

# Public Relations Roles Carried out by Practitioners in Zambia

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## Abstract

Ordinarily, public relations professionals can be identified as communication managers who organize and integrate communication activities, or as communication technicians who predominantly write and create messages. Studies in this field led to the identification of four specific roles: the technician role and three types of communication managers. This study sought to establish the specific roles public relations practitioners in Zambia are inclined to execute. Qualitative and quantitative research methods were used. Questionnaire surveys and semi-structured interviews were primary data collection techniques used while secondary data was collected using media content analysis. Fifty respondents from Lusaka and along the line of rail in Zambia from organizations consisting of service and manufacturing organizations, central and local government institutions, quasi-government organizations, and government agencies participated in the study. Informal interviews were also conducted with a number of public relations practitioners' sampled using non-probability sampling, purposive sampling and snowball technique. The study established that the technician, manager, and strategist roles are performed and present in Zambia and Public Relations (PRs) managers double between the role of manager and technician with the latter most prominent in the practice much as the line between the two roles is indistinct. There is uncertainty regarding PR practitioners' perspectives regarding their management role in terms of activities carried out.

## Keywords

Zambia, Technician, Manager, PR Roles, Public Relations Practice, Public Relations Perspective

## 1. Introduction

Presently, not much research has been done on PR practice in Zambia. Conse-

quently, little literature is available on the particular topic besides a few unpublished dissertations. This is partly due to Zambia and Africa at large not having been adequately studied by researchers in this field (Taylor, 2001).

Currently, few studies if any have been carried out on the practice of PR in Zambia. Hence, little literature is available and not much discussion has taken place. Neither books nor body of literature on the practice of Public Relations (PRs) in Zambia is readily accessible. Consequently, PR practitioners hardly participate in African and global debates and discussions regarding their discipline. The scarcity of knowledge on the practice impacts the profession, the manner of practice and also on how organisations' top management views the profession and practitioners.

A paper by Smyth (2001) is the closest literature found on PR in Zambia, this paper fills a gap in the documentation of the evolution of PR in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The study demonstrates how the British Colonial Office made use of PR strategies and tactics in the administration of an African colony. Colonial officials in an African colony in conjunction with civil servants at the colonial office in London developed and implemented PR policies, strategies and tactics on an ad hoc basis in response to the need for colonial officials to communicate and manage relations with colonial subjects in an intercultural setting is revealed.

The case study makes it valuable for reading. It focuses on the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), the government's PR practices and tracks three definite phases: before, during and after World War Two, covering political public relations and community development activities and education for citizenship. Although the study is of historical value, it, however, does not describe the current practice of public relations in Zambia.

In 1923, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) came under the administration of the British Colonial Office. During the colonial era, communications were managed by means of print, film and radio. These were the methods of communication that the colonial office employed in its efforts to tackle the challenges that African PR not only faced, but continues to face today, namely illiteracy and the multitude of different languages and dialects.

## 2. Literature Review

The influence and perspective of the colonial British Administration on the practice of PR in Zambia which was born out of the desire to create and manage opinion cannot be ignored.

If PR practice in Zambia is to fulfill its potential as an important managerial and organizational purpose, it is important to gain an understanding of Zambian PR practitioners' roles in their organizations. Broom (1982) conceptualizes four basic PR roles that may be performed by PR practitioners namely: 1) expert prescriber, 2) communication facilitator, 3) problem-solving process facilitator, and 4) communication technician.

## 2.1. The Development of PR Practice in Zambia

Little-known research or discussion has taken place regarding Public Relations (PRs) practice in Zambia. Consequently, not much literature is available on the particular topic. This is partly due to Zambia and Africa at large not having been adequately studied by researchers in this field (Taylor, 2001). A paper by Smyth (2001) is the nearest found on PR in Zambia, this paper fills a gap in the documentation of the evolution of PR in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The study demonstrates how the British Colonial Office made use of PR strategies and tactics in the administration of an African colony. How, colonial officials in an African colony in conjunction with civil servants at the colonial office in London developed and implemented PR policies, strategies and tactics on an ad hoc basis in response to the need for colonial officials to communicate and manage relations with colonial subjects in an intercultural setting is revealed.

The case study makes valuable reading for it focuses on the British colony of Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia), the government PR practices and follows three distinct phases: before, during and after World War Two, covering political public relations as well as community development activities and education for citizenship. Although the study is of historical value it however does not portray the current practice of public relations in Zambia. In 1923, Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia) came under the administration of the British Colonial Office. During the colonial era, communications were managed by means of print, film and radio. These were the methods of communication that the colonial office employed in its efforts to tackle the challenges that African PR not only faced then but continues to face today, namely illiteracy and the multitude of different languages and dialect. The influence and perspective of the colonial British Administration on the practice of PR in Zambia which was born out of the desire to create and manage opinion cannot be ignored.

## 2.2. PR Practitioner's Roles

If PR practice in Zambia is to fulfill its potential as an important managerial and organizational purpose, it is important to gain an understanding of Zambian PR practitioners' roles in their organizations. Organizational roles are theoretical charts condensing the most prominent descriptions of the daily activities of organizational members. Katz and Kahn (1978) took into consideration roles key to the structure of organizations, organizations can be viewed as open systems of interrelated roles. These roles are defined as "recurring actions of an individual, appropriately interrelated with the repetitive activities of others so as to yield a predictable outcome" (Katz & Kahn, 1978: p. 189). Broom (1982) conceptualizes four basic PR roles that may be performed by PR practitioners. These are namely: 1) the expert prescriber, 2) communication facilitator, 3) problem-solving process facilitator, and 4) communication technician.

The communication technician's role commands implementing strategies with the communication tactics of news releases, employee newsletters, position papers,

media placements, Web site content, speeches, blogs, and social media messaging. In this role, practitioners are usually not participate in defining problems and creating solutions, but focus their tactics on the technical skill of writing. The expert prescriber is a specialist on a specific r industry, problem, or form of public relations and is handed the main responsibility to carry out this function as a consultant or with minimal input or participation by other senior management. The communication facilitator is a boundary spanner listening to and brokering information between the organization and its significant publics. [Cutlip et al. \(2006\)](#) posit that the goal of this role is to offer both management and publics the information required to making decisions of mutual interest. The problem-solving facilitator cooperates with other managers to define and solve problems. This role demands that the professional is a part of the dominant coalition of the organization and in addition has access to other senior managers. The practitioner performing this role problem helps other managers think through organizational problems using a public relations viewpoint.

Of the four basic roles above the communication technician is a non-management role while the three earlier mentioned roles (expert prescriber, communication facilitator, and problem-solving process facilitator) are all management roles. [Dozier \(1992\)](#) analyzed both the theoretical idealization of these four roles and the empirical tests used to construct the roles operationally, and encouraged future researchers to use a simpler, two-factor conceptualization. That is, he found it more useful to distinguish simply between managers and technicians: “Managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations programme outcomes,” whereas “technicians carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decisions made by others” (p. 333).

[Dozier and Broom \(2006\)](#) then tested the stability of the two-role conceptualization by comparing results from a 1991 survey sample of practitioners from the PR Society of America (PRSA) to data from a 1979 PRSA survey and other prior research. Using confirmatory factor analysis, they found the two-role factor solution to be consistent over time.

In addition to these two roles, however, [Toth et al. \(1998\)](#) recognized an “agency profile” among a national sample of PRSA members. Toth et al.’s agency role incorporated the tasks of counseling, research, and programming, communicating with clients and co-workers, and handling correspondence with media. The agency role emerged from Toth et al.’s factor analysis as a third factor following the manager and technician factors.

On the other hand, as well as the roles researchers cited here and pointed out, manager and technician roles refer only to the principal functions of a PR practitioner. That is, PR people normally do not function only as managers or only as technicians, but first and foremost as managers or mainly as technicians. Operationally, [Dozier and Broom \(1995\)](#) based the manager-technician distinction on an orthogonal contrast in which factor scores on one role are independent of factor scores on the other.

In theory, organizations with PR practitioners functioning as managers are more likely to practice two-way, open-systems models of PR (Grunig, 1992). One-way models of PR referred to as “press agentry promotion and public information by Grunig and his associates, are more likely to involve the technical tasks of producing and disseminating information with less regard for feedback. Two-way models, on the other hand, necessitate PR practitioners to keep an eye on the environment, interpret feedback, and participate in strategic decisions with management: conceptually, the role (manager) and the functions (two-way asymmetric and symmetric models) go hand in hand” (Dozier, 1992: p. 347). In the light of the various viewpoints and applications of public relations, this dynamic field is directed by the notion that its goal is to influence people’s behavior under the guise of maintaining the appearance, realistic or otherwise, of significant groups and organizations (Monib et al., 2021). The study applied the prudent manager-technician conceptualization to examine media choices based on vertical differences in PR roles.

The roles research has become a closely examined area both in the United States (e.g. Wu & Taylor, 2003). Wu and Taylor (2003) argued that roles research also focuses on the skills and competencies needed by practitioners to move from the ranks of PR technician to a management position.

### 2.3. PR Practitioners Role in Organisations

The conception of “Roles” refers to the daily activities of PR practitioners. Broom (1982: p. 2) says, the function of PR is “gathering, assimilating, interpreting and disseminating intelligence about the environment”. PR roles describe the behavioral patterns of individuals in organizations practicing PR. Roles set individuals to one side and define expectations from the organization’s perspectives. The concept of role is a key to understanding PR (Dozier, 1992: p. 327). Petersen et al. (2002: p. 1) emphasize the necessity to examine PR roles in international settings so as to understand how PR is practiced in a particular country.

According to Van Riel’s (1995: p. 2) contribution of corporate communication to the achievement of organizational goals can be seen as performing the “mirror” and “window” function professionally. The role of a strategist can be conceptualized on the basis of Van Riel’s mirror function. The manager and technician roles are redefined by the study, based on Van Riel’s (1995: p. 2) window function, expanding the latter to the preparation and execution of a communication policy and strategy, culminating in messages that depict all aspects of the organization.

- **The Mirror Function** points to the monitoring of relevant environment developments and the anticipation of their consequences for the organization’s strategies and policies. Large organizations usually gather large amounts of information but are not used in strategy formulation because it is not gathered or interpreted at one collection point (Steyn & Puth, 2000: p. 19).

- **The Window Function** points to the preparation and execution of a corporate communication strategy and policy, resulting in messages that portray all

facets of the organization. The corporate communication practitioner interprets the doctrine, policies, programmes and practices of top management to its stakeholders (Steyn & Puth, 2000: p. 19).

Consequently, the redefined manager role is looked upon as a role at the functional level of the organization. In addition to managing the corporate communication function, its most important activity is to develop a corporate communication strategy for offering direction to the organization's communication with strategic stakeholders and acting as a framework for corporate communication plans. The conventional role of the technician is considered as a role at the micro or implementation level, implementing communication plans and their activities. The strategist is therefore distinguished from the previous two roles in being a strategic role at the top management or macro of the level organization (Van Riel, 1995: p. 4).

In practice, PR roles do not occur simultaneously, i.e. one role is not influenced nor is it caused by the other. An experienced practitioner possibly takes on all these roles to a greater or lesser extent, nevertheless research puts forward that a dominant role will be likely to appear for each practitioner. A professional advancement strategy guidebook was laid out by Druck and Hiebert (1979). The guide book presumed the movement of practitioners from for the most part technical roles at the beginning of their careers into managerial roles as they gained more professional experience. The implication is that individual practitioners who do not advance into management roles are fixed in essentially entry-level work with diminutive value. Based on previous roles research, the following research question was birthed: What roles do Zambian public relations practitioners perform in their organizations? The role referred hereto is the part played by PR practitioners in a particular situation

In the *Excellence Project* (Grunig, 1992; Grunig et al., 2002), the most important forecaster of excellence in public relations was the knowledge base to sanction the strategic manager role and to take on two-way communication with publics. Additionally, the knowledge base was functionalized as an attribute of the public relations department, not individual practitioners.

By way of the multivariate analysis of the factors linked with by and large excellence, Grunig et al. (2002) observed that organizations with excellent public relations also had high know-how in the technical aspects of the practice. Consequently, Dozier and Broom (2006) theorized that know-how to authorize the strategic manager role at department level resulted in successful public relations programs over time. This, consecutively, permitted the public relations department to acquire more resources to develop the technical expertise of the department.

### 3. Methodology

The investigation took the quantitative and qualitative approach to data collection employing both primary and data collection techniques to access first-hand

information and secondary data collection techniques to analyze existing data that included analysis of media content. The approach guaranteed comprehensiveness and thoroughness of research by way of triangulation and thus minimized bias and distortion. Interviews and focus group discussions were used to aid access of in-depth descriptive data. The quantitative approach to data collection allowed the use of figures and numbers to arrive at intended findings. The study was able to focus on facts and figures which were then illustrated through graphs and tables over human behavior.

### 3.1. Sampling

The study sample was a portion of the population targeted to collect information, so as to infer about the larger group. The non-probability sampling procedure was used. Information about the sampled population was to an extent restricted. Specifically, purpose sampling for interviews and snowball technique for the questionnaire was used. At the time there was no register for public relations practitioners in Zambia and the Zambia Public Relations Association (ZAPRA) membership list was not comprehensive enough or conclusive for a number of practitioners were not paid-up Association members thus not listed. Hence respondents were headhunted based on knowledge of where they worked. Fifty respondents from organizations from the capital city Lusaka and from organizations along the line of rail of Zambia, consisting of service and manufacturing organisations, central and local government institutions, quasi government organisations and government agencies were selected to answer the administered questionnaire. Questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were means used to collect primary data. Secondary data was obtained from sources such as the internet, reports, publications and research papers related to public relations. The response rate i.e. returned questionnaires totaled 32 representing a 64% response rate. To solicit additional information open-ended questions and close-ended questions were used. Close-ended questions are more specific, and therefore were more likely to communicate similar meaning and the response could be easily compared as confirmed by Foddy (1993). However, since close-ended questions may also introduce bias as respondents are given alternatives to choose from Open-ended questions helped to avoid bias that may have resulted from suggesting responses for the respondents, and also allowed for individual variation (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). The study employed this approach to questions in an attempt to understand, describe and explore the perspective and practice of PR in Zambia, more especially the roles played by practitioners. In an attempt to establish the roles of PR practitioners as perceived by the practitioners themselves the questionnaire data collection instrument comprised twenty-three questions focusing on the roles. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews allowed participants to get involved and talk about their views. Furthermore, the interviewees were able to discuss their perception and interpretation of their roles as practitioners. The researcher was also able to probe

for views and opinions of the interviewee. Once the data had been collected the processing of the data was done manually.

Following the completion of the data collection exercise, data processing was done manually. The researcher checked for completeness of the questionnaires and accuracy of responses obtained from questionnaires and interviews. Coding of the data followed the exercise of data processing. This involved assigning numerical codes to represent specific responses from the respondents.

The study used qualitative and quantitative tools for data presentation and analysis. In quantitative analysis, argumentation was based on numbers and on systematic, statistical relations between numbers. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS version 11.0) was used to analyse the data. Qualitative analysis on the other hand considered data of the research in totality. The researcher explains all reliable pieces of information known to belong to the issue under study.

### **3.2. Reliability and Validity**

Reliability is the degree to which a test consistently measures what the study set out to investigate in this case the roles public relations practitioners perform in Zambia. The solution to the problem of reliability is to use carefully reporting methodology in gathering data. Reliability was calculated in terms of the number of agreements divided by total number of agreements and disagreements with the most desirable range being 90%. Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient of reliability or consistency. The reliability of the study was proven using Cronbach's alpha and it was established that the instrument used for data collection was 76% reliable.

Validity on the other hand is the degree to which a test measures what it is supposed to measure i.e. to confirm how plausible the data collected. Pike (1967) coined Emic and Etic concepts to explain validity in qualitative research. Emic being the study of behaviour from inside the system, i.e. local concepts, e.g. family, culture etc. while Etic, being the study of behaviour from outside the system i.e. pan-cultural concepts, e.g. circumcision of males.

The researcher was able to study the roles public relations practitioner in Zambia perform from the Emic point of view having been the secretary of ZAPRA for two years and from an Etic point of view by carrying out a questionnaire survey, interviews and content analysis. Validity was tested using the content valid index which is  $=67/69 = 0.97$ . The total number of valid items/total number of items. In this case the total number of valid items was 67. These were divided by total number of items which were 69. Validity was thus established to be 97%.

The study provides insights into the way PR is perceived in Zambia and how it is practiced. This is attained by looking at the roles of PR practitioners. However, due to the sample size of the study it is not conclusive.

## **4. Discussion of Findings**

The following section of the data describes the demographic characteristics of



the population, in terms of age, gender and educational background.

From **Table 1** of demographic results, it is noted that in terms of age the largest group (56.2%) falls under the age group of 30 to 39 while those between 25 to 29 and 50 to 59 recorded 12.5% and those between 40 to 49 and 18 to 25 made up 9.4% respectively. This shows that PR is still a growing profession in Zambia. The lower percentage in terms of those between the ages of 18 to 25 practicing PR confirms the practice to be a new profession. PR not being a stand-alone programme as regards training also implies it is not a first-choice career path and does not guarantee gainful employment for new entrants in employment. Practitioners between the ages of 30 to 39 are those who have diverted from their first-choice career path notably with qualifications in mass communication, journalism and marketing and have taken on public relations as a tool rather than as a profession.

Practitioners whose age ranges between 40 to 49 and 50 to 59 are those born between 1953 and 1973 as shown in **Table 1**. This is a period in which the state controlled the media. News was only reported from the government and the ruling party's perspective, divergent views were absent. In the one-party era media existed to propagate and spread uncritically, government views and policies. The role of the media as seen and understood by the Kaunda regime was to transform society in line with government policy. In this environment PR existed as a propaganda tool and for public information services i.e. one way form of communication.

In a democratic society, PR should facilitate making profoundly uncomfortable conversations more comfortable, posits Spicer (2000). Consequently, the advent of plural politics in 1991 and liberalization of the economy, the change from Kaunda and UNIP to Chiluba and the MMD accelerated the development of PR in Zambia. The change of government style from the autocratic Kaunda days introducing virtually no restrictions about what media could not or publish in turn promoted the development of PR as evidenced by the larger group of practitioners being aged between 30 and 39. The fact that PR is not a stand-alone programme in mass communication at degree as well as at diploma level, PR in its infancy continues to be perceived as a tool rather than an independent discipline. Hence, the lower percentage recorded of practitioners aged between 18 to

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics.

Age of Resp.	18 - 25	25 - 29	30 - 39	40 - 49	50 - 59
%	9.4	12.5	56.2	9.4	12.5
Level of Ed.	Certificate	Diploma	Degree	Masters	
%	3.2	41.9	48.4	6.5	
Gender	%				
Male	40.6				
Female	59.4				

25. PR is not yet perceived as a start point for guaranteed employment but rather as a tool for one qualified in a communication discipline such as journalism or marketing.

The following part provides the results of the questions in section one (1 - 16) and two (1 - 19) of the questionnaires regarding the roles/functions and activities of PR in organisations as perceived and practiced by practitioners in Zambia. The role of PR is shown in the tables below.

The greater part of the respondents as shown by the results above in **Table 2** regarding the role/function and activities of PR at technician level, 78.2% agreed (34.4 strongly agreeing and 43.8 in simple agreement) that their role or function in the organisation as PR practitioners involved keeping a media clipping service. Furthermore, 85.5% agreed (53% strongly agreeing) that part of their work is organising special events such as open house/gala dinners/exhibitions. 75.1% perceived writing articles for the organisation's publication as forming part of the practice while 65.7% also agreed that writing news stories for producing publications and keeping a news clipping file as being an important means of staying abreast with what publics think of the organisation.

**Table 3** shows respondents view and practice in terms of roles performed by the PR department in the organisation. These roles are related to the strategic role/function of PR This forms part of section two of the questionnaire (1 - 19).

**Table 3** specifically describes the respondents' perception and practice of the strategist role in Zambia. The strategist role is a role that has been empirically tested and verified in South Africa. The strategist role was conceptualised by **Steyn (1997)** in South Africa. Steyn draws similarities between the South African role of strategist and the European reflective role as conceptualised by **Holmström (1996)**.

According to **Holmström (1996: pp. 528-529)** the "reflective strategist" role is whereby the PR practitioner acts as an advocate for key stakeholders by explaining their views to management, making management aware of the impact of their behaviour/organisational policies and strategies on key stakeholders and societal

**Table 2.** Role/function and activities of PR technician.

The current function/role of PR in your organisation is...		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
		%	%	%	%	%
Q 2	To keep a media clipping service (articles that appeared in the media about the organisation)	3.1	9.4	9.4	43.8	34.4
Q 5	To organize special events (e.g. open house/gala dinners/exhibitions)	6.3	9.4	-	31.3	53.1
Q 8	To produce audio-visual materials for presentation	6.3	18.8	21.9	34.4	18.8
Q 12	To write articles for the organisation's publications	31	9.4	12.5	31.3	43.8
Q 8	To keep a news clipping file as an important way of staying abreast with what publics think of your organisation	9.4	9.4	15.6	34.4	31.3
Q 21	To write news stories for producing publications	3.1	6.3	25	31.3	34.4

**Table 3.** Role/function of PR practitioner strategist.

Current activity of the PR department in the org is...		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
		%	%	%	%	%
Q 1	Explain to top management the impact of their behaviour (obtained through research) on key external publics (e.g. media, investors, communities, etc.)	9.4	15.2	18.2	30.3	24.2
Q 3	To act as an “early warning system” to top management before issues in society erupt into crisis for the organisation	6.3	9.4	3.1	37.5	43.8
Q 6	To act as an advocate for key internal publics by explaining their views to top management	3.1	6.3	12.5	34.4	43.8
Q 19	To act as a key advocate for key external publics by explaining their views to management	3.1	15.6	9.4	34.4	31.3
Q 18	To express the company’s stance on social responsibility to society in order to gain public trust.	6.3	18.8	3.0	33.3	36.4
Q 16	To explain to top management the impact of organisational behaviour on society	9.4	6.3	18.8	34.4	31.1

interest groups.

Steyn (2009) states that:

“The ‘reflective strategist’ influences management to adapt strategies to societal/stakeholder values, norms and expectations, balancing the quest for the realization of organisational goals with respect for the natural environment (the planet) and its inhabitants (the people). Management is made to understand that public trust is not earned by simply changing outward communication to signify responsibility, an organisation has to behave accordingly, show concern for broader societal issues and values considered publicly relevant, and practice self-restriction to obtain legitimacy and a good reputation, and garner trust. Social responsibility is thus at the core of strategic public relations practice the lens through which to determine the boundaries of acceptable behaviour and the collective interest (Steyn, 2009: pp. 528-529)”.

It is the view of this study that the strategist role is the most highly developed role performed by a PR practitioner. Therefore, the following section seeks to determine the presence of the strategist role in Zambia.

**Table 3** also shows that a little over half of the respondents 54.5% (30.3 agreed, 24.2% strongly agreed) agreed that the role the PR department fulfills are to explain to top management the impact of the organisation’s behaviour on society. 65% also agreed that they explain to top management the impact of their behaviour on key external publics, while 81.3% with 43.8% strongly agreeing that they act as an early warning system to top management before issues in society become crisis for the organisation.

The majority of respondents as illustrated in **Table 3**, 78.2% agreed that they act as advocates for the key internal publics by explaining their views to top man-

agement. In response to PR practitioners' role, as that of expressing the company's stance on social responsibility to society in order to gain public trust 69.7% were in agreement.

In the case of PR practitioners acting the role of advocate for key external publics by explaining their views to top management, it is noted in **Table 3** that 65.7% respondents were in agreement while 18.7% were in disagreement.

It is noted in **Table 4** that the majority of the respondents (81.1%) agree that they initiate dialogue with pressure groups in society while 6.2% disagree and 12.5% were neutral in terms of activities carried out by practitioners. In response to bringing to management's attention any organisational behaviour that erodes public trust 31.3% agree and 37.5% strongly agree. 43.8% strongly agree and 25% agree while 15.6 disagree with 3.1% strongly disagree that they explain the views that exist in the society to management. In response to bringing to top management's attention societal expectations of socially responsible behaviour, 28% of the respondents strongly agree and 50% agree while 12.5% were neutral with 9.4% disagreeing. The high percentage of respondents in agreement implies that the role of strategist is prominent in the practice of PR in Zambia and PR is perceived to be such by practitioners.

From the tabulated results in **Table 5**, it can be seen that the manager's role drew most of the respondents who carried out the second role. 65.6% (37.5 agree and 28.1% strongly agreeing) of the respondents agreed to taking responsibility for the success or failure of PR plans and an equal percentage agree (65.6 with 40.6% agreeing and 25% strongly agreeing) to developing public relations strategy that supports public relations plans and 87.6% manage the implementation of PR plans (with less than half agreeing and strongly disagreeing). Though collectively 68.8% of the respondents agree to monitor the performance of staff in their departments the percentage of those who agree and strongly agree is below 50%. The same applies when it comes to taking responsibility for the success or the failure of public relations strategy. The percentage of respondents who agree is again collectively 68.8%.

**Table 4.** Activities of a strategist.

Current activity of the PR in our organisation is...		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
		%	%	%	%	%
Q 9	Initiate dialogue with pressure groups in society that are limiting the organisation's autonomy (e.g. legislators/environmentalists/consumer advocates)	50	31.1	12.5	3.1	3.1
Q 13	To bring to top management's attention organisational behaviour that erodes public trust	31.3	37.5	18.8	6.3	6.3
Q 11	To explain views/opinions that exist in society to top management	43.8	25	12.5	15.6	3.1
Q 15	To bring to top management's attention societal expectations of socially responsible behaviour	28.1	50	12.5	9.4	-

**Table 5.** Results describing the manager role of PR practice according to Steyn and Puth (2000) as viewed by PR respondents.

The function/role of PR department in organisation		Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
		%	%	%	%	%
Q 4	To take responsibility for the success or failure of PR plans	6.3	12.5	15.6	37.5	28.1
Q 7	To develop PR strategy that support PR plans	6.3	6.3	21.9	40.6	25
Q 10	To manage the implementation of PR plans	-	9.4	3.1	43.8	43.8
Q 14	To take responsibility for the success or failure of PR strategy	6.3	12.5	12.5	37.5	31.3
Q 17	To monitor performance of PR Practitioner's subdivisions	3.1	9.4	18.8	43.8	25

### Summary of Findings

The findings indicate that the roles performed by practitioners are those of technician (78%), manager and strategist. It has also been established that managers double between the role of manager and technician. The technician role is the most prominent. While the strategist role is distinct and prominently practiced (81.1%) as shown in **Table 4**, the line between the role of manager and technician is indistinct.

### 5. Conclusion

The researcher had the opportunity to speak to a number of PR practitioners as part of an informal interview/discussion. The researcher sought to make a connection of whether the practitioners who attempted to carry out activities associated with the manager's role were reporting directly to the CEO, marketing manager or other departments such as that of the human resource. To conclude the researcher's findings, out of the 20 informally spoken to 5 were reporting directly to the CEO or general manager.

It is notable that practitioners' views as regards activities performed by the PR department within the respective organisations, only accumulative totals indicate that 50% were in agreement. Practitioners that agree and strongly agree all fall below the 50% mark respectively (**Table 5**). This may indicate a certain uncertainty in terms of PR practitioners' perspective as regards their management role in terms of activities. This uncertainty could be attributed to PR practitioners in Zambia reporting directly to the Marketing Manager (52%). Although they may recognise PR as a management function, many admitted not carrying out responsibilities that are required of them to be regarded as managers of PR.

Furthermore, one on one interviews with practitioners revealed that although practitioners are known as managers by title in their respective organisations, they do not make decisions even though in the structure of a particular organisation they are considered part of management. They are mostly tasked to implement management decisions. Thus, they do not form part of the dominant coalition in practice but in name only. Van Heerden (2004) and Steyn (2003) note that in Africa PR may exhibit characteristics portraying Western Standards. In Zambia, it is not uncommon for a PR practitioner to double as manager and technician

with the technician role being most prominent and much sought after by employers.

The researcher was privileged to be part of an interview panel, interviewing candidates for the position of public relations manager for the municipal council on behalf of the Local government authority. The researcher observed that out of the ten candidates interviewed only one was able to give a near-correct understanding of PR roles. Ten candidates emphasised and brought out the technical aspect of the practice without mentioning the managerial role of PR. Also, notable was the background of the candidates' training inclusive was journalism.

The results relating to being concerned about society and issues that are coming out and going into it from the organisation and vice versa, suggest PR functions as an intermediary i.e. as a link between the organisation and society so as to arrive at an agreement or reconciliation. Steyn (2003) confirms this when he states that PR should facilitate mutually beneficial dialogue whereby public trust is not broken, so as not to cause the success of the organisation not to decline.

The three PR roles namely: the technician, manager and strategist role as shown by the above results are present in Zambia. The strategist's role stands distinct from that of the manager. However, the line between the roles of manager and technician is blurry. The findings of the study are that a PR manager doubles between the role of manager and technician with the latter most prominent of the two, in the practice in Zambia. Van Heerden's (2004) study brought out similar responses among African practitioners. It was determined that PR managers also performed duties that include writing press releases, organising events and making press appearances together with managing PR strategies for their organisation.

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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