CORPORATE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY: Getting away from the structured and planned approach to an emergent postmodern approach

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Abstract
Within the views of Newtonian science, and the classical ontology of management, organisations are operated according to deterministic modes. This worldview implies that structures determine the information needed and that perceptions must be managed by feeding the ‘right’ information and withholding information that might lead to disorder and chaos. The formal planned approaches to strategic management have forced managers to be structured when communicating organisational goals and strategic issues. Current public relations theory in terms of management and corporate communication strategy is very much in line with the general strategic management views of structured planning and decision-making.

A more recent approach to corporate communication has developed because of the fact that fast changing environments demand more contingent methods. This has moved organisations to postmodern approaches such as those described through the chaos and complexity theory.

This paper suggests a new approach to corporate communication strategy in line with these postmodern theories. It argues for a more participative approach with high ethical and moral meaning creation through action science and research rather than the structured approaches suggested by current corporate communication theorists. This approach ensures a positive reputation for the organisation through socially responsible change processes that have relational influences into a larger societal community structure.

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Introduction
As a communication consultant and lecturer I am often asked to give advice on how to design a communication management strategy. Students and communication practitioners want a step-by-step guide to follow in order to do a ‘proper’ strategy, which will be accepted by top management structures in organizations. Students are taught how to go through certain carefully designed processes, and they do assignments that are evaluated accordingly. Textbooks show detailed methods of long term strategic planning and they design communication programs derived from strategic management theory (Broom,
Casey, & Ritchey, 1997; Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; D'Aprix, 1996; Ferguson, 1999; Kendall, 1992; Oliver, 2001; Smith, 2002; B Steyn & Puth, 2000). New developments in management theory, as well as in corporate communication theory, have however extended the thoughts surrounding strategic planning, and these new developments are what I will put forward in this paper. Before looking at these new developments I will briefly discuss the traditional approaches to communication management strategy and planning.

**Traditional approaches to strategic management and corporate communication strategy**

The traditional ontology of management science relies very heavily on strategic planning and strategic thinking. Management sees its role within this paradigm as reducing conflict, creating order, controlling chaos and simplifying all the complexities created by the environment. Goals and objectives are set, possible outcomes are predicted and alternatives for action are planned, and these are communicated throughout the organization. The traditional approach to strategic management describes it as a process of analysis where the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the organisation are used to develop the mission, goals and objectives of an organisation (Harrison, 2003:6). Management of tactics to plans and programs that are short-term, adaptive, and reactions to opposing forces whereas strategy would be more continuous and changes are geared toward broader goals and the vision of the organisation.

Structured and planned approaches of strategic management imply fixed patterns, plans and positions that influence the way the organisation is managed and controlled. "For most people, strategy is generally perceived as a plan - a consciously intended course of action that is premeditated and deliberate, with strategies realised as intended" (Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence, & Smith, 2002:51). Strategy and management is constantly referred to as the way to provide a framework for planning and decision-making that control and manage influences from the environment. Although flexibility is mentioned, it is still within the paradigm of a strong foundation and firm position.

The planned approach to strategic management and change is a current overarching paradigm in management literature – especially from the perspective of change and transformation (Genus, 1998). [Examples can be seen in Cummings, 2001 #4; Head, 1997 #14; Burns, 1996 #2; Gouillart, 1995 #11; Ghoshal, 2000 #147; Hill, 2004 #142; Sanchez, 2004 #141;Senior, 1997 #31; and Mintzberg, 1996 #102]. With this approach the importance of strong leadership and strategic management teams are emphasised. This paradigm is tightly linked to strategy and on identifying and managing processes designed to make organisations more successful and competitive (Sanders, 1998). All these processes are focused on providing solutions to help management obtain improved productivity and competitive advantage. Strategic planning makes the results tangible, help control the processes, guide decision-making, and provide security around uncertainties.
Current public relations theory in terms of management and corporate communication strategy is very much in line with the aforementioned general strategic management views of structured planning and decision-making. Public relations literature portray a very traditional view of strategic management and the emphasis is very much on the planning process of campaigns and communication plans – a very tactical and technical view of the communication management process. The strategic process is usually described as well defined steps or stages that follow one another comprising broadly of research (formative and environmental scanning), planning (sometimes called the strategy stage), implementation (or tactics stage) and evaluation (Cutlip et al., 1994; Kendall, 1992; Oliver, 2001; Smith, 2002). The authors referred to are examples of this approach to strategic management.

Steyn and Puth (2000), Grunig and Repper (1992) and White and Dozier (White & Dozier, 1992) call this process ‘communication management planning’ and distinguish it from ‘corporate communication strategy’. Steyn (2000) refers to this difference when she explains that ‘where strategic thinking determines the strategy (i.e. what the organisation should be doing), strategic, long-term and operational planning helps to choose how to get there by programming the strategies, making them operational’ (38). Although she mentions that plans should be linked to strategies, she emphasizes that a strategy is the outcome of strategic thinking, it has external, long-term focus, and it is pro-active.

One of the leading theorists in current views of corporate communication strategy, Benita Steyn (2002) describes the corporate communication process of strategic thinking as ‘senior communicators and top managers taking strategic decisions with regard to the identification and management of, and communication with, strategic stakeholders’ (2002:126). She proposes corporate communication strategy on a functional level where each functional unit of the organisation will contribute to the higher-level strategies associated with strategy implementation. Grunig et al. (2002) explains that the model by Grunig & Repper (1992) has developed to adjust to a more postmodern view where the participation from all management disciplines work amalgamate all their resources to create and implement a strategy. Steyn (2000) suggests that the contribution of the corporate communication function should be the provision of information about stakeholder interests through research. She proposes a model for the development of a corporate communication strategy where a process of steps provides guidelines to follow. The same basic model is also proposed by Ferguson (1999), which suggests an analysis of the internal environment of the organisation in terms of the mission, culture, vision, etc. The most important part is to establish the organisational goals and objectives as the communication strategy should support and flow from these macro-level.

The next step in this proposed strategy is the identification of the strategic stakeholders and publics of the organisation through an environmental analysis (Ferguson, 1999; J. E. Grunig & Repper, 1992; L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; B Steyn & Puth, 2000). This is followed by they ‘issues stage’ where problems are identified that could have an impact on the organisation or the stakeholders. This would then lead to the setting of communication strategies, goals and objectives out of which communication plans are developed. All of these newer and very sophisticated approaches to strategic
communication management emphasize the importance of relationship management as the core principle around which these strategies have to operate.

Grunig and his research colleagues (J. E. Grunig, 1992) refer to the terms ‘manage’ and ‘strategy’ as “thinking ahead or planning rather than manipulation and control” (123) and they describe it as a symmetrical process where the organisation considers its strategic interest and will change its behaviour in order to accommodate stakeholders in its environment. They further describe it as “an approach, design, scheme, or system” (123). This view of strategic management coincides with the strategic management perspective of the organisation as a network of relationships with stakeholders (Harrison, 2003; B Steyn & Puth, 2000), but this view has only emerged in the past two decades together with postmodern approaches to strategic management.

There are a few problems with the above approaches that will be addressed in the following section of the paper with reference to the postmodern approaches of the chaos and complexity applications to strategic communication management. Some of these problems relate to the fact that the above models still followed deterministic, logical, causal, linear ‘steps’ and processes. Apart from the improved model by J. Grunig and Repper (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002), which suggests a more interactive and cyclical approach, the ‘three stages’ still suggest chronological inputs and consequences.

A further issue that will be addressed is the issue of top management strategic decision making, which suggests a top-down approach, and although the necessity of the corporate communication function is emphasized throughout, I want to question the initial assumption that strategy lies with the upper levels in the organisation. If communication managers become part of the decision making process, they become part of the problem. This statement warrants further explanation. In order to explain these statements we need to discuss the basic principles of relevant postmodern approaches.

**Emergent approaches to strategy and management**

Modernist approaches seemed to have seized to contribute to the development of strategic management theory and postmodernism have stripped modernist concepts of its rational objectivity (Chia, 1995; Jackson & Carter, 1992). According to Jackson & Carter (1992:2) many theorists have criticised the body of management knowledge used in industry and training. They describe management theory as distinctly unusual in the sense that it comprises ‘a body of “knowledge,” taught repeatedly, that is widely acknowledged to be deeply flawed, and as not producing the returns promised’ (Jackson & Carter, 1992:2). The integrity and effectiveness of management theory is being questioned on all levels.

From a management perspective postmodernism emerged out of postindustrialism as a way to question and criticise the relevance of business thinking during the Industrial Age (Sherman & Schultz, 1998). The whole thinking paradigm shifted from a mechanistic view to a more organic worldview of science, management, and basic thinking methodologies. Organizations are now viewed as organisms submitting to natural laws of
evolution, transformation, and process. Kreiner (1992:38) says that in postmodernism the frames of reference of management and organizational theory is blurred because of the improbability to identify a common theoretical paradigm, i.e. it is difficult to distinguish basic assumptions with well-defined methodological borders. The use of scientific methods to create and understand organizational epistemology is ignored and even popular literature on organizational experience is accepted as valid depictions of reality.

The chaos theory and the complexity theory are relevant postmodern approaches that contribute to emergent views of management philosophies and application. Chaos and complexity theory both accentuate the importance of interaction, relationships and self-regulation – concepts that will be explored in more depth in this discussion relevant to communication management and strategic management in organizations.

Postmodernism

Postmodernism spreads over different fields of study and domains and it offers a reconceptualisation of how we view the world around us (Chia, 1995:579; Cova, 1996:16). Postmodernism underwrites a worldview that relies on constructivism where knowledge is created through the process of interaction making communication central to the social construction of truth and reality (Littlejohn, 1992:32). Although there can be no unified postmodern theory or collective set of approaches to mark postmodernism (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997:455), it is possible to say that there are countervailing trends of postmodernism. The more academic definition of postmodernism is: ‘incredulity towards meta-narratives’ (Cilliers, 1998:114) compared to modernism, which implies an appeal to meta-narratives. In organizational terms this implies that organizations would challenge what it traditionally holds as sacrosanct, such as its culture, legends, its strategic intent, how it creates meaning – its meta-narratives (Kreiner, 1992:37; Sherman & Schultz, 1998:28).

Post modernism is termed as a response to the failure or natural consequence of the shortcomings of modernism therewith also implying an underlying questioning of the rationality of the scientific approach to strategic management theory (Chia, 1995; Cova, 1996; Jackson & Carter, 1992). Singh and Singh (2002) goes as far as saying that postmodern approaches provide explanations of why strategic planning will not work and that these approaches throws strategic planning out the window. Cova describes postmodernism as the integration of new models into a ‘generic perspective on life and human condition’ (1996:15) and an epochal swing from modernity, breaking free from functionality and rational thinking. These authors state that postmodernism rejects epistemological postulations, contends methodologies, refutes accepted theories, and contrasts the modernist realities in almost every sense.

It is important to mention though that postmodernism is inexplicably connected to modernism in that postmodernism is the modern in an embryonic state. It can only be articulated through the modern while the modern can only be expressed as a passing image of the postmodern (Chia, 1995; Cilliers, 1998; Cova, 1996). This also applies to strategic management theory and all the comments on the applications of chaos and complexity to strategic corporate communication expressed in this paper should be seen
against the background of modernist strategic planning. This paper does not argue to
discard strategic planning altogether. Instead it appeals for it to be less positivistic,
controlled, linear and planned, and for it to be more flexible, emotional, and
understanding.

Chaos and complexity theory are both postmodern approaches. Similarities between
postmodernism and the chaos and complexity theories are:

- View of the organization is organic and flexible;
- Structure and linearity is considered impossible because of the unpredictability of the
  environment;
- Diversity is a common feature and conformity is criticized;
- Change and transformation is inevitable and is uncontrolled;
- Relationships are essential and are the crux of all interactions;
- Conflict is natural and necessary. It is seen as growth and creativity;
- Perspectives, ideas, and views are contradictory and irrational;
- Knowledge is a process of learning and is not linear. It is borne out of discourse and
debate;
- Systems should not regulate people or values. The concepts of self-regulation
  through interaction and relationships apply.

According to Cilliers (1998:113) postmodernism has an implicit sensitivity to complexity
and it acknowledges the importance of philosophical perspectives such as self-
organization and connectionism – important attributes that influence the way chaos and
complexity theories are approached and that are relevant to this paper.

Postmodernist views of organizations

Chia (1995) further distinguishes between modernist and postmodern thinking in terms of
organizational studies when he describes modernism as a style of thought that sees
organizations as 'isolatable real entities or attributes which can be systematically
described and explained and, therefore, meaningfully compared' (1995:583). He argues
that even when modernist talk about 'process' they are referring to 'static process' where
a process would be discrete, linear, and sequential – exactly what we see in strategic
communication management planning. In contrast postmodernists would refer to
'process' in terms of intricate patterns and networks of interaction and relationships. I
thus question the linear, objective, and positivistic approaches currently presented for
strategic communication management and place emphasis on ambiguity, conflict, debate,
uncertainty, ideology, subjectivity, relativity, diversity, and most importantly on
relationships. Some of these concepts and ideas are coming through a few of the current
literature on strategic communication management (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; B. Steyn,
2002), but not to the fullest extent as suggested by this paper and postmodern public
relations theorists such as Holtzhausen (2000) and Murphy (1996). With the use of
applications from the chaos and complexity theories I challenge the unquestioned
soundness of capitalist practices and make room for humanistic values such as quality of
relationships and fun through creativity and uncertainty.
Postmodernism is characterized by the co-existence of different discourses and paradoxes but with the important distinction of being part of a complex set of relationships and interlinked networks (Cova, 1996; Holtzhausen, 2000). This network of our society fabricates knowledge and results in an explosion of information. The different clusters in the network of society have an organic life of growth, constant interaction, participation, change, and self-organizing processes by which meaning is created. The non-linear relationships in the network of society interact around the competition for resources and boundaries are constantly challenged. In order to create meaning it is necessary for systems to be unstructured and as diverse as possible as diversity creates rich information that can be managed to become knowledge and wisdom.

**Complexity theory – connectionism/relationships and self-regulation**

Complexity refers to the fact that in a system ‘there are more possibilities than can be actualised’ (Cilliers, 1998:viii; Luhmann, 1985:25). Cilliers (1998:viii) distinguishes between ‘complicated’ and ‘complex’ by arguing that a complicated system consists of a huge number of components (such as computers and jets), which can be analysed accurately, whereas in a complex system the interaction between the components of a system and between the system and the environment are so intricate that it is impossible to completely understand the system by simply studying the components thereof. Examples of complex systems are societies, the brain, organizations, and language.

A further important characteristic that makes systems complex is the fact that the relationships and interactions of complex systems shift, change and transform, which makes them even more difficult to study. ‘A complex system is not constituted merely by the sun of its components, but also by the intricate relationships between these components’ (Cilliers, 1998:2). It is not merely a linguistic occurrence, or merely the way we describe systems that make them simple or complex, but complexity results because of the interactions between subsystems.

According to Cilliers (1998:10) the interaction of all the subsystems of a complex system and the role of the relationships formed, as well as the creation of information and knowledge through these interactions, form the basis of the complexity approach. In societal terms this would apply to people in any context and would imply that a person or group of people derive their meaning from the relationships they have with other individuals or groups in their environment. To the people of Africa this principle is deeply ingrained in their culture and they very aptly refer to this concept as ‘Ubuntu’ (Boon, 1998:31; Harrison, 2003). Ubuntu is described through the expression ‘Motho ke Motho ka batho’ (Sotho) or ‘umntu ngumntu ngabantwane’ and means: A person is only a person because of and through other people. Boon (1998) alludes to Ubuntu as not being empirical and says that it does not exist unless ‘there is interaction between people in a community. It manifests through the actions of people... One’s humanity can, therefore, only be defined through interaction with others’ (1996:32). An organization concept of Ubuntu is human interdependence and interconnectivity. This is a true example of complex systems.
'Structure' relates to the internal device developed by a system to receive, encode, change and store information and at the same time the system reacts to such information by some form of output. These internal devices can transform and evolve without the interference of any external creator or some centralised form of internal control. He contends that a system will develop a self-organising process as a result of complex interaction between the environment, the current state of the system, and the history of the system. This self-organising process refers to a 'spontaneous emergence of order and structure' (Cilliers, 1998:89). He further defines self-organization as 'a property of complex systems which enables them to develop or change internal structure spontaneously and adaptively in order to cope with, or manipulate, their environment' (1998:90).

Cova (1996) argues from a postmodern perspective when he refers to the need of individuals in society to have a personal link to the rest of the community and he goes as far as saying that the individual wants to become part of the firm. Building relationships between organizations and publics are becoming the most important function of the practitioner (Ledingham & Brunig, 1997:24). At the same time the borders between the organization and the publics should also be eliminated so that the publics become part of the organization and the creation of meaning (Sherman & Schultz, 1998:169). Another comparison is the movement away from data based segmentation to qualitative and participatory approaches such as action research and ethnography (Holtzhausen, 1999:28).

This same shift is present in public relations where publics want to be active participants in the creation of meaning (two-way symmetrical model) in contrast with being merely told and persuaded by the organization – asymmetric models (J. E. Grunig, 1992; Holtzhausen, 1999:39; Spicer, 1997). According to Cova 'participation is the essence of postmodernity' (1996:22) and while he describes this as ethno-marketing from a marketing perspective, from the viewpoint of public relations ‘ethno-public relations’ should enable practitioners to transfer meaning ascribed to issues from organizations to publics and vice-versa in an atmosphere of trust. Stakeholders and publics want to participate fully in strategy creation and not merely be the recipients of well formulated messages from the top down.

**Chaos theory and chaotic concepts**

The Chaos theory started out with the basic principles of the systems theory and grew into what is summarized by Overman from various definitions by other authors as 'the study of complex, dynamic systems that reveal patterns of order out of seemingly chaotic behaviors...the study of complex, deterministic, non-linear, dynamic systems...so complex and dynamic, in fact, as to appear chaotic (Overman, 1996:487)'.

Chaos is 'the final state in a system's movement away from order' (Wheatley, 1994:122). It can be understood as the state where a system can no longer sustain a stable pattern of behaviour because of an increasingly changing environment and subsequently leads to the system reorganizing itself to adjust to these changes (Dennard, 1996:498). Chaos theory attempts to understand why systems seem to not function in linear, predictable,
conventional ways, but when studied from a distance, display patterns and structures (Murphy, 1996:96). It is a term that can be used to explain a number of both natural and artificial phenomena such as the weather patterns, stock prices, economies, traffic patterns and even biological aspects such as heart arrhythmia (Overman, 1996:487).

The term ‘chaos’ is actually a misnomer because although it seems as if it implicates total disorder and no traceable pattern, chaos is still deterministic and basically Newtonian in that it provides definite answers and methods (Overman, 1996:489). Behind all the order and nonlinearity observed in chaos states lie an order and pattern, and new relationships and structures emerge out of what seems to be incomprehensible and out of control. According to Wheatley (1994:20), ‘there is so much order that our attempts to separate out discrete moments create the appearance of disorder’. If we view chaotic systems over time and from a distance they always demonstrate inherent orderliness (Briggs & Peat, 1989:14; Wheatley, 1994; Youngblood, 1997:47).

Importance of interdependence, participation and relationships
A very important contribution of the chaos approach is the participatory nature of the new approaches to change management. Wheatley (1994) suggests a way out from the non-objective, chaotic and complex world of the new sciences. Traditionally the interpretation of data and information was done by management, which in turn led to filtering, subjectivity, exclusivity, and over-control. She suggests that there is interdependence between different subsystems in an organization (as the extension of the systems theory to the post-modern and complexity theories imply). This interdependence suggests that all the subsystems should take part in the processes of the system. Participation could add to the richness of information, shared responsibility, more trust and transparency and, ultimately, to healthier relationships. This interdependency and participation in turn imply relationships, the sharing in decision making, as well as in the dissemination and interpretation of information throughout the organization.

The process and the building of relationships are vital, and development and maintenance of these relationships are of more importance than the outcomes, players or objects themselves. Meaning is derived from relationships and not from the party in isolation. Because of the interdependency of systems with the environment, relationships actually give meaning to the entities and processes and meaning is not situated within the entities or processes themselves (McDaniel, 1997:24).

Youngblood (1997:247) defined a relationship as the ‘commitment of two or more people to supporting each other in the pursuit of a common goal’. He adds that relationships are not only relevant between people but include all living systems. The key concepts here are commitment, mutual support and common goal. Grunig & Huang (2000) further applied the concepts of control mutuality - which could include mutual support - (joint acceptance of degrees of symmetry), trust, and satisfaction with the relationship to communication management. Relationship building in organizations is an indicator of successful public relations and communication management. The order seated in the holism of systems and subsystems co-create environments and relationships (Dennard, 1996:497). The natural flow and
flexibility of living systems contribute to greater access to information, power levels, new technology and developments that renew and change organizations more effectively (Youngblood, 1997:71).

**Self renewal and the self organising ability of systems from a chaos theory perspective**

According to Jantsch (Dennard, 1996:497) living systems have an ability to 'continuously renew themselves and to regulate this process in such a way that the integrity of their structure is maintained.' While systems change there is an underlying recognisable structure that maintains it. This order is seated in the holism of the system and not in separating different subsystems that co-create environments and relationships.

Overman (1996:488) illustrates the self-organising ability of systems with the use of an example. He equates it to a 'parking lot' after a big game. At first the parking lot is quiet and 'balanced' or in equilibrium. Suddenly, when the game is over everybody tries to leave at once. Now it moves to a state of not being in equilibrium at all. Everybody moves to the exit simultaneously. Strangely, amidst all the chaos, people start forming lines and although it is a totally unpredictable situation, with a lot of frustration and uncertainty, oddly the drivers start organising a system without the help of any traffic controller. This selforganization eventually leads to fewer cars until the whole parking lot is empty.

**Strange attractors**

Disordered systems are driven by what is called a strange attractor. This is a deep structure within any system that is a natural order behind the disorder and this order is taken from an attractor that traces a path in a regular pattern (Evans, 1996:492). Even systems that appear to be totally out of control and unpredictable have underlying deep structures that are termed attractors. 'An attractor is an organizing principle, an inherent shape or state of affairs to which a phenomenon will always tend to return as it evolves, no matter how random each single moment may seem' (Murphy, 1996:98).

Most chaotic systems never go beyond certain boundaries - it is contained within a shape with a 'strange attractor' holding it together (Wheatley, 1994:21). Briggs and Peat (1989) talk about systems being constantly pulled apart and iterated toward change, transformation and disintegration although at the same time there are magnetic powers drawing these systems into order and shapes. '...eventually all orderly systems will feel the wild, seductive pull of the strange chaotic attractor' (Briggs & Peat, 1989:77).

Some authors describe organizational culture as the strange attractor that keep organization from oscillating into total chaos and disintegration (Murphy, 1996:98). Others describe it as purpose and information. Wheatley (1994) described organizations that were in total chaos because of reorganization and buyouts and yet there were employees who created meaning for themselves and carried on working productively: 'Employees were wise enough to sense that personal meaning-making was their only route out of chaos' (Wheatley, 1994:135).
If the often quoted function of communication as ‘the process of creating meaning’ (Spicer, 1997) is taken into consideration, the importance of communication management in organizations as possible strange attractor, is rather obvious.

**Fragmentation and interdependence**

By looking at systems from a holistic perspective, provides the observer with the possibility to identify correspondences or relationships between forms that vary in scale but compare in terms of patterns of successfully greater magnification as well as complexity (Murphy, 1996:100). Each pattern takes on something from the one that preceded it and so builds a history that can be traced over time. These patterns are all interdependent and changes in the one affect the other. The relationships are to many physicists of the quantum world ‘all there is to the reality’ (Wheatley, 1994:32) and they see particles as a set of relationships and interactions. The differences of entities in different relationships make for fluid and flexible systems and also makes predictions and strict lines or boundaries of order impossible (Wheatley, 1994:34).

An important affirmation of the chaos theory is ‘that the stronger the connections between the diversity of elements comprising a system, the more capable the system will be of sustaining itself when far-from-equilibrium’ (Fitzgerald, 1996:29). The ability to change and strategically manage an organization will lie in the challenges of relationship management, and not in changing the structures or functions of individuals (Fitzgerald, 1996). Communication strengthens the connections between entities of a system.

**The ethics of self-organization**

According to Cilliers (1998) ethics is not merely a ‘nicety’ to have values in a system but it is essential for the survival and growth of a system. A flexible system increases its survivability by decentralising control and organising itself to adjust to changes in the environment. It is not a question of ‘good’ or ‘bad’ but a strategy to decrease entropy. He takes on a rather teleological approach and argues that the consequences of unethical behaviour of a system would ultimately have negative consequences for that system and lead to its collapse. The strategy of a system should ultimately aim to be ethical. The question arises as to what it exactly is meant by ‘ethical’ behaviour of a system such as an organization. From a public relations perspective this could mean the building and maintaining of healthy relationships toward harmony in society.

Discourse is an important concept in postmodernism and refers to the use of language in communication by ‘forming structures and conveying meanings’ (Holtzhausen, 1999). Holtzhausen (2000) explains that meaning is not formed through language itself but by the debate or discourse of different points of view as well as in the ways knowledge is structured. Discourse thus creates and structures ideas, beliefs, and ideology extending these to images and semiotics.

Individuals need to have a personal link to the rest of the community to the extent that they want to feel part of the organizations they support and deal with as customers, clients, or any other stakeholders (Cova, 1996). Building relationships between organizations and publics are becoming the most important function of the
communication practitioner (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000). At the same time the borders between the organization and the publics should also be eliminated so that the publics become part of the organization and the creation of meaning – two way symmetrical models (J. E. Grunig & Huang, 2000; Holtzhausen, 2001; Sherman & Schultz, 1998; Spicer, 1997) in contrast with being merely told and persuaded by the organization – asymmetric models, or even pulled into the strategic process through a well designed top management driven strategy (as suggested by most models of strategic corporate communication management). According to Cova 'participation is the essence of postmodernity' (1996:22). Research findings show that a higher degree of participation in organizations will lead to significantly more positive overall relationships between an organization and its internal publics than with lower degrees of participation and planned approaches to strategic management and change (Ströh, 2002). But this participation does not merely suggest interaction with stakeholders, but suggests participation by all stakeholders in the creation of the strategic process itself – a bottom-up approach to strategic management.

Postmodern theorists and corporate communication managers are starting to move away from the models of strategic planning, objective setting and positivistic measurement. New approaches suggest environmental scanning to identify stakeholders that might be affected by organizational actions, building relationships with those stakeholders by involving them in decision-making processes, and thereby affecting the goal achievement and reputation of the organization (L. A. Grunig et al., 2002; Holtzhausen, 2001). Conflict management, discourse and participation are emphasized. Measurement is focused on qualitative methodologies, action research and ethnographic research – a more emic approach as an insider view of organisational problems and issues.

**In conclusion**

Traditional and conventional strategic management approaches are linear in essence, but the unpredictability of business environments are so acute that managers are unable to control the implementation of strategies and strategic plans. Long term planning becomes impractical and impossible (Singh & Singh, 2002:29). The chaos and complexity approaches demonstrate that strategic management should be more about facilitation than management. Corporate communication managers should be more concerned with the building of relationships with stakeholders through the facilitation of participation, than with 'strategic planning' and 'strategic management'. The role of the communication manager should thus not be one of technician, facilitator between management and stakeholders, or internal problem solver, but should be one of organisational activist (Holtzhausen, 2000). They should be involved with the facilitation of conflicts rather than the resolution of conflicts, and they should instigate dynamic instability. Communication managers should create and maintain channels for discourse and they should not manage information but rather open all information systems to allow self-regulation of communication. They should not seek unanimous control and equality but should work toward diversity and different voices in order to keep the system creative and on the edge of chaos. They should not measure – they should try to understand the complexity of the environment and the interaction of all the different components of the organization.
The role of the communication manager should be one of facilitator, but not as part of top management to be perceived as a mouthpiece for management. The facilitator role should be one of negotiation facilitator between conflicting parties, as well as of facilitator of conflict creator through the provision of channels and forums for discourse. The role should be strategic but not as part of the management team, rather as one of outsider/agent and organisational activist (Holtzhausen, 2001). The communication manager should facilitate a climate of constant change, conflict and diversity where the communication management function becomes the 'strange attractor' keeping the organisation from entropy and instilling a culture of 'positive chaos' (Ströh, 1998).

Postmodern communication management should play an important role in empowering marginalized groups by empowering all stakeholders through participation. It should furthermore create dialogue and especially recognize differences and dissensus between the organization and its publics. This ontology recognizes that organisations are not merely units of analysis or physical objects or resources, but consist of complex relationships between the entities that make up an organization. This paper thus argues for a more participative approach with high ethical and moral meaning creation through action science and research rather than structured approaches suggested by current corporate communication theorists. This approach will ensure a positive reputation for the organisation through socially responsible strategy making, which will have relational influences into a larger societal community structure.

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