrality and periphery, suggesting that practitioners are concerned with finding where they “fit” into an organisation. Finally, this thesis has shown that practitioners perceive the themes that define their work as indicative of a broader lack of understanding by others about the purpose of communication, and attempt to make sense of this by bridging such gaps in understanding through the acts of educating and advising. It is

also important to note that this study was not a study of organisational discourse, but a study of interpretive repertoires, or “discrete discourse styles” employed by communication practitioners within specific organisations. As such, it does not theorise about the “process and practices that constitute the ‘organisation’” (Grant and Hardy, 2004: 5), but instead reveals the sensemaking strategies and interpretive repertoires that subsequently uncover the sense of dislocation felt by communication practitioners as they interpret the events they experience.

The first section of this chapter will discuss how, in answering these questions, this study has brought new dimensions to, and extended current theory on roles, communication excellence and integration. This first section will also expand on the importance of adapting Dervin and Frenette’s (2001) sensemaking model, and how this enables us to contextualise the research findings to form a more rounded understanding of the lived experience of practitioner, as well as how sense is made of the situations they experience. Such detailed contextualisation of themes and interpretive repertoires is the first study of its kind in the disciplines of public relations and corporate communication, and therefore forms a significant contribution to existing knowledge.

This chapter then moves on to discuss the contributions to existing methodological debates. It contends that the research contributes to methodological discussions in two ways. The first contribution sits within the discourse-centred approach used in a discipline that has rarely been subjected to this type of internal and reflective analysis, particularly at the micro-level of the individual practitioner (Boje et al, 2004). The second contribution centres on the seldom used diary method, its adaptation into a web-based format using technological advances and the phenomena observed on how participants engage with the diary as an artefact. This research therefore contributes to the paucity of information on the use of diaries as a valid and rich data gathering method.

The chapter then discusses how the research has significant implications for the training offered to future communication practitioners in both formal, higher education institutions and through professional membership bodies, such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the UK. The research contributes to industry practice by suggesting that communication training providers must acknowledge the ambiguity and inconsistency that exists for the modern

communications practitioner in their natural work setting. The chapter then concludes by outlining the limitations of this research, followed by suggestions for a future research agenda.

8.2 New contributions to theory

Before highlighting how these findings have extended existing debates on roles, communication excellence and integration, it is worth noting what the research brings to the existing body of knowledge that is new to the field.

8.2.1 Practitioners' talk: revealing a sense of dislocation

As stated throughout the thesis, the current research offers empirical evidence on the lived experience of the communication practitioner. This is the first study of its kind in the disciplines of public relations and corporate communications. The rich data gathered through the research has highlighted two interpretive repertoires that exist in practitioners working lives, which has allowed us to gain a deeper insight into the lived experience of the practitioner.

The research reveals, for the first time, that by examining the interpretive repertoires of communication practitioners, we can see how they organise their sensemaking around the spatial polarities of centrality and periphery. Specifically, their narratives reveal that their interpretations are symbolic of their feeling either central or peripheral to organisational events. However, these feelings of centrality and periphery are continually changing, and practitioners move between the two polarities with apparent ease. They appear also to be unaware of the variability of their interpretations, suggesting that in moving from one repertoire to another, they are attempting to locate themselves within a bounded organisational space, which in itself is an indication of uncertainty. The frequency with which the movement between repertoires occurs, suggests that there is a very real sense of *dislocation* amongst practitioners. The first and main contribution of the research therefore lies in the identification of the two interpretive repertoires employed by practitioners as they attempt to make sense of the events they experience, and the sense of dislocation that the frequent use of these repertoires suggests.

The repertoires of centrality and periphery are overtly spatial metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980), which represent the vertical, horizontal and lateral dimensions of where practitioners are trying to locate themselves within a bounded space. These spatial references are also indicative of their perceived power and status in their organisation, where the central is powerful and the peripheral equates to powerlessness. Chapter 6 illustrates the model that has been developed to show the oscillation between the repertoires of centrality and periphery. The model is therefore an important addition to public relations and corporate communication literature, as it allows us to identify the discursive patterns inherent in the two repertoires, and illustrates the presence of discourses other than that of strategic value.

In accessing these unique interpretations, this research gives us a more holistic picture of the communication practitioners in their natural work setting, thereby allowing us to gain a deeper empirical insight into the working lives of these practitioners, which represents a considerable new contribution to existing literature. The broader contribution of the research also allows us to move beyond traditional and largely normative debates that focus on practitioner roles, communication excellence and integration, to that of the interpretation of events as experienced by the individual communication practitioners.

8.2.2 Contextualising the lived experience: sensemaking strategies

Existing research in public relations and corporate communication decontextualises aspects of roles, excellence and integration. A further contribution of this research therefore lies in how it shows the enormous value in contextualising aspects of communication work and roles that have traditionally been analysed separately. By adopting an existing sensemaking model that is seldom used in public relations and corporate communication research, the relationships between the themes and the nature of their influence upon each other, become more apparent.

Throughout this research, it has been shown that these interpretive repertoires can be linked back to a number of themes that dominate the working lives of communication practitioners. These themes are presided over by a sense of inconsistency, contradictory forces and, one might say, ambiguity. In identifying centralist and peripheral repertoires, the findings show that prior research does not

adequately account for the flux (Culbertson, 1991) and contradictions experienced by practitioners, as it traditionally views practitioner enactment from a singular and one-dimensional perspective.

This research shows the way sense is made in the presence of such inconsistency and contradiction. In adapting Dervin and Frenette's (2001) model, we are able to contextualise many of the themes that this research has revealed. As such, the adapted model illustrates the importance of context, both for contextualising the findings within a broader framework, and also for contextualising practitioner narratives in their natural work setting. By contextualising the findings in such a way, this has brought valuable insights into the sensemaking strategies employed by practitioners, which in turn had brought us closer to the sensemaking processes of practitioners as they occur. In particular, it affords us a more rounded and holistic picture of the communication practitioner, who is traditionally portrayed as preoccupied with developing strategy and protecting organisational reputations.

An additional contribution is how the findings of this thesis support existing distinctions between sensemaking and sensegiving (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007; Maitlis, 2005). In particular, they show that sensegiving is undertaken through acts of education and advising others as to the value of communication, which in essence is about making sense of events for other people, as seen, for example, in the analysis of Helen's interpretations. The discourse analysis presented in this thesis also shows how sensegiving, through educating and advising, can be motivated by personal agendas, as in the analysis of David's interpretations, where he is driven by wanting to maintain a positive reputation, which is closely associated to being seen as central to organisational events.

Although sensemaking strategies can concentrate on the minutiae of organisational life (Weick, 1979), this thesis extends existing literature by bringing together the elements that influence practitioners' sensemaking and viewing them through a contextualised sensemaking lens. Furthermore, this study shows that normative research does not fully acknowledge the relational or contextual nature of how practitioners interpret events.

In addition to bringing new empirical evidence on the interpretive repertoires and the contextualised sensemaking strategies of practitioners to existing academic

debates, the findings from this research help us to rethink and extend existing debates, as discussed below.

8.3 Extending existing debates

The aim of the current research was to understand the nature of the modern communication environment within which the practitioner is situated. In attempting to understand the daily lives of communication practitioners in such a way, the current research concentrated on how communication practitioners interpreted and made sense of the events they experienced. In particular, the research focused on how practitioner interpretations revealed two important interpretive repertoires which practitioners use in an effort to make sense of their position within their respective organisations. In elaborating upon the interpretive repertoires, this allows us to rethink the key debates dominating existing research over the last few decades, and in particular, reconsider long-held notions on roles, excellence and integration.

8.3.1 Rethinking practitioner roles research

In light of the themes and interpretive repertoires revealed through this study, we can see that the long-established and abstract definitions of practitioner roles have certain connotations attached. Labelling is an extremely effective way of attributing power and status, and an interpretive lens allows us to see how the different definitions of roles promote different aspects relating to notions of feeling either central or peripheral within the work setting.

Taking the expert prescriber role, this sees the practitioner as acting in an advisory role to senior management. The interpretative repertoires revealed through this research show that firstly, the advisory role is one in which the practitioner makes sense of events for others – they *sensegive* – in order that others understand the value of and process involved in communicating, and secondly, that this advisory relationship is not one which is exclusive to senior management. In making sense of events for others, practitioners are attempting to bridge a gap in understanding (Dervin, 1989). Bridging gaps in understanding is a complex process and involves first having to make sense of events for oneself, in order to then give that sense to others (Maitlis and Lawrence, 2007; Maitlis, 2005). Moreover, the act of

sensemaking and sensegiving occurs across all levels of seniority and is particularly prevalent across departmental boundaries, as practitioners attempt to sensegive, and therefore penetrate those boundaries. This research shows that the advisory role therefore constitutes more than the simplistic imparting of expertise to senior managers, and in showing this, the research adds depth to existing theories of about the expert prescriber role.

Sensegiving applies equally to the communication facilitator role which overlaps with the boundary spanner role. Interpretive repertoires show us that this role too is concerned with making sense of events in order to then sensegive. This role sees the practitioner as a buffer, or part of the mediating means (Engestrom, 2001), between the environment and top management, and existing research portrays this as a relatively linear and passive position as it is concerned with “moving information.” The interpretive repertoires show that rather than engaging in a linear process, practitioners are moving within a bounded organisational space whilst gathering information to “prep” others about communication events. Boundary spanning is therefore a three-dimensional role and not merely actionable across vertical and horizontal planes.

The problem solving process facilitator is defined as working with top management on strategic issues, a relatively functional definition that lacks any specific notions about what strategy entails. The findings of this research shed light on this role definition by presenting us with accounts of how working on strategic issues is not particularly clear-cut. The interpretive repertoires show how particular paradoxes exist in practitioners’ interpretations of events. These include a mismatch in interpretations about what type of work is perceived to be strategic and how the practitioner should then be involved, as seen for example in Helen’s case. The research therefore gives us an insight into how difficult and complex issues of strategy can be and the types of paradoxes embedded within such issues.

The communications technician is traditionally viewed as the person who produces or generates tangible things. This positions them as a machine, but we know from David’s account that managers can also be machines, as they are asked to generate “new perspectives” for senior management. The research therefore shows that it is not solely the technician who “generates” tangible things for others, but that the manager is also expected to generate intangibles, such as a “fresh perspective.”

8.3.2 Rethinking excellence in communication: shared expectations

A number of themes identified in Chapter 5 help extend existing theories of excellence in communication functions, particularly on aspects of shared expectations between practitioners and managers, and the nature of the relationship with the dominant coalition. Isolation from the central decision making process has been associated with practitioners not aligning their values with that of the dominant coalition (Lauzen, 1995). This implies that inclusion, and therefore being central, relates directly to the relationship that the practitioner has with the dominant coalition. However, Lauzen's (1995) research does not elaborate on the nature of that relationship. This research, however, shows that the nature of that relationship is orientated around a desire for a good reputation, as seen with David at Barksdales, the effect of which *may* result in inclusion in the central decision making group, but of this there is no guarantee. Furthermore, Lauzen's (1995) study takes a positivist approach in attempting to quantify perceptions of shared values and issues of strategic involvement, which in itself is problematic. Synchronicity of values is an extremely subjective assessment and is fraught with misunderstanding, which we can see in Helen's interpretation of how her team is valued; one person's dustbin is another person's sensemaker. The interpretive approach used in this research shows that it is the practitioner's drive to be perceived positively that guides them to align their values with that of the dominant coalition, but this does not guarantee inclusion into the dominant coalition. Lauzen (1995), however, suggests that the outward and obvious aligning of oneself to the values of the dominant coalition is enough to ensure inclusion into the decision making process. The current research therefore extends Lauzen's (1995) premise, which positions the act of alignment as a fail-proof tactic for inclusion into the dominant coalition, by uncovering the individual motivations that lay behind any act of potential alignment. In light of this, a simplistic articulation of alignment may not offer a stable solution to inclusion as once thought. Furthermore, if inclusion in a group is an indication of the high value of a communications department, this research shows that a full understanding of communication by the dominant coalition is a *precursor* to them appreciating the valuing of communications and consequently including the communication function in the decision making process.

8.3.3 Rethinking integration: two-way encroachment

The themes presented in this research also help re-evaluate theories of integration, particularly aspects of encroachment (Lauzen, 1993). As evident across all three organisations, encroachment of any sort breeds resistance of some kind. Existing research on encroachment revolves around communication processes and resources being taken over by other departments (Lauzen, 1993; Lauzen and Dozier, 1992; Broom et al, 1991; Lauzen, 1991). It portrays public relations or communication functions as potential victims of an attack by other departments, which is evident in Barbara's account of being "circled" by the marketing department at Barksdales. However, the idea that communication departments are vulnerable to attack does not give space to research which focuses on what practitioners are doing about such feelings of vulnerability. The themes presented in this research show that practitioners are engaging in another type of encroachment that revolves around penetrating departmental silos and attempting to make others understand the value of adopting communication practices as part of their regular work. It shows that whilst there is no out-and-out war being waged in the three organisations that took part in the research, practitioners are nevertheless aware of their vulnerable spots and are countering potential encroachment of resources with an act of encroachment themselves. Their encroachment lies in their drive to penetrate department silos and educate others about the value of communication. This research therefore updates existing theories on encroachment by showing that practitioners are actively engaged in their own type of encroachment and imperialistic behaviour in an effort to counter any take over of resources by other departments.

8.4 Contributions to methodological debates

As elaborated earlier in Chapter 3, discourse analysis offers a valuable methodology for examining the interpretations of practitioners in their natural setting. The discourse analysis used in this research has given a useful insight into how practitioners orientate their interpretations around a number of themes, thereby giving us a deeper insight into the daily lives of communication practitioners. It is not only this particular methodological approach that has helped open a window into

the lived experience of practitioners, but also the use of diaries, which has proved to be an extremely enlightening, engaging and flexible tool which has benefited both the participants and myself.

8.4.1 The diary as an artefact

The diary is a method which is rarely used in management research and even rarely used in public relations and corporate communication research. This research has shown the value of using diaries as an entry point into understanding the lived experience of communication practitioners. It has proved an extremely flexible method to adapt for a study of this kind, particularly into a web-friendly format, and suited the uniquely hi-tech working environment of all three organisations. In addition to the operational flexibility it offers researchers, the research has shown some interesting phenomena to come from the practitioner diaries. In observing these phenomena and patterns of engagement, we are then able to update existing literature, which is very thin, on the validity and richness of data that diaries elicit.

As stated in chapter 4, the diary is an important method for the interpretive researcher (Alaszewski, 2006b). Interpretive research has relied largely upon the well honed use of interviews in the organisational setting, to gain some insights into the workings of the modern organisation. The dominance of this method is not without its reasons. Interviews give the researcher an opportunity to examine the nuances of verbal and bodily connotations, helping us to contextualise what the participant is attempting to articulate. In spite of the varying structures - fully, semi or unstructured (Bryman and Bell, 2003) - of interviews, however, this type of everyday talk is subject to interruption, tangents and suggestion by the researcher, no matter how much we attempt to distance ourselves from the process. Diaries, by contrast, allow the participant to reflect on "taken for granted activities" (Alaszewski, 2006b: 37), allowing us to access interpretations of institutionalised norms and protocols. The reflective nature of diaries allows for minimum interruption from the researcher, giving space for a stream of consciousness from the participant which can then be elaborated upon in the follow-up interview.

In choosing such a reflective and developing tool as a research method, I was taking risks on a number of levels. In favouring the interview over diaries or other more creative forms of data gathering, what has happened within traditional

research, and indeed in many other disciplines, is that our knowledge of what constitutes robust qualitative interviewing is founded upon what Garfinkel (1967, cited in Weick, 1979) would call “avoidance tests.” The routinisation of interviewing, surveys and experiments have come about through their perpetual promotion as the most robust and insightful methods of gathering qualitative data. However, this has served to create barriers for other, more creative forms of data gathering entering research debates, which may yield alternative and complementary data. Sayings such as *that’s how we’ve always done it* indicate a degree of avoidance testing, whereby people do not do something because of fear of failure, reproach, alienation, ostracising and also the fear of the unknown (Weick, 1979). The more traditional research methods to some extent can therefore be said to be established through the avoidance of alternative practices which might help us learn about the very practices we are avoiding (Garfinkel, 1967). Avoidance testing of such practices therefore institutionalises those methods that we actively favour and use over others (Weick, 1979). The use of the diary can be seen to challenge traditional data gathering methods in that it offers, with some trepidation, an alternative insight into the world of the participants who take part in a diary study. With interviews, there is the safety net of knowing that data generates patterns of behaviour, activities and explanations of some sort. With diaries, we don’t know, as seen by this study, how participants will choose to use the diaries, even when they have all been presented with the same guideline and have all been at the same initial training meeting. The reflexivity that diaries offer is unique to this very method, as is the space and time it offers for thinking. This, of course, comes with its downfalls, as space and time to think make retrospective accounts more revisionist (Weick, 1979) but the production of revisionist accounts is not dissimilar to those produced at interviews and is therefore a skewed argument against using diaries.

Diaries have a strong reputation in the health sciences and their use in the public relations and corporate communications discipline presents many options for examining previously unobserved phenomena in the future. It is, however, up to the researcher to challenge the avoidance tests that exist within research agendas, before the diary can develop and be accepted as a robust data gathering tool. This study has shown how versatile the diary can be, particularly in light of how technology was used in this study to develop the diary from its traditional paper based format. The use

of technology is a major development in the diary based approach and has led to new phenomena being witnessed in this study as to how the diary is used. This represents an important contribution to knowledge in the field of research methodology.

Diaries create ownership of the research process, as follow up interviews are based on the participant's interpretation of events (Elliott, 1997) and the construction of their verbal and written texts that articulate those events. Diary entries, when followed up with interviews, therefore set the discursive framework for the interview, even when the researcher has a loose structure of the interview to which to refer. The follow up interview then begins the process of gaining clarity of meaning primarily for the researcher as they attempt to process the interpretive repertoires of the participant into their own mental framework.

The cathartic effects that some participants attributed to the diary are a particularly unique feature of this method (Stewart, 1968). Although interviews also offer therapeutic opportunities, this is not always the case, particularly if they are highly structured, time limited or a relatively trusting relationship has not been established between the researcher and participant. Diaries, by contrast begin to form a unique and trusting bond between the researcher and participant even before the follow up interview. This has been noted in diaries used for coaching and mentoring, where the diary entries are seen as a safe form of expression as they do not answer back or disagree with the author, and accept what is articulated unconditionally (Brockbank and McGill, 2006)

Additionally, this thesis has shown how the use of technology has transformed the traditionally paper based diary format into a data gathering method that blends easily into a modern corporate communications working environment. As Argenti (2006) notes, this marks an innovative use of technology, making its use and adaptation an important development for future researchers. This is particularly useful in light of the research agendas espousing new and more flexible methods of gathering qualitative data in a natural setting (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998). This research also makes a distinction between electronic questionnaires, often labelled as electronic diaries (Bolger et al, 2003) and an actual diary that operates on a web-based platform. Existing research on the technological advancements in diary use have incorrectly labelled open-ended survey questions as a "diary." The two methods

need to remain separate, not least because narrative based diaries encourage different social phenomena amongst participants.

8.5 Contribution to policy, practice and professional development strategies

Higher education courses in the UK continue to stress the strategic value of communication within a large organisational setting and portray the position of the practitioner and their team as high in status, fixed and beyond dispute. Duffy (2000) argues that “public relations textbooks uncritically present a singular view of PR as an ever-evolving and positive social force” (2000: 294). The research shows that this is not the case, and that practitioners in fact struggle to reconcile traditionally taught concepts and models, and consequently struggle to find where their actions and involvement “fits” into an organisation. In focusing on the strategic value of communications, courses are not preparing future practitioners for the ambiguous and contradictory *nature* of communications work, which is very different to the preferred teaching option of presenting a list of likely activities or abstract tasks, such as “developing strategy.”

Current training projects the changing communication environment as undergoing a constant change. However, the change portrayed is as external and happening “out there” beyond organisational boundaries, and largely due to globalisation and technological forces. As a result, courses are concerned with teaching communication practitioners to respond to these external forces. In doing so, courses correspondingly represent the communications function as a relatively stable function in amongst this changing external environment. In addition, courses portray a univocal, generic role of communication functions, which is one of strategic value, and situates the role as embedded within management objectives and hierarchies. What this research shows is that, as a result of a traditional professional development agenda, communication practitioners enter the working environment with expectations of certain privileges but are faced with an ambiguous and fluctuating working environment that lack the privileges they were taught to expect.

The formal training of communication practitioners therefore needs to accommodate and acknowledge notions of ambiguity and flux in order to help

practitioners cope with the uncertainty that they face. In particular, training needs to acknowledge that a changing environment occurs within the organisation as opposed to merely 'external' to the organisation. On a practical level, this would include the inclusion of case studies and action learning sets illustrating the varying levels of engagement to communications, as experienced by practitioners, and how they *really* react in these scenarios, rather than case studies illustrating communication strategies in large multi-national organisations. It is also important that a distinction is made between public and private sector communication issues, in particular, the pressure that public sector workers are under to 'justify' their role in an organisation in light of the lack of 'tangible' results, such as generating profit for an organisation. The first step towards this would be to redress the imbalance that exists in existing communication related research. A large body of research currently focuses on the communication practices of private sector organisations, whereas a focus on public, not-for-profit and voluntary sector organisations would help contextualise and develop current communication literature, as well as provide a wealth of additional case studies for teaching.

This thesis therefore advocates that higher education institutions and professional membership bodies need to acknowledge the complexity of the working life of the communication practitioner in order to prepare future communication practitioners for the "realities" of working in a modern organisation. In addition, professional membership bodies need to establish more robust codes of conduct which hold practitioners to account. This type of policy development will be a positive move towards reducing the levels of ambiguity and inconsistency that exists within the practitioners' working environment.

8.6 A future research agenda for communications

The findings presented in this research present a useful springboard for examining developing notions of interpretive repertoires across different scenarios, as well as exploring practitioner identities through qualitative approaches. Given the complexity of human sensemaking, no single attempt at analysing the discourse of communication practitioners will give a definitive account of what it means to be a communications practitioner in today's modern environment. The interpretive

repertoires identified in this research offer one important set of findings from an extremely rich data source. However, by concentrating on one set of interpretations, we must be careful not to present a singular narrative (Weick, 1997, Vos, 2008) as this gives prominence to one discourse over another and begs the question *whose interest does it serve to promote this discourse* (Brown et al, 2005)?

A particularly interesting development from this study would be to consider whether the repertoires of centrality and periphery are contingent upon level of organisational change or specific situations. This research focuses on the need for practitioners to locate themselves within their organisations, however, it is not known how specifically identified scenarios promote the use of one repertoire, and not necessarily the two repertoires identified in this research, over another. In terms of contingent factors, it would also be interesting to note whether perceptions of centrality evoke different battling metaphors to those evoked by perceptions of periphery. Such a study would have to incorporate a more detailed exploration and abstraction of metaphors than that used for this research, but this nevertheless poses an interesting area of research.

There are broader issues of power running through the themes, which have not been elaborated upon in this thesis, as its aim was to explore interpretive repertoires. Cultural theorists would argue that discourse is inherently about power (Foucault, 1989), and an examination of the differing power struggles implied in the repertoires would also make for an interesting study. In particular, an acknowledgement of *powerlessness*, as interpreted by practitioners, would bring a valuable, cognition-related understanding to current thinking, as it may allow different practitioner mindsets to come to the fore.

Additionally, future directions, according to Dervin (1997) should include “interviewing and listening to others that are explicitly dialogic and explicitly invite others to theorize about their worlds” (1997: 129). This calls for a greater use of discourse analysis in the natural setting of participants. A particularly useful development, then, would be exploring the identities that are constructed by the diary authors, as well as the co-construction of reality that occurs, beyond that of the obvious fictional accounts or “biographies” that exist in mainstream literature. This could include which identities are being constructed through practitioner diaries and how they vary over time. This is partly in response to Bolger et al’s (2003) call for

research into the “temporal dynamics” (2003: 585) of human cognition and identity construction.

Although the intention of this study is not to generalise, there is scope to conduct a larger study of this kind, looking at the discourses of communication practitioners across industry sectors, as well as across cultural and geographical boundaries.

8.7 Limitations of the research

A degree of reflection is necessary to understand the limitations, and therefore the boundaries, within which this study has been undertaken. The findings emanating from a study of this kind can be open to multiple interpretations, which some would argue is a cause for concern. The exactness that comes from more traditional, quantitative methodologies offer some surety and stability, which a discourse analysis is unable to offer, given that it actively acknowledges how the meaning of language changes continually according to context and other factors. Moreover, it is the diary method which potentially presents the researcher with more limitations than the implications of using particular methodologies. There is reluctance amongst academics in the public relations, corporate communications and management disciplines to fully accept the validity of the diary as a data gathering tool, and there is even less creativity about how it is used. This is partly based on the premise that it compromises “accurate” data for richness (Clarkson, 2008), and partly because researchers have been conditioned to use “safe” data gathering options (Argenti, 2006). There are, indeed, limitations to using diaries, however, this research has shown that these are largely logistical and can be mostly overcome with planning, systematic implementation, training, creativity, patience and a degree of flexibility about how participants choose to complete their entries.

There are also issues of truthfulness that prevail over gathering narrative accounts. However, the risk of participants being “selective with the truth” is equally problematic with quantitative surveys, interviews, focus groups and many other methods. The concerns about truthfulness are particularly important to bear in mind when considering the multiple identities and different roles that are potentially being performed by participants (Goffman, 1959), both in diaries entries and during

interviews. There was also the likelihood that by beginning the interview by looking over the diary entries, practitioners may have used the interview to justify the actions that they had written about, in an effort to promote a particular image of themselves in front of me.

The use of non-participant observation as a source of secondary evidence could be said to be a limitation to the research. Non-participant observation was used to help contextualise what was being written and articulated by practitioners, and as such, I did not analyse the discourse of practitioners during the observed meetings. A greater comparison of interpretive repertoires would have been possible if these observations had been tape-recorded, in order to then conduct a full discourse analysis of practitioners' language in an overtly public setting. As a result, the interpretive repertoires emerged from private sensemaking accounts and one-to-one interviews with myself. A comparison of private sensemaking accounts with public accounts would nevertheless make for an interesting study.

Given the richness and volume of data, the analysis privileged the more apparent themes which presented across all three organisations. This has undoubtedly led to the less frequently occurring, but just as important (Weick, 1979), themes to be placed aside, in favour of exploring the more expansive themes. As Brown et al (2005) note, in privileging the central and peripheral discourse styles, "many others have had to be suppressed" (2005: 322). A greater analysis of the less frequent themes, undertaken at the micro-level, would serve to add to existing data on interpretive repertoires. Additionally, the research was organised around UK based companies, which presents both a limitation in the research, and an opportunity to develop future research.

8.8 Conclusion

A review of existing literature, spanning the disciplines of public relations, corporate communication and certain areas of management research show that there is a little empirical research on the lived experience of the communication practitioner, aside from the key debates which concentrates on practitioner roles, excellence in communication and issues of integration. This research has challenged that disparity to "generate new realities, to engender perspectives or practices as yet

unrealized” (Gergen, 2001: 161). This research has brought to light a number of themes that prevail in the working lives of communication practitioners. It has shown that in examining the interpretive variability of practitioner narratives, we can see that there is a concern for status, which can be understood using notions of centrality and periphery. Furthermore, this research has illustrated that practitioners make and give sense whilst attempting to educate and advise others about the value of engaging in communication initiatives. Examining interpretive repertoires is an important qualitative approach and is beginning to be acknowledged in recent research that seeks to rethink public relations and corporate communication (Yeomans, 2008; Pieczka, 2007). It is hoped that this trend will continue.

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Appendix 1:

Articles from The Independent, 16th June, 2008.

Introducing the world's largest provider
of big & tall clothing in your size.

THE INDEPENDENT

June 16, 2008

The end of the spin cycle? Why the PR industry wants a change of image

There is a certain symmetry, and some would say an irony, in the fact that the inaugural gathering of Britain's public relations industry took place at the St Bride's Institute, which is not just in Fleet Street but is, even today, the home of the London Press Club.

Since that initial "exploratory" meeting on 10 February 1948, called to discuss forming a professional association "to serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences and to foster the interests of the profession generally", PR professionals have spent six decades struggling to get on with journalists.

The relationship has evolved, to a degree that it is now sometimes said that PR holds an upper hand, cynically spinning and distorting the output of hard-pressed news organisations. Others argue that without the support of a new generation of publicity-conscious communications professionals, the modern media, a content-devouring beast that never sleeps, could not survive.

The evolution of the PR industry in the 60 years since the founding of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, is illustrated by the organisations represented by some of those founding fathers – and they were pretty much all men – such as Bill Vint of Hastings Corporation, Kenneth Day of Erith Town Council and Eain Ogilvie of the International Wool Secretariat. Largely the representatives of local authorities, they reflect only a small fraction of the business-driven multi-million pound PR machine of today.

Yet more than half a century on, why is it that a profession dedicated to protecting and enhancing reputations does not itself have a better name and continues to be tarnished with slurs of spin-doctoring? Martin Loat, founder and director of Propeller Communications, is clear where the problem lies. "Journalists exert a lot of control over what gets spoken and written about PR, so if a journalist encounters a poor PR who can't answer a simple inquiry or a combative PR person who won't roll over, the journalist might have a grumble. That happens in any profession, but in this case the grumbles can end up in print. That can harm PR's reputation; but it's a distorted lens."

Loat points out that the businesses and celebrities who hire PRs, not to mention the students eager to enter the industry, suggest that the scorn of certain journalists is not shared by the wider public.

Lionel Zetter, a former president of the CIPR and a specialist in the public affairs sector of PR, is even more robust in his defence. "PR has a reputation, both in the UK and elsewhere, of delivering value," he says. "Very often, when sitting around the table, it will be the PR professional who will come up with the solution to whatever problem the collective body is facing."

Increasingly, he points out, that PR professional is sitting at the boardroom table. "Ten years ago you might have found that the director of communications would not have had a main board position, but nowadays that would be very much the exception. Any company of size or substance that does not have a PR on the board is probably missing a trick."

Yet there are well-known figures in the industry who are prepared to admit PR's shortcomings. "Some of the biggest fees are for laundering the reputations of some of the major companies. We have to hang our head in shame when we look at what some of the big food, tobacco and energy companies are doing globally," says Mark Borkowski of Borkowski PR. "That's an element where a PR can lose their moral compass because of the enormous fees being offered. Billions of dollars go into selling dodgy political regimes." Nevertheless, Borkowski accepts that "PR is a many-headed hydra, from investor relations to corporate social responsibility to publicists" and he acknowledges the "phenomenal work" being done particularly in the charity sector and in issue-based PR.

The great diversity of the industry is something which Elisabeth Lewis-Jones, the current CIPR president, feels is not always appreciated. As the director of the Bromsgrove-based Liquid PR, she has a perspective that extends beyond the capital and points out that half the institute's members work outside of London. Lewis-Jones believes that PR is a growing business, a reason why it is a popular choice of career for graduates. "Most in-house teams are looking to recruit and it's hard to get senior staff at the moment – the industry wouldn't be growing if it had a bad reputation."

The downturn of the economy will not, she believes, undermine a sector that is "incredibly efficient" in delivering value for clients.

Journalists are fewer and less likely to attend press conferences, but are more likely to rely on the support of a PR, says Lewis-Jones, adding that the CIPR runs a continuous professional development scheme as a means of upholding industry standards.

Despite what journalists think, there is more to a PR's job than providing information to the media, and only a tiny fraction of the industry is involved in political communications. "The vast bulk of the 20,000 practitioners are promoting products and services for businesses," says Ian Wright, corporate relations director at the drinks giant Diageo, which has a team of 250 providing corporate relations information for 60 markets.

He argues that the growth of the PR industry has been beneficial to society, enabling organisations to get across their views in "a coherent and well-organised way" so that people can then "make their own judgments about issues that they may be debating".

James Wright is director of corporate social responsibility at Trimedia UK, part of a Europe-wide PR group. "PR has evolved a lot in the last few years. It is becoming more and more important because it's not just about generating media coverage and column inches, it's about generating relationships that will create traction and have an ultimate business benefit. We encourage clients to engage with other organisations that have a beneficial relationship with their business or organisation."

Wright has taken a proactive role in countering the spread within the PR industry of "green-washing" (where unfounded claims are made for a client's environmental credentials) and has drawn up best practice guidelines for the CIPR. "You need to be able to prove what you say in a much more robust way," he says. "It's not about painting the toilet green, it's about fixing the plumbing. It's not just a marketing opportunity, but a chance to change your whole business."

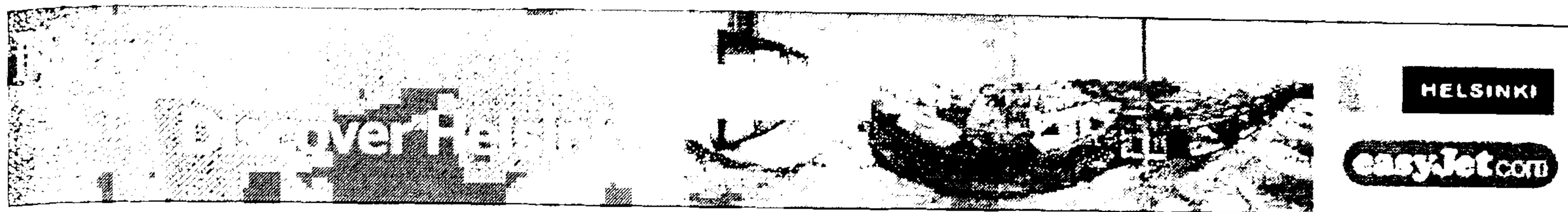
He says that part of the reason why PR is not better regarded is that the public tend to see the industry as publicists who have a role to "generate publicity". One of Britain's best publicists, Alan Edwards, CEO of the Outside Organisation, which numbers Paul McCartney, David Bowie and The Spice Girls among its clients, says his task requires subtlety and tact. "One reason that the PR industry has a hard time proving its worth is that its very existence is a bit ethereal. Its influence is massive but not tangible and many of the greatest practitioners prefer to remain in the shadows. PR can stop wars, bring down governments and establish nonentities as celebrities, and if it's good PR you will never know it."

Edwards says that the modern media landscape means that PR has had to evolve into a 360 degree beast. "The days of publicists sending out meaningless releases are numbered," he says. "The really good publicity companies in the future will contribute much more. Speed of thought, global vision, ideas, management reputation and brand enhancement will all play crucial parts and we will finally see the industry get the credit it deserves."

Those pioneers of the post-war years were onto something, but they could hardly have imagined it would turn out like this.



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THE INDEPENDENT

June 16, 2008

Elisabeth Lewis-Jones: It's time for the industry to claim a little of the limelight

Without doubt, the public relations industry has come a long way. Testament to the industry's progression is its professional body, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.

Celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, the Institute has developed considerably within its lifetime, although perhaps most notably in the last decade. During this time it has grown its membership to over 9,500 individuals working across industry sectors; has approved an increasing number of PR degrees; and has developed and expanded its training courses and professional qualifications nationally and overseas. Only three years ago the Institute achieved Charter status, recognition from Government that it is the professional body to lead the industry.

These achievements demonstrate the success and maturity of the CIPR and the PR profession but, and there is always a but, there is still much to do.

One of the biggest challenges for the industry is the general misconception about what public relations is and does. What it is about is building lasting relationships with different groups via effective two-way communication. In a business setting, it is about helping an organisation achieve certain objectives, but its function is far wider. Tied to freedom of speech, public relations can provide a voice to those who wouldn't necessarily have one – which is why true public relations does not exist anywhere other than in a democracy.

The general lack of knowledge about public relations has a lot to do with the fact that most PR work goes on under peoples' radars. While increasingly media savvy, and quick to spot campaigns with an obvious commercial or political objective, people often fail to see the vast amount of PR work carried out in the charity and public sectors. They might be aware for example of the anti-smoking messages they come into contact with on a daily basis, but not the PR campaign behind these.

That's not to say that there is anything wrong with this. Many practitioners say that public relations and those practising it aren't supposed to be the "story". That said, perhaps it is time that public relations claimed its share of the limelight. Perhaps it is time that all those in the industry championed their good work and the valuable contribution they make to business and peoples' day-to-day lives.

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THE INDEPENDENT

June 16, 2008

Colin Farrington: Relationships and reputations on the line; but no room for spin

Director general, CIPR

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations is delighted to be hosting the World PR Conference and Festival in London next week, bringing together practitioners from across the globe to share ideas. But it is not a task for the faint hearted. To begin with, how can we expect them to agree on anything? After all, there are over 300 definitions of public relations – close to General de Gaulle's "country of 365 cheeses" that made France "ungovernable".

And there are historical differences: PR in Britain and in Europe has a strong public benefit tradition, with the Institute of Public Relations in Britain founded by people with wartime experience, working in local government and organisations such as the Post Office; in the United States there was always a more commercial slant, and a mixture of the philosophies of Barnum's circus and early disciples (and relatives) of Sigmund Freud.

But in all definitions, two ideas hold sway: "reputations" and "relationships". Choosing one to precede the other can make for a heated debate, but whatever order you put them in they interact, they thrive on dialogue and they require constant work.

All the tactics used by public relations people in support of their clients are fundamentally about relationships and reputation, occasionally for short-term impact but best aimed long-term. A good reputation "bank" and sound relationships with stakeholders, investors, customers and the media, are the fundamentals of a public relations strategy. They are the grails to which all our speakers will refer, whether promoting city reputation for Turin or Liverpool; advising African nations to operate more confidently on the world stage; ensuring that new media can be used by everyone, or, at the very top of the commercial scale, showing how energy giants such as Gazprom can get messages across in an ever more critical and environmentally conscious world.

All our speakers have good stories to tell, but they will not be heard uncritically. And they will not be talking "spin" or giving lessons on how to be "economical with the truth".

In a globalised economy with a 24-hour media, the demand for public relations knowledge continues to grow. The World Conference and Festival shows just how sophisticated and vibrant our industry is and how it is attracting some of the most able and original people worldwide.

The World PR Conference takes place in London on 23-24 June. For further information and to book, visit www.cipr.co.uk/wprf08 [<http://www.cipr.co.uk/wprf08>]

Appendix 2:

Press release to CIPR members



Researching the daily lives of communication practitioners

Earlier this year, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and Leeds University Business School conducted some research which looked at the scenarios commonly experienced by communications practitioners. The research showed some interesting emerging themes, namely that the scope of the communication role often involves considerably more than is first anticipated and certainly more than senior management teams recognise. Researchers are now looking for organisations interested in taking part in the next phase of the research, which involves working with a communications team made up of 5 or more people within an organisation.

Background to the research

This is a major piece of research in the field of corporate communication and is jointly-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the CIPR, who helped launch the research in April 2006. The research began with an initial study asking practitioners to recall the most common situations they face, how they have acted in each of these situations and their motivations for such actions. The main research builds on this initial study and looks in detail at how communication practitioners make sense of the situations they experience. This is the first study of this kind in the field of corporate communication and has been long awaited by both practitioners and academics.

Research design

The design of the study involves working with a communication department (a team of 5 or more communication practitioners that are grouped together as one unit within their organisational structure) and asks individual team members of the communication department to complete confidential, online diaries for approximately 3 weeks, or for the duration of a small project they are involved in. In practical terms, this would involve individuals writing 2-3 short diary entries each week. The diary entries will form the basis of confidential interviews, which would be conducted at the convenience of the individuals taking part (i.e. over lunch or whenever suits the individual). It would also be useful to observe 1 or 2 project meetings that individuals attend during this short period.

Research outcomes

The research so far has generated a lot of interest, with Anne Gregory, 2004 CIPR President, using the results from the initial study in a presentation about competencies of top communicators to the CIPR Northern Ireland Group. She also plans to include the results in various fora this year, which shows a very practical outcome very early on in the research. The next phase of the research, and the involvement of all participating organisations and their communication teams, therefore has the potential to shape existing training material for in-service and university courses, which the CIPR and Leeds University Business School are keen to develop.

On a more practical level, the research may identify areas of professional development or communication strategy that organisations may find useful. If this is the case, then a team from Leeds University Business School can run some free workshops or training sessions for participating organisations, in return for their valuable contribution to the research.

For more information about participating in the research, please email Nilam Ashra at n.ashra05@leeds.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Diary extracts

David, Barksdales

19/9/07 - In Edinburgh. An early start to set up photography of the group CEO with The Sunday Times. Drafted appraisals on each of the team.

It's important that we get strong and positive images of the group CEO taken by The Sunday Times photographer. The pics will accompany the profile of him in the paper ... it could be a big article so he has to look relaxed and confident. The key is to meet the photographer early and go over what he's looking for and the possible set-ups so that the group CEO can walk on and off without too much time being taken. It goes well and is painless all round. I use the opportunity to hand him a copy of the day's paper which carries a very large article based on the interview with one of the director's yesterday. It's a strong result and delivering positive news face-to-face is a positive reinforcement of the service we provide. I then find a quiet room to call the director who had featured in the article to make sure he's seen it and to tell him the group CEO has seen it. I then find a quiet spot to type out an outline of my team's individual appraisals to submit to my boss.

A good photograph can make all the difference to the size of the article that eventually appears. If there's no setting up when your subject arrives then they're more likely to endure 15 minutes of photography in a number of poses. A great pic is a foot in the door on a bigger article which ultimately serves my purpose and that of the business.

It's important that the subject sees you as protecting their image. I often help them adjust collars, pull jackets down at the shoulders, etc. They appreciate why you're doing it. Image is important to them and my role reinforces the trust they put in me.

Sarah, Primecare

This week has been quite interesting. Since I joined the organisation a few months ago it has been obvious there is a bit of resistance from some teams to have PR/communications support - I think because they feel it is not necessary and they can manage. Anyway a new system has been set up where each team has now been allocated a PR officer for them to deal with exclusively. This has been received fairly positively and even where there was initial reluctance, there's been positive feedback. I think it's about breaking down barriers and showing that we're here to support them and can add value to what they do. But it will take several months to convince some people! Anyway, on Wednesday I attended my first meeting with the team I will be supporting. It went quite well and I was fairly positively received but I think that's because they're pleased because they've got a 'senior' comms officer and I've also been doing a bit of ground work in anticipation of this change.

As this was my first meeting I really spent it assessing the dynamics of the team and trying to identify key issues that may be of particular relevance in terms of communications. I contributed in a minor way to update them on some projects and highlight areas that we needed to address immediately (such as web site and intranet).

I think that was the right balance for the first meeting as they become used to my presence and visa versa. Often, as I did in this case, I will pick people off individually either before or after the meeting to follow up on matters and speak to them in a more relaxed and friendlier setting away from a potentially competitive/political team meeting. I think speaking to them on a personal basis is good for building a strong long term relationship and securing mutual support.

Overall the organisation seems confident and there is a lot of support from senior managers. However there are some improvements we need to make and there are some teams who feel they don't need our help - which I think is a bit of intellectual snobbery going on! I think because I have not been here long, because I'm 'senior' (although many of the others have much more experience of this organisation than I do) and have come from an

experienced background I'm maybe being treated with more respect than some other people in the comms team.

Ralph, Elco

I have joined the corporate communications department of [Elco] on a temporary basis. By temporary, I mean maternity cover so whilst my tenure is fixed in months, I'm not sure how many. To add to the slightly peculiar nature of my position, I haven't been brought in the cover on a like for like basis. [staff], who is on maternity leave, developed the department from scratch having no doubt started as an office of one, there is now an office of 3.5. I get the impression that she has defined the work of this office and fought many battles to get the recognition it needs and deserves. This is clearly evident in the name change of last year where the name of the office changed from media relations to corporate communications. This not only reflects on the changing and wider role of the office and increasing need for a more strategic view to communications planning, it only reflects an internal struggle for recognition. I'm not sure if I can't still detect a consciousness of previous struggles amongst the existing team members. The department seems to be positioned well within the organisation although there are still challenges ahead. I'm just glad I didn't have to go through that transitional phase. I've done it before and it requires perseverance, patience and politics. It is also quite distracting and if one has only a short time with an organisation then focus and objectivity are paramount. I am not here to manage the team but rather to take forward specific projects that involve internal communications, external communications and communications and marketing.

I am to replace the head of department but not as head of department as my arrival coincides with a new deputy chief executive who will assume overall line management responsibilities. I have been brought to carry out specific projects relating to; internal communications, the running of pilot projects for committees to communicate better, helping with the re branding and generally providing back up and fresh perspective to the department.

The team appear to be a bright and levelheaded bunch and I enjoy working with them. I think there was an initial (and wholly natural) uncertainty when I arrived as to how I would fit in and when others in the organisation assumed that I was the new head of corporate comms then I'm sure there were a few qualms. However after the initial few weeks, things seem to settle down. There were fewer qualms from me about my role and getting on with the team. I was more concerned as to how best to carry out these projects and whether I actually could. Fortunately they too were merely initial and natural concerns which soon evaporated.

I am conscious that the department changed its name in the previous year from media office to corporate communications. This helped with three aims: Firstly it reflected the changing role of the department; secondly it recognised a greater need for strategic planning when it came to communication and thirdly it was an internal recognition of the worth of the department. I feel that the department is well placed within the organisation in terms of recognition and respect but I can sense that it has had to battle quite hard to get there. Having been through that process in a previous organisation, I appreciate the perseverance, patience and politics required to achieve that goal. I am conscious that there might still be some scarring on the team and I regard myself as fortunate that I avoided it because being here short-term means that I must have maximum objectivity and clarity of purpose. Next week, the projects...

Appendix 4: Interview extracts

Brian, Barksdales

- Brian Two things there's two things my area needs one is I need a bit more support in the top of the business banking area [hmm] and you know for example what we've had is before teams in the business banking area teams speaking directly with the media without any direction [n laughs] exactly so I went to the two top guys and said look going to put a stop to this so a half hearted email on two occasions was written it didn't come from their email inbox it was put on a website [oh] and they're they're just ignoring it they're totally ignoring it so until they make a stand and say pr is one of the things you don't control [yeah] you don't control everything has to go through corporate affairs [int: yeah] if I don't have that my job's going to be unbelievably difficult unbelievably difficult
- Nilam And how will you get that or you think you're starting to get that now
- Brian I'm pushing on that with [senior managers] but that was my second point my second point was I need to see stronger leadership off of [senior managers] [int: yeah] erm you'll see a couple of my entries in there were about see anything that passes his desk [int: yeah] he'll take it on [hmm] you can't keep doing that you know we're a small team you've got to be brave enough to say no [int: yeah] and there's this inability to say no so everything gets dumped on my desk or dumped on ewan's desk or dumped on carol's desk that's why I think carol in particular feels it [int: hmm] every day something new you can't keep doing that
- Nilam Is this [staff] you're talking about
- Brian It's [staff] [int: yeah] we need strength at the top we don't have that strength at the top [hmm] you know I have had to fight so many battles on my own that I shouldn't have [hmm] that's a big one and David feels it as well and he tries his damndest but what is he to do he doesn't go above him either
- Nilam Yeah yeah difficult yeah I'm not sure how you could even go about
- Brian There's not a lot you can do with that [int: yeah] erm you know you just have to make it very clear that you know it comes back to that back trail I've got a situation at the moment where one of our guys in [department] thought he would speak to [newspaper] insider about the credit crunch [int: hmm] we don't talk about that at the moment we do not talk about that because we are part of [global organisation] [they] have got issues [int: yeah] we just don't he went off and did it on his own now I'm going to be covering my back on that [int: yeah] I'm not taking responsibility when that goes wrong [int: yeah] sorry unless you back and tell every management partner you do that again and you'll get disciplined [int: yeah] I'm not taking responsibility [int: yeah] I'm not putting my reputation on the line
- Nilam And have you had a conversation with [manager] about that
- Brian Oh he knows about it
- Nilam Has it not it hasn't clicked
- Brian There's a big fight on he's not prepared to compromise [hmm]
- Nilam What's his background
- Brian He's more internal comms
- Nilam Is he
- Brian What we do is a real mystery it's a real black art [n laughs] the whole media thing is just a wooooo [black art] in a real feeling that it's not his forte he's got an incredible array range of skills that I don't have [int: hmm] but you need that support for what I want to achieve cos I've got to work with these people day in day out [int: hmm] I'm the one in there saying no my relationship with them is shot to pieces [int: yeah] it needs to come from up above which is you will do what

you're told [int: yeah] and that's not happening and it's getting dangerous the company has ridden it's luck so long something's going to give something's going to go wrong [int: hmm] in the press and we'll be along to mop up all the mess that follows it so

Juliet, Elco

Nilam Yeah erm so by comparison then if cos you say that education and training are really easy to work with erm they're proactive they have tangible things [j: hmm] that kind of you know they think ahead [j: hmm] so how would you then describe the committee and how they how they see communications or any other department for that matter

Juliet I don't know what the education and training committee think of communication but I attended one of their meetings erm quite recently and I think the director of the department invited me along just to see [j laughs] what she had to contend with [int: right yeah - n laughs] and there's a lot of personalities and agendas [int: right] a very agenda driven committee like the individuals are sitting on it because they have a vested interest in education and training [int: yeah] not because they've got education and training you know best interests at their heart erm so I think she did that [j laughs] just to let me see why I wouldn't want to erm and also they were making comments like erm what I attended for was they were about to launch a big consultation er asking as many people as were interested in the future training of [profession] and one of them said but how are we going to tell people about this I mean really didn't understand the very basics and also what are you going to be doing about it other than you know this is your baby as well [int: yeah] you know this is your project you know we just said you can start on a very basic level by talking to people about it and just telling them you know you come across lots of colleagues erm clients you know people every day just mention it to them [int: yeah] there's simple things you can do so and what did you say about other departments [int: yeah] compared to others

Nilam Yeah how do you think other departments then see you cos you said education and training are quite you know you have quite a positive erm I suppose relationship with them [j: ahuh] and they're quite clued up as to communications [j: yeah] I wonder what other departments are like

Juliet I think er it it just depends on the client relations departments which deals with complaints [int: yeah] erm we've done so much work with them over the years that they have we've really got a good working relationship with them as well [int: yeah] and I think that their director has really really come on huge amounts it's almost as if the two departments have grown together [int: yeah] because they've had to erm we've needed to learn a lot more about they way they work and worked closely with them and they've had to rely quite heavily on us [int: yeah] erm so I would say that they're a good department as well other end of the scale I would say the [department] erm would rather never work with us and rather really that we went away and stopped annoying them

Nilam [n laughs] and why is that

Juliet I think they see it as erm it's too difficult it's more work for them every time we turn up it's usually to ask them to do something

Nilam Such as

Juliet Erm write an article or speak to journalists they don't really do that actually

Nilam And that's too you think they think that's too much or

Juliet I think they just see us and go oooff

Nilam Oh right ok [n laughs]

Juliet Here they are they're going to ask us to do more work it's going to be difficult it's not going to be easy erm why should we have to do it [int: yeah] I mean they're different people in that department and some are better than others [int: yeah] but

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the general the general drift is that they just want to get on with their work [int: yeah] and you know we are just pains we're just pains to them

Nilam And how do you handle that then

Juliet Er a lot of swearing [s laughs]

Nilam Do you?

Juliet Well yeah

Nilam In your diary I may add too [both laugh]

Juliet Well a number of things we've been proactive I suppose this year [manager] has tried a number of different things [int: hmm] from meeting the director every week [int: yeah] which didn't work because he's away out and about a lot now working and lobbying and things to us attending the regular workload meeting [int: yeah] which didn't happen cos they kept cancelling the it changing it chopping it it never seemed to happen on the same day [int: yeah] to working with them on a one to one basis [int: yeah] erm they've got a huge number of committees that they look after it's about 50 committees [int: yeah jees] erm and on a one to one basis just erm asking them to let us know what's coming up and what they want to do with it to val and I sat down with them all and erm chatted about you know what what we do and [int: hmm] and how we would like to work with them and what we'd like to do for them and what they needed to do [int: yeah] to work with us [int: yeah] what was required of them and you know I thought it went very well but there's been really very little success out of that [int: yeah] erm and one of the things they talked about was erm they wanted to raise the profile of the department and we said why don't we set up a regular column in the journal, Elco's really keen on that [int: hmm] so we arranged it set it up had a chat with them and the editor and figured out what we were going to do and it was going to be every two months and the first one happened [int: hmm] it was fine and we even got Andy to write it for them [int: hmm] we said look we've got someone on hand who can interview you and write it and then two weeks in two months down the line they missed the deadline they sort of apologised and I said is there something going it no oh right we've forgotten about that is it every two months can't remember what we agreed [n laughs] so I'm like ok let's do it for the next month just finished a very painful process of getting an article written that has involved me, Liz, Neil, Ralph

Helen, Primecare

Helen Erm being asked erm what do I do, different, I mean in a sense I think I maybe said in this as well sometimes it's a bit deskilling [int: hmm] because it takes away from the communication skills that I have and puts me into a position where I'm not skilled I'm not a policy development person [int: yeah] and that's not one of my fortes, I quite enjoy it but it's not something that I'm particularly good at, oh I had to do something last year, I had to do an analysis of a consultation that we'd done, now I'm not an information analyst [n laughs] and I didn't develop the consultation [int: yeah] so I didn't put the questions in they were framed in a way that I wouldn't necessarily have done [int: sure] erm cos I have done a little bit of work on on how preparing questionnaires [yeah] and what have you and analysis but minimal bit of work but that was a role that was given to me in and I couldn't object to it [int: hmm] so when I did the analysis I couldn't object to it because [executives] said I was doing it [int: sure] and I said well I'm not sure that I'm equipped to do this [int: yeah] and then let them know that I wasn't sure I was equipped to do this, so I did it and erm [CEO] hated the report because it was very statistical [int: right] there was some qualitative stuff in it but it was very statistical erm and it was you know 30 percent of respondents said no they didn't support this but they but out of that 30 percent 15 percent qualified it with a statement that said blah erm which [CEO] didn't like [int: yeah] cos it didn't quite give the flavour in the slant she wanted it to so she completely [int: yeah] I mean she made it almost completely qualitative erm and I spent a lot of time doing that but they did say [executives] that I am not used to, that it's not my role to prepare reports like that [int: yeah], they did they did recognise it, but personally I think a statistical report was a more honest reflection

[int: yeah] however I wouldn't have achieved what [CEO] wanted it to achieve so [int: yeah] which was the consensus from her committee erm to agree certain things [int: yeah] so she's she's able to manipulate them in that way and that that you know that's important which points them in the right direction erm but personally I think the statistics are more honest [int: yeah] but then what she does with them is up to her so, but that was an indication of somewhere I couldn't, they wouldn't let me say no, I said I'm not entirely sure I'll be doing this the way you want it to to be done

Nilam But they let you do it anyway

Helen But they let me do it anyway and then said no you're right actually [both laugh] this is how we wanted it to be done, sometimes they'll throw you in at things, throw things at you because there isn't anybody else to do it [int: right], we don't have a policy department

Nilam Yeah you see now you, this is another thing that came out I think you actually said that sometimes it's a dumping er I can't remember how you phrased it er [ni laughs] that

Helen I can't remember either

Nilam Where is it

Helen That does happen [int: yeah] we'll get lumbered with things nobody else knows what to do with them

Nilam Yeah yeah

Helen And I think it's really common

Nilam That was it, they seem to lump irrelevant stuff into comms [h laughs] that was what you said

Helen But I used to get that in my last job [int: yeah] you know I think that's something that is a bit of a theme, oh that comes under public relations we'll throw it in there [n laughs] or communications and [yeah] it's really maybe cos they're not entirely sure how to deal with something or you know there just is no other obvious home for it [int: yeah yeah] sometimes

Nilam Is your, when you look at your job description [h: ahuh] does it bare any resemblance to what you actually do now

Helen Not well [n laughs] some of it, some of it does but I think the role has changed [int: yeah] lets see if I can find it, if I can print it off, I'm sure I've got it here somewhere

Nilam Cos I'm just thinking I mean did, did you ever imagine that you'd be involved in policy work or

Helen Not particularly no [int: no] in a sense I should have known because [previoud manager] background is policy [int: right] and I think they were used to her [int: I see] giving a bit of that however I mean not much cos [she], I I speak to [her] she's great she's a friend anyway erm and she says that's why I left

Nilam Right

Helen You know she said I couldn't deal with it anymore and they can be very dismissive erm and she said that's why I left they they make a play of valuing it highly [int: yeah] erm but only on their terms sometimes

Nilam Valuing comms very highly

Helen Yeah and they do, we're a very well respected team don't get me wrong you know we do, the council are very pleased with our work [int: yeah] they always, always commend the work of the team and what we achieve, but sometimes it is about with senior management team, it's about when it suits them [int: yeah] and they'll listen to your advice and or you give your advisory role and certainly the strategic processes

Appendix 5: Papers and conferences

Ashra, N. (2008) *Inside stories: Understanding the daily lives of communication practitioners through discourse*. Paper presented at the Radical PR conference, Stirling, June 2008.

Ashra, N. (2007) *The sensemaking and enactment of two corporate communication teams in the public and private sector*. **Awarded Best Paper:** Foresight and Organisational Becoming Track, British Academy of Management Conference, Warwick, September, 2007.

Ashra, N. (2007) *The actions and motivations of communication practitioners*.
Revise and re-submit, Journal of Communication Management.

Ashra, N. (2007) *The actions and motivations of communication practitioners*. Paper presented at the CIPR academic conference, London, July 2007

Ashra, N. and Cornelissen, J. (2007) *Making sense of events in the daily lives of communication practitioners*. Paper presented at the Reputation Institute Conference, Oslo, May 2007.

Reviewed paper for Communication, Culture and Critique (forthcoming)

Attended International Communication Association Conference, Montreal, May 2008.

Attended and presented at EURPERA Doctoral Post-Conference, Roskilde University, Denmark, October 2007.

Attended BledCom conference, Bled, July, 2007.

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THE
INDEPENDENT

June 16, 2008

The end of the spin cycle? Why the PR industry wants a change of image

There is a certain symmetry, and some would say an irony, in the fact that the inaugural gathering of Britain's public relations industry took place at the St Bride's Institute, which is not just in Fleet Street but is, even today, the home of the London Press Club.

Since that initial "exploratory" meeting on 10 February 1948, called to discuss forming a professional association "to serve as a platform for the exchange of ideas and experiences and to foster the interests of the profession generally", PR professionals have spent six decades struggling to get on with journalists.

The relationship has evolved, to a degree that it is now sometimes said that PR holds an upper hand, cynically spinning and distorting the output of hard-pressed news organisations. Others argue that without the support of a new generation of publicity-conscious communications professionals, the modern media, a content-devouring beast that never sleeps, could not survive.

The evolution of the PR industry in the 60 years since the founding of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, is illustrated by the organisations represented by some of those founding fathers – and they were pretty much all men – such as Bill Vint of Hastings Corporation, Kenneth Day of Erith Town Council and Eain Ogilvie of the International Wool Secretariat. Largely the representatives of local authorities, they reflect only a small fraction of the business-driven multi-million pound PR machine of today.

Yet more than half a century on, why is it that a profession dedicated to protecting and enhancing reputations does not itself have a better name and continues to be tarnished with slurs of spin-doctoring? Martin Loat, founder and director of Propeller Communications, is clear where the problem lies. "Journalists exert a lot of control over what gets spoken and written about PR, so if a journalist encounters a poor PR who can't answer a simple inquiry or a combative PR person who won't roll over, the journalist might have a grumble. That happens in any profession, but in this case the grumbles can end up in print. That can harm PR's reputation; but it's a distorted lens."

Loat points out that the businesses and celebrities who hire PRs, not to mention the students eager to enter the industry, suggest that the scorn of certain journalists is not shared by the wider public.

Lionel Zetter, a former president of the CIPR and a specialist in the public affairs sector of PR, is even more robust in his defence. "PR has a reputation, both in the UK and elsewhere, of delivering value," he says. "Very often, when sitting around the table, it will be the PR professional who will come up with the solution to whatever problem the collective body is facing."

Increasingly, he points out, that PR professional is sitting at the boardroom table. "Ten years ago you might have found that the director of communications would not have had a main board position, but nowadays that would be very much the exception. Any company of size or substance that does not have a PR on the board is probably missing a trick."

Yet there are well-known figures in the industry who are prepared to admit PR's shortcomings. "Some of the biggest fees are for laundering the reputations of some of the major companies. We have to hang our head in shame when we look at what some of the big food, tobacco and energy companies are doing globally," says Mark Borkowski of Borkowski PR. "That's an element where a PR can lose their moral compass because of the enormous fees being offered. Billions of dollars go into selling dodgy political regimes." Nevertheless, Borkowski accepts that "PR is a many-headed hydra, from investor relations to corporate social responsibility to publicists" and he acknowledges the "phenomenal work" being done particularly in the charity sector and in issue-based PR.

The great diversity of the industry is something which Elisabeth Lewis-Jones, the current CIPR president, feels is not always appreciated. As the director of the Bromsgrove-based Liquid PR, she has a perspective that extends beyond the capital and points out that half the institute's members work outside of London. Lewis-Jones believes that PR is a growing business, a reason why it is a popular choice of career for graduates. "Most in-house teams are looking to recruit and it's hard to get senior staff at the moment – the industry wouldn't be growing if it had a bad reputation."

The downturn of the economy will not, she believes, undermine a sector that is "incredibly efficient" in delivering value for clients.

Journalists are fewer and less likely to attend press conferences, but are more likely to rely on the support of a PR, says Lewis-Jones, adding that the CIPR runs a continuous professional development scheme as a means of upholding industry standards.

Despite what journalists think, there is more to a PR's job than providing information to the media, and only a tiny fraction of the industry is involved in political communications. "The vast bulk of the 20,000 practitioners are promoting products and services for businesses," says Ian Wright, corporate relations director at the drinks giant Diageo, which has a team of 250 providing corporate relations information for 60 markets.

He argues that the growth of the PR industry has been beneficial to society, enabling organisations to get across their views in "a coherent and well-organised way" so that people can then "make their own judgments about issues that they may be debating".


James Wright is director of corporate social responsibility at Trimedia UK, part of a Europe-wide PR group. "PR has evolved a lot in the last few years. It is becoming more and more important because it's not just about generating media coverage and column inches, it's about generating relationships that will create traction and have an ultimate business benefit. We encourage clients to engage with other organisations that have a beneficial relationship with their business or organisation."

Wright has taken a proactive role in countering the spread within the PR industry of "green-washing" (where unfounded claims are made for a client's environmental credentials) and has drawn up best practice guidelines for the CIPR. "You need to be able to prove what you say in a much more robust way," he says. "It's not about painting the toilet green, it's about fixing the plumbing. It's not just a marketing opportunity, but a chance to change your whole business."

He says that part of the reason why PR is not better regarded is that the public tend to see the industry as publicists who have a role to "generate publicity". One of Britain's best publicists, Alan Edwards, CEO of the Outside Organisation, which numbers Paul McCartney, David Bowie and The Spice Girls among its clients, says his task requires subtlety and tact. "One reason that the PR industry has a hard time proving its worth is that it's very existence is a bit ethereal. It's influence is massive but not tangible and many of the greatest practitioners prefer to remain in the shadows. PR can stop wars, bring down governments and establish nonentities as celebrities, and if it's good PR you will never know it."

Edwards says that the modern media landscape means that PR has had to evolve into a 360 degree beast. "The days of publicists sending out meaningless releases are numbered," he says. "The really good publicity companies in the future will contribute much more. Speed of thought, global vision, ideas, management reputation and brand enhancement will all play crucial parts and we will finally see the industry get the credit it deserves."

Those pioneers of the post-war years were onto something, but they could hardly have imagined it would turn out like this.

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THE INDEPENDENT

June 16, 2008

Elisabeth Lewis-Jones: It's time for the industry to claim a little of the limelight

Without doubt, the public relations industry has come a long way. Testament to the industry's progression is its professional body, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations.


Celebrating its 60th anniversary this year, the Institute has developed considerably within its lifetime, although perhaps most notably in the last decade. During this time it has grown its membership to over 9,500 individuals working across industry sectors; has approved an increasing number of PR degrees; and has developed and expanded its training courses and professional qualifications nationally and overseas. Only three years ago the Institute achieved Charter status, recognition from Government that it is the professional body to lead the industry.

These achievements demonstrate the success and maturity of the CIPR and the PR profession but, and there is always a but, there is still much to do.

One of the biggest challenges for the industry is the general misconception about what public relations is and does. What it is about is building lasting relationships with different groups via effective two-way communication. In a business setting, it is about helping an organisation achieve certain objectives, but its function is far wider. Tied to freedom of speech, public relations can provide a voice to those who wouldn't necessarily have one – which is why true public relations does not exist anywhere other than in a democracy.

The general lack of knowledge about public relations has a lot to do with the fact that most PR work goes on under peoples' radars. While increasingly media savvy, and quick to spot campaigns with an obvious commercial or political objective, people often fail to see the vast amount of PR work carried out in the charity and public sectors. They might be aware for example of the anti-smoking messages they come into contact with on a daily basis, but not the PR campaign behind these.

That's not to say that there is anything wrong with this. Many practitioners say that public relations and those practising it aren't supposed to be the "story". That said, perhaps it is time that public relations claimed its share of the limelight. Perhaps it is time that all those in the industry championed their good work and the valuable contribution they make to business and peoples' day-to-day lives.

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THE INDEPENDENT

June 16, 2008

Colin Farrington: Relationships and reputations on the line; but no room for spin

Director general, CIPR

The Chartered Institute of Public Relations is delighted to be hosting the World PR Conference and Festival in London next week, bringing together practitioners from across the globe to share ideas. But it is not a task for the faint hearted. To begin with, how can we expect them to agree on anything? After all, there are over 300 definitions of public relations – close to General de Gaulle's "country of 365 cheeses" that made France "ungovernable".

And there are historical differences: PR in Britain and in Europe has a strong public benefit tradition, with the Institute of Public Relations in Britain founded by people with wartime experience, working in local government and organisations such as the Post Office; in the United States there was always a more commercial slant, and a mixture of the philosophies of Barnum's circus and early disciples (and relatives) of Sigmund Freud.

But in all definitions, two ideas hold sway: "reputations" and "relationships". Choosing one to precede the other can make for a heated debate, but whatever order you put them in they interact, they thrive on dialogue and they require constant work.

All the tactics used by public relations people in support of their clients are fundamentally about relationships and reputation, occasionally for short-term impact but best aimed long-term. A good reputation "bank" and sound relationships with stakeholders, investors, customers and the media, are the fundamentals of a public relations strategy. They are the grails to which all our speakers will refer, whether promoting city reputation for Turin or Liverpool; advising African nations to operate more confidently on the world stage; ensuring that new media can be used by everyone, or, at the very top of the commercial scale, showing how energy giants such as Gazprom can get messages across in an ever more critical and environmentally conscious world.

All our speakers have good stories to tell, but they will not be heard uncritically. And they will not be talking "spin" or giving lessons on how to be "economical with the truth".

In a globalised economy with a 24-hour media, the demand for public relations knowledge continues to grow. The World Conference and Festival shows just how sophisticated and vibrant our industry is and how it is attracting some of the most able and original people worldwide.

The World PR Conference takes place in London on 23-24 June. For further information and to book, visit www.cipr.co.uk/wprf08 [<http://www.cipr.co.uk/wprf08>]



Researching the daily lives of communication practitioners

Earlier this year, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) and Leeds University Business School conducted some research which looked at the scenarios commonly experienced by communications practitioners. The research showed some interesting emerging themes, namely that the scope of the communication role often involves considerably more than is first anticipated and certainly more than senior management teams recognise. Researchers are now looking for organisations interested in taking part in the next phase of the research, which involves working with a communications team made up of 5 or more people within an organisation.

Background to the research

This is a major piece of research in the field of corporate communication and is jointly-funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) and the CIPR, who helped launch the research in April 2006. The research began with an initial study asking practitioners to recall the most common situations they face, how they have acted in each of these situations and their motivations for such actions. The main research builds on this initial study and looks in detail at how communication practitioners make sense of the situations they experience. This is the first study of this kind in the field of corporate communication and has been long awaited by both practitioners and academics.

Research design

The design of the study involves working with a communication department (a team of 5 or more communication practitioners that are grouped together as one unit within their organisational structure) and asks individual team members of the communication department to complete confidential, online diaries for approximately 3 weeks, or for the duration of a small project they are involved in. In practical terms, this would involve individuals writing 2-3 short diary entries each week. The diary entries will form the basis of confidential interviews, which would be conducted at the convenience of the individuals taking part (i.e. over lunch or whenever suits the individual). It would also be useful to observe 1 or 2 project meetings that individuals attend during this short period.

Research outcomes

The research so far has generated a lot of interest, with Anne Gregory, 2004 CIPR President, using the results from the initial study in a presentation about competencies of top communicators to the CIPR Northern Ireland Group. She also plans to include the results in various fora this year, which shows a very practical outcome very early on in the research. The next phase of the research, and the involvement of all participating organisations and their communication teams, therefore has the potential to shape existing training material for in-service and university courses, which the CIPR and Leeds University Business School are keen to develop.

On a more practical level, the research may identify areas of professional development or communication strategy that organisations may find useful. If this is the case, then a team from Leeds University Business School can run some free workshops or training sessions for participating organisations, in return for their valuable contribution to the research.

For more information about participating in the research, please email Nilam Ashra at n.ashra05@leeds.ac.uk