

53rd Annual Conference of the International Communication Association

“Communication in Borderlands”

May, 23-27, 2003, San Diego, CA, USA

Reflective Communication Management, a Public View on Public Relations

Abstract

Current public relations is commonly defined as relationship building with publics. In this paper we will argue that a feasible managerial concept of public relations needs more indicators than relationships alone to reflect the plural nature of its service to organizations and society, and that this needs to be an empirically based concept. We, therefore, will propose a two-by-two-dimensional definition of organization and communication and derive four basic models of communication management from it. We will propose different indicators for each of the four models. Then we will argue that the four models are not exclusive, but complementary, and that organizations are best advised to use these simultaneously in various combinations, i.e., as strategies. We will argue that this is necessary because all models are positioned at the behavioral level, i.e., on (members of) organizations and their publics. Taken individually, the societal level remains totally neglected. We will argue that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the legitimacy problem of organizations. To address this we will propose a new view of practical public relations called *reflective communication management* that is derived from social sciences rather than behavioral sciences. In this view of communication management the four existing models are combined as strategies.

Reflective Communication Management

A Public View on Public Relations

1. Introduction

The newly published *Handbook of Public Relations* (Heath, 2000a), the widely discussed Ledingham and Bruning reader (2000), the handbook of Cutlip, Center and Broom (2000) that is used worldwide, as well as recent volumes of the public relations journals, show that the academic community currently defines public relations as a management function concerned with relationship building among publics from a symmetrical perspective to build trust, preserve or reduce conflict, and build community. However, "An evening spent at an awards banquet of the Public Relations Society of America or the International Association of Business Communicators gives a much different view of the field," Heath admits (2000b:2). Should we conclude then that most professionals in this field and their clients are unprofessional? Or could it be that this perspective of public relations does not have sufficient empirical force and is, therefore, impossible to establish for practitioners and their clients? If so, academia leaves something to be desired for practice.

In this paper we will argue that a feasible managerial concept of public relations needs more indicators than relationships alone to reflect the plural nature of its service to organizations and society, and that this needs to be an empirically based concept. We, therefore, will propose a two-by-two-dimensional definition of organization and communication and derive four basic models of communication management from it. We will propose different indicators for each of the four models. Then we will argue that the four models are not exclusive, but complementary, and that organizations are best advised to use these simultaneously in various combinations, i.e., as strategies. We will argue that this is necessary because all models are positioned at the behavioral level, i.e., on (members of) organizations and their publics. Taken individually, the societal level remains totally neglected. We will argue that this is a fundamental misunderstanding of the legitimacy problem of organizations. To address this we will propose a new view of practical public relations called *reflective communication management* that is derived from social sciences rather than behavioral sciences. In this view of communication management the four existing models are combined as strategies.

We use the term "communication management" because it seems to be the more common denominator of the field in Europe in both academia and practice (cf. Ruler et al., 2000; Ruler & Vercic, 2002; Vercic et al., 2001), while "public relations" seems to be more common in the USA. We, however, equate it with

public relations (as many other authors do, e.g., Dozier, et al., 1995; Grunig, 1992b; Grunig, et al., 2002; White & Mazur, 1995).

2. Dimensions of communication management

Although communication management is obviously an activity of specialists, we agree with Long & Hazleton Jr (1987), defining it principally as a way to explain and describe how to manage an organization and how to communicate accordingly. Agreeing with Deetz et al. (2001) in his argument on organizational communication as a view of organization, we propose to approach the issue of communication management from a general management point of view. Mintzberg (1973: 54-99) showed that managers are almost always busy communicating: most roles of managers are communication roles, and all roles have communication aspects. Today's "information society" (Castells, 1996) views the communication aspects of these roles as even more important than they were when Mintzberg described them, and it changes the communication strategies in use. Yet, communication and public relations handbooks seldom analyze organizational processes and structures. Managers not only play many communication roles, they also use communication with different intentions, goals, objectives, and consequences, according to their own basic organizational principles. That is, managers have to manage their communications as they have to manage their budgets, etc. Without doubt an organization needs specialists to advise and help management execute its communication management properly. We believe, however, that the demands of the managers on the specialists and the specialists' own expectations of "good" communication management can be derived from their specific views about how to manage an organization and how to communicate accordingly (Dozier et al., 1995; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig, 1992a; see also Ruler, 1996, 1997; Zweekhorst, 2001).

Communication management as a specialty is necessarily intertwined with the communication principles and styles of management, which in turn can be derived from specific organization principles and styles. As there are many definitions of organization, management, and communication, it is impossible to choose a single normative view of communication management without taking into account the related view on organization and management.

Looking over the literature on communication management, we could state that there is one generic principle about communication management: that is, it is *about maximizing, optimizing, or satisfying the process of meaning creation in order to solve managerial problems*. This, however, is accomplished in different ways, guided by different theories. These theories define the different approaches to communication management, as can be found in the literature of the discipline. In a two-dimensional

space, defined by organization and management approaches as well as communication approaches, we identify four models of communication management: informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive.

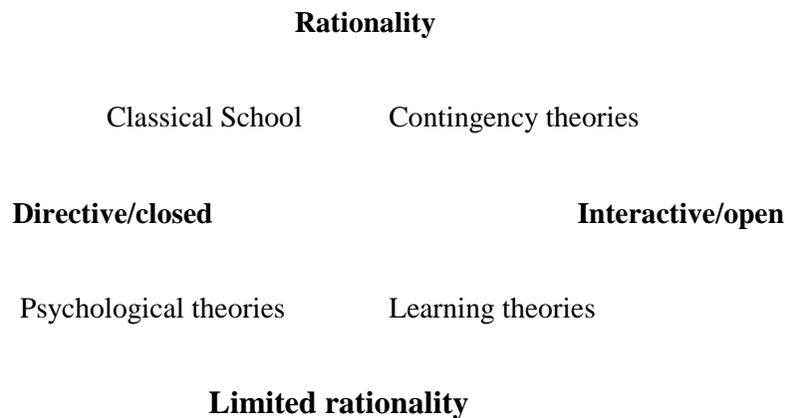
2.1. Approaches to organization and management

Management can be characterized as the process by which organizational work is done (Stoner & Freeman, 1992). Examination of the various schools of organizational and managerial thought uncovers implications for communication management thinking. It is, therefore, important to define what is meant by organization and management before viewing definitions of communication in the context of organization and management. In accordance with Scott (1987), we can organize theories of organization in four clusters arranged around two dimensions: the amount of openness in the management processes (closed/open) and the focus on human nature in organizational decision making (rational/natural). Scott shows that the closed/rational dimension reveals the field of classical theories such as Fayol and Weber. While Taylor concentrated on scientific management, Weber focused on authority structures. The closed/natural dimension is consonant with the field of the human relations school of Mayo and other psychological schools like Lewin and Likert, who focused on individual and group interaction and relations. They considered people (= employees) primarily as emotional creatures rather than rational ones. The open/rational dimension illustrates the field of contingency theories, of which Katz and Kahn and Lawrence and Lorsch are typical exponents. The open/natural dimension covers the entire field of modern network or learning theories on organization such as Morgan, Moss, Kanter, and Weick. These four clusters fit the four clusters Cole (2000) specified in his widely read book on management theories: classical theories, human relations and other psychological schools, systems and contingency approaches, and modern approaches. Although Cole does not explicate these four clusters along the line of theoretical dimensions, the background of these four clusters can easily be found in the focus on how people make decisions and in the amount of openness in management processes.

Regarding the dimension of how people (managers) make decisions, March (1994:iix) asks: "Do decision makers pursue a logic of consequence, making choices among alternatives by evaluating their consequences in terms of prior preferences, or do they pursue a logic of appropriateness, fulfilling identities or roles by recognizing situations and following rules that match appropriate behavior to the situations they encounter?" In other words, is it rational choice by which meaning is logically deduced from "true" facts or an interpretive, limited rational activity through which meaning is constructed? On the other hand, the approaches also reveal whether management is directive or interactive (see e.g., Argyris, 1994), which fits the open/closed dimension of Scott. There is a fundamental distinction in conceptualization of management between control and learning (Argyris & Schön, 1978). Management as control finds its operationalization in managerial intervention as directive intervention, while management as learning is operationalized as interactive intervention. Contemporary management authors

can be differentiated between those who argue that companies need to be "built to perform" and those who argue that companies need to be "built to last" (Collings & Porras, 1998; Foster & Kaplan, 2001). This corresponds to the distinction between shareholder or value management and certain approaches of stakeholder management (Wood, 1991), and with the distinction between "hard management" and "soft management" (London, 2002), which in turn corresponds with "direction" and "interaction" (Argyris, 1994).

Figure 1. Typology of organization and corresponding management theories



2.2. Approaches to communication

A key aspect of human communication is meaning. Meaning can be explained as the "whole way in which we understand, explain, feel about, and react towards a given phenomenon" (Rosengren 2000:59). From this point of view on communication, a crucial question is who's meaning is created by whom, and what does this mean for interpreting the world? From this question we can derive two dimensions of communication: the direction of the communication process and the character of meaning. We will use these two dimensions to structure communication theory.

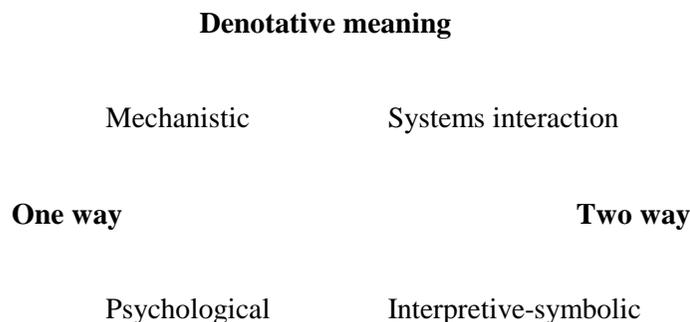
The direction of the communication process is usually operationalized as one-way or two-way, which can be explicated as: is one party active in the communication process or are all parties? Regarding the character of meaning, many theorists differentiate between connotative and denotative meaning by stressing that the connotative meaning steers behavior much more than the denotative meaning does (see e.g., Berlo, 1960; Langer, 1967; Littlejohn 1992; Rosengren, 2000; Thayer, 1987). A denotative meaning of a phenomenon is the dictionary meaning. It is the literal or overt meaning that is shared by most people. The connotative meaning refers to subjective associations. Not all theories stipulate the connotative perspective of meaning, however.

Early theory was focused on communication as a one-way process in which a sender does something to a receiver. When only denotative meaning is involved, transmission of information is enough. The widely cited Information Theory of Communication, developed by Shannon for the Bell Telephone Company to successfully transmit data through communication channels and made public by Shannon and Weaver (1949), is an example of this view of communication. They warned in this publication that this model does not relate to meaning, but only to transmission of data. In the same year Weaver (1949) proposed that this theory could also work as a general theory of human communication, thereby suggesting that meaning can be transmitted; and many agreed with him. Psychologists like Berlo (1960), however, stipulated that meaning is “in the head of people,” thereby focusing on the connotative perspective of meaning. Regarding communication management, this would mean that transmission of information is not enough; change of connotative meaning is the important thing (see e.g., Miller, 1989).

Recent approaches to the concept of communication are much more focused on communication as a fundamental two-way process for creating and exchanging meaning, interactive and participatory at all levels (Servaes, 1999). This can be seen as a paradigmatic change from a sender/receiver orientation to an actor orientation. Again we can find two views of this two-way process. For some the fundamental key to communication is the ongoing process of creation and the revelation of inter-subjective meanings as such (see e.g., Putnam & Panacowski, 1983); for others it is a process that goes further because it creates a shared meaning, i.e., consensus, which can be seen as a new, denotative meaning (Dozier, 1992; Grunig, 1989).

These four fundamentally different approaches to the study of communication fit the well-known four basic perspectives of organizational communication theory: mechanistic, psychological, interpretive-symbolic, and systems interaction (Krone et al, 1987). We will use these labels, structured by the dimensions as developed above.

Figure 2. Typology of organizational communication theories

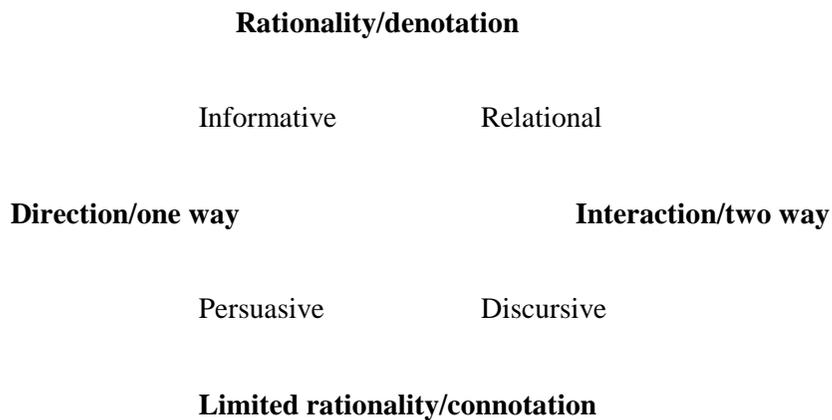


Connotative meaning

2.3. What communication management means

Paraphrasing Peters (1999), to understand communication management is to understand much more than just the two concepts. The basic understanding lies in the combination of the two. Therefore, we should combine these views of communication with the views of organization and management. By doing that, four different theoretical approaches to communication management are discovered: informative, persuasive, relational, and discursive, which are all well-known in literature.

Figure 3. Typology of communication management models



The Information Model

The directive/one-way axis, combined with the rationality/denotative axis, leads to an informational approach to communication management. In this model communication management is seen as steering the dissemination of information about the organization's (read: manager's) plans and decisions. The aim of this dissemination is that uncertainty will be reduced as knowledge is gained. In recent communication management research, this is seen as a rather naïve concept of communication management.

Theoretically, it refers to early theories of how the mass media work, the theoretical field on which communication science is based. A very influential theory has become the famous Lasswell formula, "Who says what to whom with what effect," which in practice is often combined with the Information Theory of Communication of Shannon (and sometimes referred to as the SMCR model, which is originally from Berlo). A key aspect is the transmission; the key problem in this model is noise, which can destroy the signal.

The information model of communication management focuses on the dissemination of information to target groups to inform (enlighten) them about the plans of the organization and the decisions made. Grunig and Hunt (1984:20-21) argued that in the beginning of the eighties about 50% of all organizations in USA practiced a (public) information model. Ledingham & Bruning (2000:xi) assume that at the turn of the century many organizations still held this as their model, while they "seem to perceive that the production and dissemination of communication messages is the answer to every public relations problem." Successful communication management in this approach is "informing the right people at the right time about the plans and decisions of the organization." As most people are not easy to reach directly, the most widely used channels to inform the public are the mass media. Thus, informational communication management is primarily "broadcasting management." The management of the process of meaning creation - as a generic principle of communication management - in this model is restricted to the revelation of the (denotative) meaning of the sender (e.g., organization) to certain target groups.

The Persuasion Model

The directive/one-way axis, combined with the limited rationality/connotative axis, leads to a persuasive approach of communication management. Communication management in this model is seen as a means to promote the organization's plans and decisions to important others. The aim of this promotion is to enable the organization to continue (cf. Bernays; for an overview of his ideas, see Cutlip, 1994). We expect that the increased involvement of social and economic psychology in public relations/corporate communication theory has led this to become a widely used model of communication management since the nineteen-eighties. Theoretically it refers to early theories of rhetoric that were postulated by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who made a very significant, lasting contribution to persuasion research. The key aspect in these theories is the seeking of control (Miller, 1989); key problems in this model are the characteristics of the sender (ethos), the audience (pathos), and the message (logos). The persuasion model of communication management focuses on the persuasion of target groups to accept the organization's view on relevant issues. Grunig (see e.g., 1989) calls this an asymmetrical model of communication management in which only the public has to alter its view. As with the information model, in this persuasion model the organization is the sender and the public is the receiver. But receiving the message (key in the information model) is not enough in this model: the public must also be convinced there is a predefined meaning for the situation. Successful communication management is therefore "convinced publics," or ensuring "a positive image" is held by important target groups. Since it is difficult to convince people, research is thought to be important for discovering what the public will accept and tolerate (Grunig & Hunt, 1984:24), and to develop Common Starting Points (Riel, 1995) or a Sustainable Corporate Story (Riel, 2000). Persuasive communication management is, therefore, primarily impression management. The management of the process of meaning creation is in this model restricted

to luring the (connotative) meanings of certain target groups into the meanings of the sender (i.e., the organization).

The Relationship Model

The interactive/two-way axis, combined with the rationality/denotative axis, leads to a relational approach of communication management. In this model communication management is seen as establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its publics (Ledingham & Bruning, 2000; see also Cutlip et al., 2000). The aim of the relationship is the creation of consensus (which is a new denotative meaning) on important issues to avoid conflict and assure cooperation (Ehling 1992:633). To accomplish this it is important not to focus on communication processes towards publics/target groups, but on communication processes between parties. Theoretically this approach is based on the "balance theories" of communication (see for an overview McQuail & Windahl, 1986). An influential theory in this relationship model has become the co-orientation model of Newcomb, which has been further developed by Broom and Dozier (see Dozier & Ehling, 1992:179). The key aspect of this model is the relationship between A and B, which is related to a communication process about X (something out there). Newcomb (1953) postulated a "strain to symmetry," resulting in a widening of the area of agreement by engaging in communication: where there is balance, each participant will resist change, and where there is imbalance, attempts will be made to restore balance. Key problems in the Broom & Dozier co-orientation model are the agreement of corporate views with the public's views of an issue, as well as the perceived agreement of the corporate estimate of the public's views and the public's estimate of corporate views. Quality communication management seeks for accuracy among all these relationships. It is obvious that in this model the organization, as well as its public, is no longer predefined as merely senders and receivers, but each is seen as an actor. In this approach successful communication management is seen as negotiating with the public for an acceptable meaning of issues, which is a matter of balancing the give and take (Grunig, 1992a). Relational communication management is primarily negotiation management. In this model the management of the process of meaning creation is restricted to the co-creation of a new definition of the situation (consensus), i.e., a new denotative meaning.

The Dialogue Model

The interactive/two-way axis, combined with the limited rationality/connotative axis, leads to a discursive approach of communication management. Communication management is seen as the facilitation of dialogic interaction between organization and its publics (see e.g., Burkart, 1996). Heath (2000b) refers to this process as "enactment of meanings." The aim of these dialogues is the development of learning processes (Deetz et al., 2000:xiii). Deetz et al. discuss the process through which people develop their interpretations of an event. The discussion focuses on how language, stories, and ritual frame or reframe

people's understanding of an event, whereas conversations are useful in creating alternative futures and opening the business to a wider collective learning process (Deetz et al., 2000). Zerfass (1996:31-32) calls these dialogues "arguments in which new meanings develop" (N.B.: note the plural, BvR & DV). The basis of this view of communication management is contemporary rhetorical theory, which explains discourse tactics as what players use to maneuver in communicative interactions. A key aspect of this view is the creation of as many meanings as possible, which is based more on a "battle" of interests than on harmony of interest (unlike the relationship model). Heath (2000b) developed the rhetorical enactment approach of communication management, reasoning "that all of what an organization does and says is a statement. It is a statement that is interpreted idiosyncratically by each market, audience, and public" (p.4). Quality communication management is aimed at finding deliberate and pluralistic solutions for problems. The key perspective of the dialogue model is that by facilitating interactions new meanings are continually created. This is an open-ended model; it is a learning process that never stops. Discursive communication management is, therefore, mainly dialogue management. In this model the process of meaning creation is restricted to the co-creation of ongoing learning processes of people who are related organizationally, i.e., the co-creation of new connotative meanings.

As an overview we compare the four models on the following levels: organization and management theory and managerial intervention; view of organizational communication; problem, indicator, and focus of communication management; and the communication intervention strategy.

Figure 4. The four models compared

<i>Model</i>	information	Persuasion	relationship	dialogue
<i>org&man</i>	classical	human relations	contingency	learning
<i>managerial intervention</i>	directive	Directive	interactive	Interactive
<i>org.communi-cation</i>	mechanical	Psychological	system-interaction	Interpretive
<i>cm problem</i>	knowledge	influence	trust	meanings
<i>cm indicator</i>	readability	image/reputation	relationships	understanding of meanings
<i>cm focus of management</i>	dissemination of info	promotion of plans/decisions	accuracy of relationships	co-creation of new meanings
<i>cm intervention</i>	informational	Persuasive	negotiating	Discursive

2.4. The empirical value of the four models

We believe that all theories of communication management can be subsumed within these four headings, but it is difficult to choose any one model as the "best." No research shows any one model will always

have better results than any other, and we doubt that there will ever be any findings that show this. To paraphrase Weick (1987:106), the question is not: is the model true? All models are true in themselves. The question is: when and where is the model true?

What makes communication management special for managerial tasks is that its focus is on meaning creation by the actors involved to solve managerial problems per se, and it is realized through various strategies. No manager is really concerned about which strategy is used, so long as it supports perceived ways of managerial problem-solving. Although some (European) countries are famous for neo-corporatism and their consensus building approach to societal problems (see Kickert, 1996; Ruler, 2003), it is unrealistic to say that even in these countries management acts only interactively and open-mindedly, and that every-day organizational communication is restricted to dialogue or negotiation. In practice it is difficult to choose between directive or purely interactive management, as Hersey & Blanchard (1993) showed. And it is also unrealistic to choose between certain communication strategies; all managers try to inform and persuade others, and they all engage in dialogues and negotiations (Ruler, 1998). In environments characterized by uncertainty, uniqueness, and value conflict, “an art of problem framing, an art of implementation, and an art of improvisation” are needed (Schön, 1987:13). In such circumstances a normative theory of communication management becomes improbable. We, therefore, believe that these four models can better be seen as strategies that suit solutions to certain problems, with the aim of long-term survival in society.

If we want to perceive these four models as strategies, however, as suitable in certain circumstances, what then is the perspective that determines when these strategies are suitable? For this we need a macro-oriented sociological approach to communication management, which we will develop in the next section of this paper. We call our approach “Reflective Communication Management,” and relate it to the view of people as reflective human beings engaged in a continuous social process of constructing society.

3. A reflective view of communication management

Contemporary theories of communication management mainly focus on management/organization as one actor in the communication management process and the public/target groups/stakeholders/contributors as the other actors. Most of these theories have been developed from a (social-)psychological or rhetorical perspective of communication management, and most perceive a relationship between organization (management) and certain individuals or groups of individuals. Approached from the short-term perspective of managers, the organization needs to survive/expand and needs markets (e.g., members, consumers, etc.) for their ideas/services/products, etc., and it needs supportive groups in its environment.

The main question is, however, why and how individuals might relate to an organization in a way other than as merely customers. A societal perspective can offer a more profound view of communication management, which is necessary for long-term survival. Such a view of communication management is not unusual in Germany and Scandinavia, and it can also be found in The Netherlands - probably because public relations theory in many European countries mainly developed within departments of social sciences. A societal perspective was also the basis for Olasky's alternative exposition of U.S. public relations history, especially in his differentiation between "public" and "private" relations. Referring to the German critical sociologist Habermas, Olasky (1989) claimed that public relations practitioners and academics should approach organizations from a "public" perspective, as they are concerned with phenomena of reflectivity (of organizational behavior) and societal legitimacy.

From a reflective point of view, public relations is not just a phenomenon to be described and defined, or a way of viewing relationships between parties. It is primarily a strategic process of viewing an organization from the "outside," or "public" view. Its primary concerns are an organization's inclusiveness and preservation of the "license to operate" (RSA 1995). As marketing is viewing organization from a market view, the reflective communication management approach is viewing organization from a societal or public view.

In the next part of this paper we will develop steps for a theory of communication management from a contemporary social sciences perspective of organization and communication; we call this Reflective Communication Management. In this view all current models of communication management will have a place as strategies of communicative behavior. If theories can be seen as an instrument for putting reality in focus, then concepts can be viewed as the various lenses that help us bring the world in focus (Zijderveld, 2000). For Reflective Communication Management we will use the lens of organizations as institutions that construct their societal legitimacy in an ongoing reflective communication process.

3.1. Organizations as institutions

In referring to organizational activity, management theory usually focuses on the concept of "organization," while sociologists view an organization more as an "institution." Zijderveld (2000:35) claims that these two concepts are not alternative explanations but dimensions: all organizations are also institutions. "They have, in effect, organizational and institutional dimensions. In other words, the concepts of organization and institution refer to certain sociological facets of socio-cultural reality, not to components or sectors of it." Zijderveld states that it does make a difference whether a university, a corporation, or a union is seen as an organization or an institution. The concept of "organization" focuses on functional rationality, the division of staff and line functions, on formal structures of command, on hierarchies of power, and on ways of decision making. The concept of "institution," however, shows a different kind of reality that can be labeled as value or substantial rationality. Seeing a corporation or an

administration as an “institution,” means there is less concern for careful matching of ends and means and more for definition of the ends to be realized. “The predominance of functional rationality is rather detrimental to the institutional dimensions which are geared towards substantial rationality,” Zijderveld argues (p.95).

The concept of organization is economic and administrative, the concept of institution is sociological. The organizational dimension gives an organization economic legitimacy and trustworthiness. From the perspective of “organization,” the focus is on societal values, but only from the perspective of a functional rationality that is instrumental to economic and administrative reasoning. From the perspective of “institution,” societal values are the bottom line. That is why only the institutional dimension gives an organization societal legitimation and trustworthiness. In most current communication management theories, only the economic dimension of legitimation is in use. The question is does this economic concept suffice? To address this we need to differentiate further between the two dimensions.

Institutions are traditional and collective patterns of behavior, ways of acting, thinking, and feeling. “Social behavior is essential for the survival of human beings, while institutions – as traditional patterns of behavior – ensure, by taking for granted the order and security needed for actions to be successful” (Zijderveld, 2000:16). Zijderveld echoes Gehlen, a German sociologist from the beginning of the last century, who claimed that institutions can be seen as universal, perhaps even biologically determined, competence structures, while institutes are their specific historical and cultural realizations. “When people live together in groups and set out to divide the labor needed in order to survive, basic institutions will emerge” (p.37), and they emerge in certain realities, or institutes, which are the empirical realizations of these patterns within a specific history and culture. For example, a corporation is the realization of the institution “economy,” an administration is the realization of the institution “state.” Institutes come and go, institutions are more lasting; they are ways of acting, thinking, and feeling, realized in historically and culturally-rooted institutes. From this point of view, we can argue that the organizational dimension is an empirical realization of the more fundamental, societally-rooted institutional dimension. For short-term survival the organizational dimension is important, while for long-term survival the institutional dimension is more important.

Institutes are thus creations of human beings, established to survive as social entities. As a consequence they only exist as long as they are seen as meaningful by their society. What a society considers as meaningful (i.e., socially legitimate) is a social construction itself, based in the dynamic structure of the empirical realizations of its institutions.

3.2. Societal legitimation as an organizational constraint

While we use the social sciences to define the concept, legitimacy is neither a moral nor an ethical deontological principle, but is related rather to the empirical issue of what is good and justifiable for (the members of) society. "The legitimacy of an organization is a measure of the extent to which the public and the public sphere at a given time and place find the organization sensible and morally justifiable"(Munck Nielsen, 2001:19). Jensen (1997:228) constructed an empirical model for the societal legitimation of corporations that depends on the construction of economic order. In a liberal economy, corporations are supposed to be economically successful but can act socially innocent. As Friedman (1970) stated: "The social responsibility of business is to increase profit." Consequently, the societal legitimacy of corporations is defined by profitability in their markets. As markets are insufficient for distributing goods according to values and qualitative ends in society, government has to repair market insufficiencies thorough legal regulations. In such cases, societal legitimacy is restricted to companies that are legally responsible and do not break the law. Today, however, corporations are not only confronted with legal regulations, but also with demands by public discourse and non-governmental organizations that transcend the scope of their markets as well as their legal constraints. That is why Jensen foresees "the economically successful, legal and responsible company" as the twenty-first century empirical concept of a profitable organization. In this concept theories of legitimacy must be concerned with legitimacy of power exercised by corporations and non-profit organizations. According to Jensen (2000), communication management, from the liberal economic perspective, is restricted to sales promotion, product information, and publicity. From the legal perspective lobbying is a central focus of communication management. From the public perspective communication management is to be seen as the basic business condition, with public discourse about what is good or bad as the constraint.

Holmström (2000) argued that legitimacy must be seen as a precondition for corporate social acceptance, and that legitimation is the process that establishes collective perceptions of proper behaviors as the natural way of doing things (i.e., the norms and values in societal culture). She foresees a new paradigm for legitimate business conduct, which is no longer secured by the conventional economic growth and profit paradigm, but (also) by a public legitimate paradigm, by societal legitimation. This can also be viewed as a decline in the social predominance of functional rationality and an increased emphasis on substantial rationality (i.e., the institutional dimension of organization).

From this perspective the organizational dimension can now be seen as the economic capital of an organization, and the institutional dimension is its cultural capital.

3.3. Communication as a cultural process

Kückelhaus (1998) describes three approaches to communication management: product oriented, marketing oriented, and societally oriented. She sees the predominance of societally oriented approaches in German public relations theory building, and she believes that this is the only possible approach in the

twenty-first century. The societally oriented approach uses the society at large as unit of analysis, and looks at its social structure and institutions as the basis for quality communication management. This implies that the orientation is not the corporation or organization itself, but its place in society at large (i.e., in the social structure). It is not a bottom-up but a top-down view, or at least it is a macro view of public relations (cf. Signitzer, 1992).

In this respect society at large is seen from the perspective of what the Germans call “*Öffentlichkeit*.” *Öffentlichkeit* does not mean “public” (as in public, audiences, etc.) – it means “public sphere”, and more specifically, “what is potentially known to and can be debated by all” (Hollander, 1988). *Öffentlichkeit* is an outcome, and therefore a quality of public communication in society (Ronneberger & Rühl, 1992). By equating *Öffentlichkeit* with the Anglo-American public relations concept of “public,” an analytic dimension is lost. An essential aspect of public relations is its concern with issues and values that are publicly relevant and publicly debated, which means relating to the “public sphere,” as Jensen (2000) argues. For this we need to see the organization in its institutional dimension.

This line of public relations thinking was developed in Germany, beginning with Oeckl (1976), and in the Netherlands by Van der Meiden (1978). It is also represented in other European countries. These theorists reason that public relations is not only about relations with the public(s), but creates a platform for public debate and, consequently, a public sphere. As Ronneberger and Rühl (1992:58) argue, public relations is to be measured by the quality and quantity of the public sphere, which it co-produces through its activities. Quality and quantity in the public (sphere) relate to “*öffentliche Meinung*” – which can be translated as “public opinion.” This public opinion is, however, not viewed as an aggregate of individual opinions, as conceived in public opinion polling (Price, 1992), which is a psychological approach to public opinion. In the sociological approach it has a qualitative as well as a quantitative dimension. The quality is intended as a benchmark for public relations, as a type of democratic political authority, and is the foundation on which democracy is built (Habermas, 1962). Its quantity is related to such questions as: who is in the debate and who is not?

In this societal approach public relations serves the same kind of (democratic) function as journalism does, as they both contribute to a free flow of information and its meanings and to the development of the public sphere: in size (“How many people are involved in public life?”), in level (“What is the level at which we discuss public matters?”), and in quality (“What are the frames used in the debates?”). This echoes what Carey (1975) called a cultural approach to communication. Theory building in public relations is closely related to journalism in many European countries, not because the practitioners must deal with journalists, but because of these overlapping functions in society.

Ronneberger and Rühl (1992) state that in managing the communications of an organization, management cannot avoid having an empirical function in the development of society. Ronneberger (1977:7) claimed

earlier that clarifying the different perspectives in public discourse is the most important role of public relations, thereby furthering the development of public opinion. Faulstich (1992) sees public relations as interaction in society itself: it makes something publicly known and it creates public discourse. Thus, we may argue that communication management is part of the “social structure of public meanings” through its social construction of community.

In this way communication management is explicitly defined as a function in the larger societal communication system, much as, for example, journalism and advertising are. Most of the German and Danish public relations researchers use such a social science paradigm (see Arlt, 1998).

There is another important facet in current European public relations thinking. For many European scholars public relations produces social reality, and therefore, a certain type of society. In this approach they show an interpretative or constructionist view of reality. Most of them base their thinking on communication management along the constructionist systems theory of the sociologist Luhmann. Some are also inspired by the German sociologist Habermas. As Arlt (1998:36) argues: “From Habermas can be learned what is good and bad in communication; from Luhmann, one can learn what communication is.”

Although some normative elements can be found in these sociological approaches, this view differs from the community building approach developed by Kruckeberg and Starck (1988; see also Starck & Kruckeberg, 2000) and reported by Leeper and Leeper (2000). They defined public relations in a normative way, as the social conscience of an organization that is able to contribute to mutual understanding among groups and institutions and brings harmony to private and public policies. In the European sociological approaches described above, the concept of legitimation is used to describe how an organization, as the exponent of one of the institutions in the social system, co-produces public policies and thereby the empirical realization of institutions. An organization is legitimate as long as there is no public discourse concerning its legitimation. It is therefore a fundamental empirical approach and not a normative one.

The approach to legitimacy, as explained in the above European legitimacy theories, is via the development of society itself, thereby revealing a constructionist view of society.

3.4. Constructionism as paradigm by which social reality develops

In a pre-modern societal setting, values and norms are concrete and fundamental, even if their truths are not necessarily taken for granted (Zijderveld, 2000:91vv). The values are institutionally fixed and are not open to reflection and relativization. In the modern world society is institutionally pluralistic, humanly individualistic, and culturally generalized; that is, things are reversed. This allows for an empirical foundation of a constructionist view of society. Although constructionism is rooted in continental European sociology, it is certainly not a typical European perspective. It was John Dewey who in 1916

argued that society is not only maintained by communication, but also constituted by it (Kückelhaus, 1998:142). Rogers (1994:146) shows in his *History of Communication Study* how the founding father of Social Science in Chicago, Small, developed his faculty into the “Chicago School,” which became famous for its constructionist approach to social science. Although strongly influenced by German thinking, they did not simply copy it. Whereas continental European scholars focused on fundamental thinking and philosophical and rhetorical theory building, US scholars focused on the empirical study of society and thereby were able to develop empirical theories of social life, including the role of communication in it. Nevertheless, the fundamental critical thinking of European scholars at that time was very influential for sociology and communication studies in the US (see Rogers, 1994). It enabled the development of what in 1937 Blumer called "symbolic interaction" (Ritzer, 2000:58) and is now known as constructionism (see Bentele & Rühl, 1993). But as far as we can see it has not yet significantly influenced theories of public relations or communication management.

The start of sociology can be located in the Enlightenment period, where reasoning was seen as a fundamental human activity for the first time. Traditional authority became unacceptable (i.e., “irrational, that is, contrary to human nature and inhibitive of human growth and development”) (Ritzer, 2000:12). Or, as Krippendorf (1994:102) points out: “Social theories must be livable.” The roots of sociology are critical to an unbalanced social structure and authority. Sociology has been based on the idea that human beings create society, and that society in turn creates its institutions, and thereby the reality for the human beings, in a dynamic process. That is where the roots of symbolic interactionism are located, and that is the basis for constructionism.

The idea that reality is not “something out there,” but that human beings construct reality themselves was popularized by one of the most frequently cited works in social sciences, *The Social Construction of Reality*, by Berger and Luckmann (1966). For them reality is a quality pertaining to phenomena we recognize as having a being independent of our own volition: we cannot wish them away. Knowledge is the certainty that phenomena are real and that they possess specific characteristics. The sociology of knowledge is therefore concerned with the analysis of the social construction of reality. Social structure can be seen as an essential element of the reality of everyday life. “At one pole of the continuum are those others with whom I frequently interact in face-to-face situations – my inner circle, as it were. At the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction. Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them.”(p.48).

Languages, as the most important system of vocal signs, builds up semantic fields or zones of meaning that are linguistically circumscribed (cf. Heath, 1994, 2000b). While it is possible to say that man has a

nature, it is more significant to say that man constructs his own nature, or simply, that man produces himself. This self-production is always, and of necessity, a social enterprise, as Berger and Luckmann (1966) argue. Men together produce a human environment, with the totality of its socio-cultural and psychological formations. It may be that a given social order precedes any individual organism's development. But social order is still a human product, or, more precisely, an ongoing human production. By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalizing these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him. Roles represent institutional order. Some of these, however, symbolically represent that order in its totality more than others do. Such roles are of great strategic importance in a society, since they represent not only this or that institution, but the integration of all institutions in a meaningful world. These are the roles that have a special relationship to the legitimating apparatus of society. Historically these roles have most commonly been located in political and religious institutions. This is no longer the case, however; it is said that NGOs and corporations now have more power than politics and religion. According to Berger and Luckmann (1966:110), legitimation (the term is from Weber) as a process is best described as a "second-order" objectivization of meaning. Its function is to make objectively available and subjectively plausible the "first-order" objectivizations that have been institutionalized. It embodies the institutional order by ascribing cognitive validity to its objectivized meanings and justifies them. But in the modern world there is always a rivalry between definitions of reality. Social structure can predict its outcome. That is why, in our view, communication management must be studied from a public point of view.

In communication science, as well as in organization science, symbolic interactionism has recently inspired some scholars to take a constructionist view of reality. German communication scholars have recently introduced a constructivist approach to public relations theory (Bentele, 1997; Bentele & Rühl, 1993). The basic premise of this view is that human beings reflect the other to themselves, and social reality in a dynamic process. Thus, constructing social reality is a shared process of meanings construction (Bentele & Rühl, 1993). In this view reflective interpretation and conceptualization of meanings are at the forefront in a constant process of de- and re-construction (Van Nistelrooij, 2000:275), they are a "reflection." Krippendorff (1994), a constructionist communication scientist, mentions the "recursiveness" of communication: it is an ongoing social process of de- and re-construction of interpretations. That is why Faulstich (1992) and other constructionist public relations scholars state that public relations is not interaction between human beings, but societal action as such.

4. Reflective communication management

The premise that human beings reflect themselves, the other, and social reality in a constant process of de- and re-construction is not new. Mead may have been the first to call the attention of the social sciences to the concept of “reflexivity”.¹ “The general mechanism for the development of the self is reflexivity,” as Ritzer (2000:398) writes, “or the ability to put ourselves unconsciously into others’ places and to act as they act. As a result, people are able to examine themselves as others would examine them. As Mead says: “It is by the means of reflexiveness – the turning back of the experience of the individual upon himself – that the whole social process is thus brought into the experience of the individuals involved in it; it is by such means, which enable the individual to take the attitude of the other toward himself, that the individual is able consciously to adjust himself to that process, and to modify the resultant process in any given social act in terms of his adjustment to it” (Mead, 1934/1962:134, cited by Ritzer, 2000).

The self allows people to take part in their conversations with others. That is, an individual is aware of what he/she is saying, and as a result is able to monitor what is being said and to determine what is going to be said next. But people cannot experience themselves directly. They can do so only indirectly by putting themselves in someone else's place and viewing themselves from that standpoint. The standpoint that a person views him or herself from can be that of a particular individual or the social group as a whole. As Mead puts it, most generally, “It is only by taking the roles of others that we have been able to come back to ourselves” (Mead, 1959:184-185, cited by Ritzer, 2000).” For Mead, thinking is a silent speaking with oneself (Zijderveld, 2000:54).

Reflectivity is the counterpart of causality: it is an ongoing, interactive process and not a discrete, linear one. Along these lines reflectivity must be seen as the core concept of social interaction because it provides a better explanation for what happens than causality does. While human beings reflect themselves in relation to the other and the social group as a whole, their knowing is reflective knowing. Plessman (Zijderveld, 2000) referred to human beings as a double, a homo duplex: a human being has a private as well as a public life and plays all kinds of social roles in life. The concept of reflectivity gives mankind the possibility to develop these roles. Roles are defined by society and in playing certain roles, people develop society.

4.1. Enactment, sense making and framing in communication management

Heath (1994) describes communication management as an enactment process. The meaning managers have of their company, market, environment, customers, themselves, and their jobs affects their job performance. “They enact their jobs as actors enact the scripts in plays”(p.vii). The focal points of

¹ note: like Holmström, we use reflectivity because of the psychological behavioral connotations of the word "reflexivity" (which suggests "reflex"), while here we refer to reflection as a conscious cognitive process

organizational communication analysis is the acts people perform that are meaningful for themselves and others, along with their thoughts about organizing and working, Heath (p.2) argues. At the heart of this analysis is an interest in knowing how people in companies create and enact meaning, a sense-making approach to the study of organizational performance.

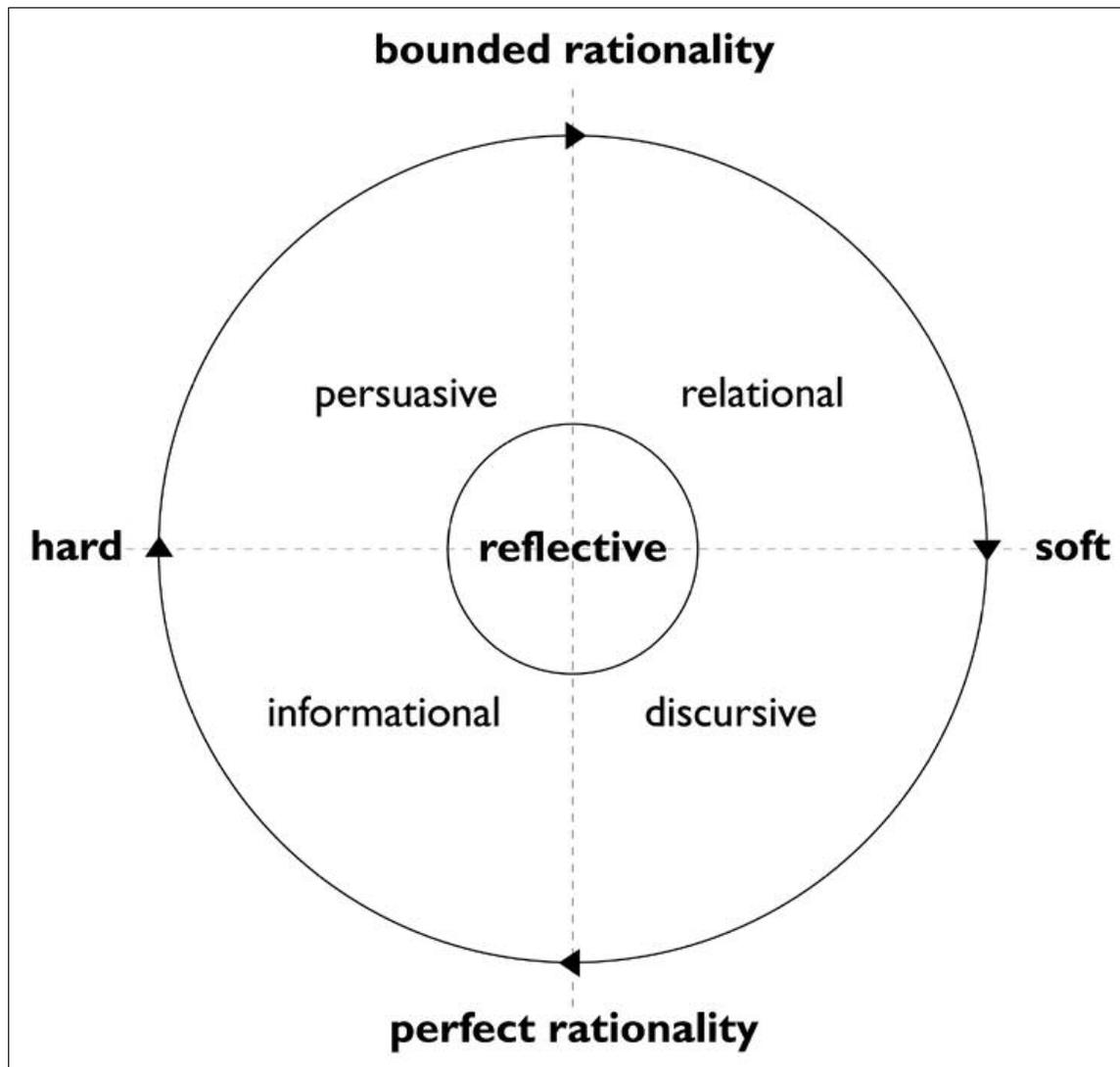
Sense-making involves placing stimuli in some kind of framework. Sense-making can be seen as a thinking process that uses retrospective accounts to explain and redress surprises, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning. "In order to convert a problematic situation to a problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an uncertain situation that initially makes no sense" (Weick 1995:6-7). This problem setting is a process in which, interactively, we name the things to which we will attend and frame the context in which we will attend to them (Schön 1983:40). Sense-making is grounded as much in deduction from well-articulated theories as it is in induction from specific cases of struggle to reduce ambiguity. Sense-making is, however, driven by plausibility rather than accuracy. The concept of organizational sense-making is based in action theory, seen as the propositions people have to guide their behaviors (Weick 1995:21), which refers to the basic Thomas Theorem that "not facts but the interpretation of facts steers people's action." People, and thus also managers, tend to frame situations so that it makes the problem solvable. Managers use all kinds of strategies, including manipulation of frames (read: persuasion). They have to because they must get things done, even if there are conflicting interests. The constraint in this manipulation is public legitimacy, which, because of increased public counteraction, has become increasingly necessary for business to survive. This new, broadened business paradigm requires a larger degree of reflective self-control by management. This leads to what Schön (1983) calls the dilemma of rigor or relevance, which all professionals experience sooner or later. Rigor develops technical rationality, yet depends on internally consistent but normative theories to achieve clearly fixed ends. Relevance develops reflective rationality, focusing on the right solution in the right context. Doubt, therefore, is located more in the situation than in the mind. The task of the professional/manager is to make sense of the situation and construct the appropriate meaning for it. The way to do that is by enacting his or her meanings and reconsidering them. That is reflection-in-action and reflection on the communication-in-action (cf. Schön, 1983).

What is seen as appropriate is not random. "Culture defines which act is appropriate and which is not" (Heath, 1994:5). Culture leads people to share a vocabulary that carves reality into meaningful units. But enactments themselves also develop culture. That is why the process in which organizational work is done - management - itself produces culture. Looking at the institutional dimension of organizations, it is obvious that societal culture defines management and is defined by management as well. That is why framing is basically an interactive cultural process.

4.2. *Aspects of reflective communication management*

What does this all mean for communication management? First, we must differentiate between the societal and the economic/administrative roles each organization plays in its communication management. The economic role is concerned with the meso-(group) and micro-(interpersonal) level of communications among (members of) the organization and between the organization and its publics in order to become legitimate in the eyes of specific publics. The societal role is concerned with the macro level of societal legitimation. In the twenty-first century Western economic order, this macro-level role is the basis for the meso- and micro-level roles. This is presented in the Wheel of Reflective Communication Management, as illustrated in Figure 5.

Figure 5. The Wheel of Reflective Communication Management



Second, it means that we must differentiate between the organization as organization and as institute. The reflective model looks at the organization as an empirical realization of an institution in society. The organizational dimension is subordinate to the institutional dimension when it comes to survival. That is why organizational communication is only a strategy, empirically working in and through the social construction of public identity, for which several perspectives (e.g., mechanical, psychological, systems interaction, interpretative) are necessary. Accordingly, communication management is primarily concerned with its public legitimation, and to get public license to operate, it focuses on public opinion (the public sphere) as a quantity as well as a quality. For this, all four existing models of communication management can be used and all communication management indicators count.

Figure 6. The reflective model of communication management compared to existing models

<i>Model</i>	information	Persuasion	relationship	dialogue	Reflective
<i>org&man</i>	classical	human relations	contingency	learning	institutional
<i>managerial intervention</i>	directive	directive	interactive	interactive	reflection-in-action
<i>org.communi-cation</i>	mechanical	psychological	system interaction	interpretive	depends
<i>cm problem</i>	knowledge	influence	trust	meanings	public legitimation
<i>Cm indicator</i>	readability	image/ reputation	relationships	understanding of meanings	public license to operate
<i>cm focus of management</i>	dissemination of info	promotion of plans/decisions	accuracy of relationships	co-creation of new meanings	public sphere
<i>cm intervention</i>	informational	Persuasive	negotiating	discursive	Depends
<i>task of cm specialist</i>	broadcasting of decisions	engineering cooperation to decisions	controlling decision making	mediating decision making	counseling & coaching on reality construction

Regarded from this public point of view, the generic principle of communication management can become a more specific one: *it is about maximizing, optimizing, or satisfying the process of meaning creation, using informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive interventions to solve managerial problems by co-producing societal (public) legitimation.*

This is not a specialized management function but a function of management per se. The role of the communication management specialist, however, is to advise and coach (the members of) the organization in this process. We will discuss the necessarily changing role of the communication management specialist in the final section of this paper.

4.3. The role of the specialist in communication management (the public relations professional)

Viewing communication management as primarily an organizational approach and therefore as a function of general management does not explain the flourishing industry of communication management as a specialty. In this last section we plan to build a theory of specialist communication management that follows from our approach to communication management as a function of general management.

What distinguishes communication managers from other managers when they sit down at the table is that they contribute special concern for broader societal issues and approaches to problems. Further, they have special concern for the implications of organizational behavior towards and in the public sphere, as well as towards certain stakeholders and target groups. This determines the roles the specialist in communication management can play.

The tasks of the communication manager within an organization, or the consultant who is hired to advise on communication management, can be derived from the four characteristics that were seen as inclusive of communication management by experts on public relations in Europe (see Ruler & Vercic, 2002). The four characteristics are counseling, coaching, conceptualizing, and executing (see Figure 7).

Figure 7. The four roles of reflective communication management as a specialty

- 1. Counseling:** to analyze changing values, norms, and issues in society and discuss these with members of the organization in order to adjust values, norms, and issue-related points of view in the organization. This role is concerned with organizational guidelines, policies, and standards, and aimed at the development of vision/mission, corporate story, and organizational strategies.
- 2. Coaching:** to educate the members of the organization to behave competently in their communications so they can respond to societal demands. This role is concerned with the mentality and behavior of the members of the organization, and aimed at internal public groups.

3. **Conceptualizing:** to develop plans to communicate and maintain relationships with public groups to gain public trust. This role is concerned with commercial and other (internal and external) public groups and with public opinion as a whole. It is aimed at the execution of the organizational mission and strategies.
4. **Executing:** to prepare the means of communication for the organization (and its members) to help the organization formulate its communications. This role is concerned with services and is aimed at the execution of the communication plans.

To see these roles as inclusive in reflective communication management, we can develop the following parameters of the profession: *Communication management as a specialty helps organizations by counseling the deliberations on legitimacy, by coaching its members in the development of their communicative competencies, by conceptualizing communication plans, and by executing communication means, using informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive interventions.*

The reflective approach to communication management regards the counseling role as the fundamental one; the other roles follow from it.

4.4. Conclusion and discussion

In this paper we have argued that to reflect the plural nature of its service to organizations and society, a feasible managerial concept of public relations requires more indicators than only relationships. This led us to develop a two-by-two dimensional definition of organization and management as well as communication. We derived four basic models of communication management from the definition. We argued that these models are not exclusive, but complementary, and that organizations are best advised to use these simultaneously in various combinations, i.e., as strategies. We proposed this because all models operate on the behavioral level, i.e., on (members of) organizations and their publics. If taken individually, the societal level, and consequently, the legitimacy problem of organizations, remains totally neglected. To avoid this we developed the Reflective Communication Management approach, which is related to the view of people as reflective human beings engaged in a continuous social process of constructing society. We also looked at organizations as institutes, thereby focusing on their fundamental rationality in order to develop their societal legitimation. In our approach this legitimation is not based on morality or ethics as a deontological principle, but on the empirical question of what is good and justifiable to (the members of) society. In a pre-modern social setting, values and norms are concrete and felt to be fundamental, even if they are not true in the sense of being taken for granted. In the modern

world values are plural and dynamic. This allows for a constructionist view of society and communication.

In our societal approach of communication management, society at large is the unit of analysis - with the social structure and institutions being the basis for quality communication management. This implies that the point of view is not that of the corporation or organization itself, but the organization's place in society at large (the social structure). Communication management is engaged in constructing society by making sense of situations, creating appropriate meanings out of them, looking for acceptable frameworks and enactments. This Reflective Communication Management approach sees communication management as about maximizing, optimizing, or satisfying the process of meaning creation, using informational, persuasive, relational, and discursive interventions to solve managerial problems by co-producing societal (public) legitimation.

We believe that management needs a reflective view of its communication management to sustain "the license to operate." What communication management specialists offer today, is primarily unreflected execution. It is in the gap between demand and supply that the future of communication management is about to grow. If it does not, there will be no future for management itself.

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