

Running Head: PR LEADERSHIP ATL CDN UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Master of Arts (Communication) Thesis

Public Relations Leadership in the Context of Atlantic Canadian Universities

Cindy Bayers

Department of Communication Studies

Mount Saint Vincent University

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Abstract

While leadership has been a long-studied phenomenon in management and organizational behaviour, it has received little attention in public relations until relatively. Juan Meng and Bruce Berger (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) can be credited with the most recent and comprehensive work on public relations leadership. They conceptualized excellent leadership in public relations and identified the leadership dimensions practitioners should employ to facilitate public relations effectiveness. What remains unknown, however, is a) whether there is agreement between practitioner understanding of public relations leadership and the prescribed definition of excellent leadership in public relations; b) whether practitioners perceive themselves as aligning with the key dimensions; and c) how practitioner role and gender influence this alignment. This qualitative study of public relations practitioners in Atlantic Canadian universities contributes to our understanding on these points.

This study employs the existing principles of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) to increase understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context and expand on development of the excellent leadership in public relations theory.

Overall, how study participants understand and interpret public relations leadership is consistent with the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. Notably extending the integrated model, however, this study found that it is the attributes of a leader in public relations in addition to the communication and public relations work one produces that supports and elevates the quality of the communication team's work; and that public relations leadership boosts the credibility of the profession as well as the organization. Further, this study also suggests that public relations leadership does not allow for informal leaders (i.e., those without formal authority to influence others), because participants indicated that a leader in

public relations must be in a position of authority within the university. This finding is contrary to the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct; Meng & Berger (2013) assert that leadership is not limited to senior levels in organizations and can be found at every level.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This study began earnestly with having an interest in public relations and in leadership. From there, I began studying the literature on leadership in public relations, and quickly realized this area of inquiry is ripe for growth. Leadership has been a long-studied phenomenon and central theme in the literature on management and organizational behaviour (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Berger, Reber & Heyman, 2007; Meng et al., 2012) yet it has received little attention in public relations literature until relatively recently (Meng et al., 2012; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009; Jin 2010; Choi & Choi, 2009). The literature review revealed significant work to develop an excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) but no studies of relevance having been conducted in Canada nor studies on self perception of leadership in public relations. There began the central theme of this study.

With this study, I aimed to expand understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context and contribute to development of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) by employing a qualitative research design guided by a constructivist worldview. I interviewed public relations practitioners in Atlantic Canadian public universities to gain insights into how they understand and interpret their leadership; whether that interpretation and understanding aligns with the excellent leadership in public relations construct, including its definition of excellent leadership in public relations and key dimensions; and how practitioner role and gender may influence leadership.

The Overview

Leadership in Public Relations

Public relations leadership theory has its roots in social science literature where leadership is generally understood to be a process through which individuals influence and affect a population (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Meng et al, 2012). Within organizational behaviour and management literature, it is understood that leaders influence key aspects of an organization including its strategies, culture and performance (Meng & Berger, 2013). Several parallels can be drawn between leadership in the social sciences, organizational behaviour and management literature and the public relations literature. The parallels include the four major approaches to the study of leadership: those studies that focus on 1) defining leadership traits (attributes such as personality, motives, values, skills); 2) outlining leadership behaviours (what leaders do on the job); 3) determining situational and organizational factors that influence leadership and 4) further defining and understanding transformational leadership (Meng et al., 2012).

Within the arena of public relations leadership, Aldoory and Toth (2004) are credited with initiating the development of leadership theory in public relations (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009) and Juan Meng and Bruce Berger can be credited with the most recent and comprehensive work to develop a theoretical construct. The excellent leadership in public relations construct “conceptualizes the meaning of leadership to effective communication and public relations practice,” outlines “crucial dimensions that contribute to communication excellence” and provides a measurement tool (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 142). The construct includes a definition of public relations leadership, which is described as the “capacity of individual practitioners to exert their influence in the organization” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 143) and six dimensions that public relations leaders should demonstrate to facilitate effective public relations practice.

Excellence Theory

The excellence theory (Grunig, 1992), which adopts public relations as a strategic management function and espouses symmetrical communication, is considered the framework for effective communication and public relations practice and communication excellence in the literature on excellent leadership in public relations (Meng & Berger, 2013). With this in mind and my propensity toward the excellence theory as the framework to which organizations and their public relations departments should aspire to produce effective public relations, this study employs the excellence theory as a metatheory. The semi-structured interviews with practitioners in Atlantic Canadian public universities provide insights into the meaning of leadership to effective communication – with public relations excellence being the framework that results in effective communication.

Practitioner Roles

As noted in Meng et al (2012), Dozier (1992) describes a public relations manager role as that which facilitates communication among management and publics and supports a problem-solving process for the organization. Meng et al. propose that these role activities are also relevant to public relations leadership, drawing a connection between the public relations managerial role and public relations leadership. A similar connection has not been made between the technical role and public relations leadership, however, Meng & Berger (2013) assert that leadership is not limited to senior levels in organizations and can be found at every level.

By exploring the role of practitioners, this study begins to provide insight into how public relations role may affect leadership in public relations – an area that has not yet been discussed in the development of the excellent leadership in public relations construct.

Leadership and Gender in Public Relations

As noted previously, Aldoori and Toth (2004) are credited with initiating the

development of leadership theory in public relations (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). In addition to finding that practitioners perceived transformational leadership to be the most effective and appropriate for public relations, their study of leadership and gender in public relations – the only study of its kind to date – found that women may be more suited to be public relations leaders due to the connections between transformational leadership and feminine traits, but “organizational culture, general business and economic environments and socialized gender stereotypes all work to constrain leadership style and women in leadership positions” (p.179). Given that more than a decade has passed since Aldoory and Toth’s study, it’s fair to question whether these constraints still exist. The current study didn’t aim to answer this specifically, however, it explored the potential for constraints to leadership within the Canadian university setting.

Though the work to develop the excellent leadership in public relations construct has attempted to control for gender rather than explore how gender may affect public relations leadership, I consider gender an important variable to leadership in public relations and thus explored, with this study, the potential effects of gender on public relations leadership.

Public Relations in Higher Education

With the author’s previous public relations practice in an Atlantic Canadian public university and my continuing interest in this area, Atlantic Canadian universities served as the context within which I conducted this study of public relations leadership. When I first began exploring the literature into public relations in higher education, I found that public relations as a management function is of strategic importance to higher education. The literature shows that establishing and fostering ongoing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication with stakeholders contributes positively to the university (Szymanska, 2003) and those universities that build and maintain ongoing relationships with students via two-way symmetrical

communication better retain students (Pompper, 2006). Despite this, higher education public relations professionals mainly serve a technical rather than managerial role (Kohring et al., 2013; Pirozek & Heskova, 2003; Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003; Peyronel, 2000); b) there is a misunderstanding or disregard of the public relations function as a management function among university leaders and public relations professionals (Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003; Whitaker-Heck, 2014); and c) public relations in higher education has been primarily one-way asymmetrical (Pirozek & Heskova, 2003). The apparent gaps in theory and in practice, increased my interest in this area. When choosing the Atlantic Canadian universities as the study context, I also considered the following:

1. The practice and role of public relations in higher education has not been well studied (Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003) and is not well understood (Luo, 2005), which is particularly true of Canadian universities, despite the fact that as a group they educate more than 1.5 million students each year, conduct more than one-third of Canada's research and development, and represent a \$30 billion enterprise (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada, n.d.).
2. Public relations in a Canadian context is an under-studied and under-researched academic discipline (Flynn, Savage, Sevigny, Scholz & Killingsworth, 2014). Academic discourse on public relations leadership in the context of Atlantic Canadian universities will add to the limited body of academic literature on public relations practice in Canada.
3. Carrying out this study in the context of Atlantic Canadian public universities controlled for organization type, addressing weaknesses identified by Meng and Berger (2013) in their most recent study to measure and validate the six dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations.

Research Gaps

With this study I aimed to add to the work by Meng and Berger and their colleagues to develop the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. In reviewing their work and conducting a larger literature review, I identified the following knowledge gaps: a) whether there is agreement between practitioner understanding of public relations leadership and the prescribed definition of excellent leadership in public relations; b) whether practitioners perceive themselves as aligning with the key dimensions; and c) how practitioner role and gender influence this alignment. Further, in Meng & Berger's most recent work, they argue that researchers should identify the leadership issues that influence effective communication management (Meng & Berger, 2013). I contend that self-perception of leadership, the degree to which that understanding and interpretation align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct, and how practitioner role and gender influence that alignment meet the threshold for such issues, and thus merit attention through an academic lens. This study fulfills this need in the context of Atlantic Canada's public universities.

Research Questions

With the above in mind, this study aimed to build on Meng and Berger's work to establish a theoretical construct for excellent leadership in public relations and was guided by the following central and subsequent questions:

1. How do practitioners understand and interpret leadership in public relations in reference to their behaviours, characteristics and professional role?
2. To what extent do practitioner understanding and interpretation of their public relations leadership align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct?

3. How do public relations role and gender influence practitioner alignment with excellent leadership in public relations?

Research Methods

Public relations leadership is a phenomenon defined by individuals based on their lived experience. Thus, to gain a richer understanding of public relations leadership, the primary aim of this study, I elected to take a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews of mid- and senior-level public relations practitioners in public universities in Atlantic Canada.

Qualitative methodologies such as those employed in this study – semi-structured interviewing, thematic analysis, and researcher interpretation of the data – are generally understood to align with the aim of exploring and understanding social and human phenomena through individuals' interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Stark, 2007; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Groenwald, 2004). This study is the first to have explored self-perception of public relations leadership. Construction of public relations leadership theory to date has sought to define leadership in public relations by way of literature reviews and qualitative research wherein public relations and communication practitioners defined and assessed leadership in public relations as an external phenomenon rather than one we enact.

Thesis Outline

This first chapter has introduced why this study is important and why I decided to conduct this research. The following chapters include a fulsome literature review of public relations leadership (ch.3); this study's theoretical framework (ch.2) and methodology (ch. 4); an analysis of the data (ch.4), including the main themes; the research findings (ch.5); a discussion of the research findings (ch. 6) and the study conclusions (ch.7). The final pages of this thesis are

dedicated to the appendices, which include research questions and complete study data, and references.

CHAPTER TWO

Theoretical Framework

This study examined public relations leadership from the theoretical frames of excellent leadership in public relations and the excellence theory in public relations.

Excellent Leadership in Public Relations

This study employs the existing principles of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical concept (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) to increase understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context *and* expand on development of the excellent leadership in public relations theory. In her work to examine leadership in public relations, Meng (2012) ventured to “explain the multi-faceted nature of the leadership construct” in public relations (p. 336). This work led to an understanding of excellent leadership in public relations as

a dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produces ethical and effective communication practice. Such practice fuels and guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimizes organizations in society. (Meng et al., 2012, p. 24)

Defining excellent public relations leadership paved the way for the introduction of an integrated model of excellent leadership in public relations. This model suggests that six dimensions – self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship building, strategic decision-making capability and communication knowledge management capability – are “crucial for communication executives to expand their influence in the institutional context and generate desired communication outcomes” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 141). Further, Meng &

Berger (2013) argue that public relations practitioners “need to acquire and apply” these key dimensions to become “effective leaders in institutional contexts” (p. 144). The key dimensions are further defined below.

Though Meng and Berger have established a positive relationship between the six dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations and public relations’ effectiveness, the organization’s structure and culture affect this relationship. The theoretical construct identifies the organization’s structure and culture as antecedents of, and social culture as an environmental moderator of, leadership success and effectiveness (Meng & Berger, 2013).

Table 1. Key dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations (Meng, 2012)

| Dimension | Description |
|---|---|
| Self-dynamics | Qualities, personalities and attributes of successful leaders such as self-confidence, emotional maturity, initiative and ability to manage stress. Self-dynamics can be subdivided into self-insight (leaders’ knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses and understanding of public relations environments), and shared vision (the ability of public relations leaders to impart a vision and inspire others). |
| Team collaboration | Leaders’ ability to support the public relations team and the organization to execute successful public relations strategies and communication management. |
| Ethical orientation | The extent of leaders’ professional values and standards. |
| Relationship building | Leaders’ ability to develop relationships themselves but also to facilitate relationship building between the organization and key stakeholders. |
| Strategic decision-making capability | Leaders’ understanding of sociopolitical environments, organizational structures, processes and practices, and ability to use the knowledge to be involved in decision making within the organization. |
| Communication knowledge management capability | Leaders’ ability to translate public relations and communication knowledge and expertise into effective tactics and strategies. |

Public Relations Excellence

The excellence theory of public relations “explains how the public relations function should be structured and managed to provide the greatest value to organizations, publics, and society” (J. Grunig, 2006, p. 153). The theory espouses public relations as a strategic

management function (public relations should bring the voice of the organization's publics into decision-making) and symmetrical communication (individuals, organizations and publics should use communication to align their thinking and goals with those of others rather than using communication to try to control others' perspectives and actions) (J. Grunig, 2006). The theory and these two main principles arguably make up the most widely accepted theoretical framework for the public relations profession (Greenwood, 2010).

Excellent leadership in public relations is not part of the body of academic literature on the excellence theory, however, the excellence literature "informs some of the qualities of leaders" (Meng et al., 2012, p. 19). Also, the excellence theory is considered the framework for effective communication and public relations practice and communication excellence in the literature on excellent leadership in public relations (Meng & Berger, 2013). Further, the intent of the work to develop an excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct is to "conceptualize the meaning of leadership to effective communication and public relations practice and to identify the crucial dimensions that contribute to communication excellence" (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 142). With this in mind and my propensity toward the excellence theory as the framework to which organizations and their public relations departments should aspire to produce effective public relations, this study employs the excellence theory as a metatheory.

Insights from the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct and the excellent public relations theory shape the design and analysis of the current study. Grounding this study in the two theoretical frameworks provides insights into the meaning of leadership to effective communication – with public relations excellence being the pseudonym for effective communication.

CHAPTER THREE

Literature Review

The following outlines the scholarly literature reviewed in the areas of public relations leadership, public relations roles and public relations in higher education. The literature supports the positive relationship between public relations leadership and public relations effectiveness, shows an absence of studies wherein practitioners evaluate their own leadership, and highlights how few relevant studies of Canadian universities exist. Most importantly, it provides valuable insights into why scholars should aim to better understand self perceptions of public relations leadership among practitioners.

Public Relations Leadership

Leadership as a function and its importance to organizations and societies has been studied for centuries, yet leadership in public relations is a relatively new area of study (Meng et al., 2012; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Choi & Choi, 2009). As Meng (2012) suggests, in order for public relations efforts to continue having meaningful impact in the decision-making process, it is integral for the field to assess and evaluate the role of the practitioner as a leader in the communication process. Moving from tactic-driven, consultant-based work to a more collaborative and strategic role, the public relations practitioner stands to have an even greater impact on the organizations and causes they represent.

There are varying definitions of leadership in the social science literature; however, it is generally understood to be a process through which individuals influence and affect a population (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Meng et al, 2012). Within the organizational behaviour and management literature, it's understood that leaders influence key aspects of an organization including its strategies, culture and performance (Meng & Berger, 2013). Several parallels can be drawn

between leadership in the social sciences, organizational behaviour and management literature and the public relations literature. The parallels include the four major approaches to the study of leadership: those studies that focus on 1) defining leadership traits (attributes such as personality, motives, values, skills); 2) outlining leadership behaviours (what leaders do on the job); 3) determining situational and organizational factors that influence leadership and 4) further defining and understanding transformational leadership (Meng et al., 2012).

Defining Leadership Traits in Public Relations

Trait research, which focuses on identifying personal attributes and qualities critical to effective leadership, dominated leadership research in the first half of the twentieth century (Meng et. al, 2012). It is also the basis of a study of communications success that identified ten traits public relations and communications leaders should possess and value to achieve professional success: “communication skills, proactive nature, relationships and networking, interpersonal skills, experience, analytical skills, leadership skills, curiosity, passion for work, business knowledge” (Berger, Reber & Heyman, 2007, p. 60). Notably, the same study identified marked differences in responses from men and women. Men more often attributed their success to communication, analytical and interpersonal skills while women more often highlighted experience, proactivity and relationships. Trait research is an important aspect of leadership scholarship; however, it is but one area of study among many, including efforts to identify leaders’ behaviours (Meng et al., 2012).

Outlining Leadership Behaviours in Public Relations

Other leadership studies have focused on identifying and defining the behavioural aspects of leaders, primarily what leaders do on the job. In one such study, Choi and Choi (2009) outlined the behaviours that public relations leaders must exhibit to lead successful public relations efforts and contribute to organizational performance. Firstly, the scholars define public

relations leadership as a “process of influence” whereby practitioners encourage collaborative initiatives and action to accomplish an organization’s public relations goals (p. 294). With this understanding, Choi and Choi argue that the following leadership behaviours are those the public relations practitioner needs to enact to contribute to the value of public relations within their organizations: provide vision, act as a change agent, exert upward influence, and network (2009).

Choi and Choi’s work to identify the behaviours of public relations leaders is valuable to practitioners and organizations who wish to better understand the contributors to effective public relations leadership; however, the behavioural approach is limited just as the trait approach is limited. The behaviour approach represents an isolated aspect of leadership and fails to consider that behaviours, and public relations leadership itself, may be influenced by the situations within which the leader is enacting the behaviours (Meng et al., 2012).

Determining the Situational and Organizational Factors that Influence Public Relations Leadership

Moving beyond the personal attributes and qualities critical to effective leadership and studies of what leaders actually do on the job, more recent studies of public relations leadership consider situational, organizational and environmental factors that influence leadership in the context of public relations (e.g., le Roux, 2014; Meng, 2012; Meng, 2014; Luo, Jiang & Kulemeka, 2015). These studies show that everything from geographic and cultural contexts to organizational culture and social media use can influence public relations leadership, particularly leader behaviour and leader effectiveness. With regard to organizational influence, most of the limited literature on leadership in public relations recognizes that the nature of the organization affects the function, success and outcomes of public relations leadership. As Meng (2012) puts it, “the success of communication leaders should be linked to the flexibility in the organizational

structure, a culture that embraces communication efforts, and a distinct process to encourage, value, and share open communication among members” (p. 338). This argument is reflected in the framework of excellent leadership in public relations.

Defining and Understanding Transformational Leadership in Public Relations

The fourth leadership research stream, which constitutes efforts to define and understand transformational leadership, is the most comprehensive, integrating “traits, power, behaviour and situational factors” (Meng et al., 2012, p. 22). Within the arena of public relations leadership, Aldoory and Toth (2004) are credited with initiating the development of leadership theory in public relations (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). In this study of leadership styles, the authors found that practitioners perceived transformational leadership to be the most effective and appropriate for public relations; however, there was also support for adjustments in leadership style as situations dictated (situational leadership). Transformational leaders are “concerned with emotions, values, ethics and long-term relationships as well as followers’ motives, needs and satisfaction” (Bass, 1997; Conger, 1999; House, 1977, as cited in Meng et al., 2012, p. 22). Aldoory and Toth (2004) also found that “organizational culture, general business and economic environments, and socialized gender stereotypes all work to constrain leadership style and women in leadership positions” (p. 179). The effect of societal and organizational culture on leadership style has since been supported by several studies (Shin, Heath & Lee, 2011; Meng et al., 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013; Berger, 2015). Shin, Heath & Lee (2011) found that public relations leadership style and behaviours are influenced by both culture and situations, i.e. when faced with an issue versus when working under more routine conditions: “Culture accounts for leadership characteristics and functions of strategic or effective communication competency, and situation accounts for practical or resourceful enactment of leadership styles contingent to specific challenges” (p. 182).

Following Aldoory and Toth's lead, further studies have echoed the preference for transformational leadership in public relations (e.g., Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009; Jin, 2010). Notably, Werder and Holtzhausen (2009) found that an inclusive leadership style, which is characterized by "collaboration, shared decision making and participative practices" (p. 407), is present in, and in fact exclusive to, the public relations landscape. They also found that transactional leadership, which is characterized by a preference for the status quo and compliance over innovation and creativity, is absent, positing that this leadership style "is not functional for practitioners in the social and political climate of today's organizations" (p. 423). The authors found too that leadership style influences decisions about public relations strategies and perceptions of public relations' effectiveness. Later studies have supported this finding, showing that transformational leadership contributes to effective internal communications (Men, 2014; Men & Stacks, 2014).

Excellent Leadership in Public Relations

Succeeding Aldoory and Toth's work toward leadership theory in public relations, and taking into consideration the four major approaches to the study of leadership, Meng (2012) ventures to "explain the multi-faceted nature of the leadership construct" in public relations (p. 336). This work led to an understanding of excellent leadership in public relations as

a dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produces ethical and effective communication practice. Such practice fuels and guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimizes organizations in society. (Meng et al., 2012, p. 24)

Defining excellent public relations leadership paved the way for the introduction of an

integrated model of excellent leadership in public relations. This model suggests that six dimensions – self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship building, strategic decision-making capability and communication knowledge management capability – are “crucial for communication executives to expand their influence in the institutional context and generate desired communication outcomes” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 141). The excellent leadership in public relations construct serves as the theoretical frame for this study.

The research by Meng and her colleagues leading up to the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct provides context and allows for greater understanding of the construct. For these reasons, I highlight key pieces of this research as follows: Meng et al. (2012) found that leaders in public relations must possess strategic decision-making capabilities, problem-solving abilities and communication knowledge and expertise, and it is the latter that distinguishes leaders in public relations from leaders in other fields. Further, “public relations leaders can apply traits and explicit knowledge and take actions to reduce constraints, strengthen internal and external relations, and favorably influence strategic decision-making” (Meng et al., 2012, p. 24). The key dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations (Meng, 2012), which Meng and Berger (2013) argue are those that public relations practitioners “need to acquire and apply” to become “effective leaders in institutional contexts” (p. 144) are central to the excellent leadership in public relations construct as well as to this study.

Dimensions of Excellent Leadership in Public Relations.

Meng and Berger (2013) found strong support for the validity and reliability of the six key dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations, which are outlined in Table 1, in their study of senior and entry to mid-level communication and public relations practitioners. There is much work to be done, however, to better understand and describe excellent leadership in public relations. What remains unknown is a) whether there is agreement between practitioner

understanding of public relations leadership and the prescribed definition of excellent leadership in public relations; b) whether practitioners perceive themselves as aligning with the key dimensions; and c) how practitioner role and gender influence this alignment. Further, the work to develop the excellent leadership in public relations construct has attempted to control for gender rather than explore how gender may affect public relations leadership. This study will explore these unknowns.

Though Meng and Berger have established a positive relationship between the six dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations and public relations' effectiveness, the organization's structure and culture affect this relationship. The theoretical construct identifies the organization's structure and culture as antecedents of, and social culture as an environmental moderator of, leadership success and effectiveness (Meng & Berger, 2013). The qualitative approach to this study, particularly the employment of semi-structured interviews, enabled me to explore the organization structure and culture of the universities within which the public relations practitioners interviewed for this study are employed. This provides greater understanding of the influence of organization structure and culture on public relations leadership while controlling for organization type, extending Meng & Berger's exploratory study.

Table 1. Key dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations (Meng, 2012)

| Dimension | Description |
|-----------------------|---|
| Self-dynamics | Qualities, personalities and attributes of successful leaders such as self-confidence, emotional maturity, initiative and ability to manage stress. Self-dynamics can be subdivided into self-insight (leaders' knowledge of their strengths and weaknesses and understanding of public relations environments), and shared vision (the ability of public relations leaders to impart a vision and inspire others). |
| Team collaboration | Leaders' ability to support the public relations team and the organization to execute successful public relations strategies and communication management. |
| Ethical orientation | The extent of leaders' professional values and standards. |
| Relationship building | Leaders' ability to develop relationships themselves but also to facilitate relationship building between the organization and key stakeholders. |

| | |
|---|--|
| Strategic decision-making capability | Leaders' understanding of sociopolitical environments, organizational structures, processes and practices, and ability to use the knowledge to be involved in decision making within the organization. |
| Communication knowledge management capability | Leaders' ability to translate public relations and communication knowledge and expertise into effective tactics and strategies. |

Excellent Leadership in Public Relations and Public Relations Excellence

The excellence theory of public relations “explains how the public relations function should be structured and managed to provide the greatest value to organizations, publics, and society” (J. Grunig, 2006, p. 153). The theory espouses public relations as a strategic management function (the idea that public relations should bring the voice of the organization’s publics into decision-making) and symmetrical communication (the idea that individuals, organizations and publics should use communication to align their thinking and goals with those of others rather than using communication to try to control others’ perspectives and actions) (J. Grunig, 2006). The theory and these two main principles arguably make up the most widely accepted theoretical framework for the public relations profession (Greenwood, 2010).

Excellent leadership in public relations is not part of the body of academic literature on the excellence theory, however, the excellence literature “informs some of the qualities of leaders” (Meng et al., 2012, p. 19). Also, the excellence theory is considered the framework for effective communication and public relations practice and communication excellence in the literature on excellent leadership in public relations (Meng & Berger, 2013). Further, the intent of the work to develop an excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct is to “conceptualize the meaning of leadership to effective communication and public relations practice and to identify the crucial dimensions that contribute to communication excellence” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 142). With this in mind and my propensity toward the excellence theory as the framework to which organizations and their public relations departments should

aspire to produce effective public relations, the study proposed here employs the excellence theory as a metatheory. The semi-structured interviews with practitioners in Canada's public universities will provide insights into the meaning of leadership to effective communication – with public relations excellence being the framework that results in communication excellence.

Alternative View of Leadership Theory Development in Public Relations

At this juncture, it's important to note that much of the development of leadership theory in public relations has been complimentary, with each study building on another to provide greater understanding of leadership in public relations and its effects on successful public relations and communications, there is criticism; however, of how academics have been developing leadership theory within public relations. McKie and Willis (2015) posit that some academics influential in the development of leadership theory within public relations, particularly Juan Meng and Bruce Berger, the primary developers of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct, don't adequately consider leadership scholarship outside of public relations to provide insights for leadership development in public relations. They argue the consequences are limitations in thinking that constrain leadership development in public relations and "set the benchmark too low at the top end" (p. 633).

For too long PR has concentrated too much attention on navel-gazing that aims to find and celebrate our uniqueness as a discipline and our discipline's unique leadership and special leadership needs. Accordingly, we advocate moving the spotlight away from current PR leadership ambitions, practices, and perceptions because they link to low achievement ceilings rather than what we could be as leaders. (McKie & Willis, 2015, p. 633)

McKie and Willis (2015) advocate for development of public relations leadership and give credence to the scholarship to date but argue that greater attention should be paid to interdisciplinary scholarship and developing “leaderful” organizations by fostering leadership everywhere in public relations (p. 634).

Public Relations Practitioner Roles

Public relations practitioners, regardless of position and years of experience, possess technical and managerial skills and responsibilities, albeit to a greater or lesser degree depending on position and organization type (Vieira & Grantham, 2015a). Though researchers have developed a number of indexes and typologies to measure role, the manager/technician dichotomy (Dozier & Broom, 1995), which suggests practitioners fulfill either a manager, technician, or manager/technician role, has been the most widely used framework in public relations roles research (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005). The manager role encompasses problem-solving, decision-making and counsel, while the technician role focuses on creating and disseminating messages. As noted in Meng et al (2012), Dozier (1992) describes a public relations manager role as that which facilitates communication among management and publics and supports a problem-solving process for the organization. Meng et al. propose that these role activities are also relevant to public relations leadership, drawing a connection between the public relations managerial role and public relations leadership. A similar connection has not been made between the technical role and public relations leadership, however, Meng & Berger (2013) assert that leadership is not limited to senior levels in organizations and can be found at every level.

By exploring the role of practitioners, this study will begin to provide insight into how public relations role may affect leadership in public relations – an area that has not yet been discussed in the development of the excellent leadership in public relations construct.

Leadership and Gender in Public Relations

As noted previously, Aldoory and Toth (2004) are credited with initiating the development of leadership theory in public relations (Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). In addition to finding that practitioners perceived transformational leadership to be the most effective and appropriate for public relations, their study of leadership and gender in public relations – the only study of its kind to date – found that women may be more suited to be public relations leaders due to the connections between transformational leadership and feminine traits, but “organizational culture, general business and economic environments and socialized gender stereotypes all work to constrain leadership style and women in leadership positions” (p.179). Given that more than a decade has passed since Aldoory and Toth’s study, it’s fair to question whether these constraints still exist. While the current study can’t answer this generally, it will explore the potential for constraints to leadership within the Canadian university setting. Notably, Aldoory & Toth’s study also exposed differences in how men and women perceive themselves as leaders and how they perceive effective leadership, with men perceiving themselves as leaders and as effective leaders more often than women. This finding is also supported by Werder & Holtzhausen (2009). In public relations, where women significantly outnumber men, this may have significant implications on the profession as a whole, bringing into question whether women will fulfill a proportionate number of leadership roles in public relations and exert due influence on the profession.

Studies of public relations leadership that followed Aldoory & Toth (2004) have either paid little attention to the potential for gender differences (Meng et al., 2012; Meng 2012; Meng & Berger 2013; Luo, Jiang & Kulemeka, 2015) or found little to no gender differences (Berger, Reber, Heyman, 2007; Choi & Choi, 2009; Vieira & Grantham, 2015b). Further, studies of leadership more generally have provided little guidance on whether and how gender influences

leadership because results in the literature are mixed with no clear conclusions (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). As noted previously, the work to develop the excellent leadership in public relations construct has attempted to control for gender rather than explore how gender may affect public relations leadership. I consider gender a potentially significant variable to leadership in public relations thus this study will explore the potential effects of gender on how practitioners understand and interpret public relations leadership. In their work on the application of intersectionality, “how power is distributed based on multiple, overlapping identities,” to public relations, Vardeman-Winter and Tindall (2010) argue, there is a need to explore and understand how practitioner identities, including gender, affect their professional activities such as public relations strategies, messaging and products (pg. 223).

We encourage researchers, educators and practitioners to adopt a refined lens when considering publics, students, the discipline, and policy making to uncover systemic power differentials and illuminate solutions to equalize access to opportunities for all participants in public relations and in all contexts where public relations operates. (pg. 223)

Public Relations in Higher Education

The literature on public relations in higher education can be grouped by

- a) those that treated the adoption of the excellence theory (J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002) by higher education, in whole or in part, as a given, and then examined through quantitative or qualitative measures whether universities and their public relations departments and practitioners employed the principles of the excellence theory (e.g. Luo, 2005; Rooney & Hall, 2003; Whitaker-Heck, 2014; Sha, 2009; Kantanen, 2007; Peyronel, 2000), and

- b) those that examined cases or particular functions of higher education public relations, e.g. student retention and community relations, to demonstrate the benefits of adopting the excellence theory, in whole or in part, and employing its principles (e.g. K. Leeper & R. Leeper, 2005; Kim, Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2006; Pirozek & Heskova, 2003; Pompper, 2006; Szymanska, 2003; and Kohring et al., 2013).

From the literature, several significant insights can be gleaned about public relations practice within higher education. Overall, the literature shows that a) higher education public relations professionals mainly serve a technical rather than managerial role (Kohring et al., 2013; Pirozek & Heskova, 2003; Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003; Peyronel, 2000); b) there is a misunderstanding or disregard of the public relations function as a management function among university leaders and public relations professionals (Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003; Whitaker-Heck, 2014); and c) public relations in higher education has been primarily one-way asymmetrical (Pirozek & Heskova, 2003) and has emphasized media relations (Kohring et al., 2013; Luo, 2005).

Contrasting the state of current practice of public relations in higher education as indicated in the literature and outlined above, there is significant support in the literature for changing practice and employing the principles of the excellence theory as well as leadership in public relations. For instance, the case- and function-based literature show that establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with community stakeholders would positively impact public confidence in the university (Kim, Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2006) – an operational necessity for institutions that depend heavily on public and private support for funding as Canada's public universities do (see below). Not surprisingly then, the literature also shows that a) establishing and fostering ongoing relationships through two-way symmetrical communication with stakeholders contributes positively to the university (Szymanska, 2003), and b) two-way communication, whereby the university engages in a process of communication that allows for

stakeholder input and adjustment of the university's communication based on that input, trumps one-way communication in avoiding and mitigating conflict among the university and its stakeholders (K. Leeper & R. Leeper, 2003). Further, those universities that build and maintain ongoing relationships with students via two-way symmetrical communication better retain students (Pompper, 2006). Moving away from the models of public relations specifically, the literature supports that public relations as a management function is of strategic importance to higher education (Pirozek & Heskova, 2003).

The Canadian University Landscape

Canadian universities' primary roles include educating students, conducting research, and influencing public policy. Their primary social role, according to the Association for Universities and Colleges of Canada (n.d.) website is to "foster open, honest, and substantive debates of ideas."

With mission statements that include references to "social engagement" (Dalhousie University) and "social responsibility" (Mount Saint Vincent University), "serving our community" (University of New Brunswick), "service to society" (McGill University), and "community engagement" (Simon Fraser University), Canadian universities have broad, far-reaching mandates. With those missions and mandates, come numerous, diverse stakeholder groups, which, among them, include faculty and staff, students, prospective students, parents, alumni, municipal, provincial and federal governments, and public and private research granting agencies. Canadian universities also have a myriad of accountabilities driven by their mandates and by their need for funding. Chan and Richardson (2012) note:

They [Canadian universities] are accountable to the government and the public, which together provide about half of university funding; to the

students and/or their parents, who pay for their education; to the philanthropists and donors, who value and contribute generously to the mission of universities; and to the faculty, who do the teaching and research as well as academic administration. (p. 33)

In reference to university governance, Canadian universities are complex organizations with multiple faculties that include multiple departments and programs, multi-level governance models (Chan & Richardson, 2012), and bureaucratic, though de-centralized, hierarchies (Bird, 2011). Over time, both Canadian and American universities have moved from closed systems wherein they paid little attention to their environment to open systems wherein they consider the environment in which they operate (Warner, 1996; K. Leeper & R. Leeper, 2005; Chan & Richardson, 2012). Universities, then, are recognizing the importance of their many stakeholders to their operations. It logically follows that they also recognize the importance of establishing ongoing relationships with those stakeholders. Pompper (2006) went so far as to say that the quality of a university's relationships with its key stakeholders determines its success or failure.

With significant changes to federal funding models and policy affecting Canadian universities, namely the discontinuation of educational transfer payments to provinces, which have jurisdiction over education, and an emphasis on research and development that favours research-intensive universities (Shanahan & Jones, 2007), Canadian universities must pay close attention to building relationships with stakeholders:

At the institutional level there are 'more ties that bind', more targets to be met, more funds to be matched, more partners to be found and more accountability plans to be submitted, as the government expands its mechanisms of control. (Shanahan & Jones, 2007, p. 42)

Conclusions from the Literature

In reviewing the literature, it becomes apparent that studying leadership in public relations may be as critical to advancing the discipline as it is to advancing organizational success because of its positive affect on the practice of public relations, including effective internal communication and external communication, adoption of organizational change and engaging social media use by organizations (Sweetster & Kelleher, 2011; Men & Stacks, 2014; Berger, Reber & Heyman, 2007; Luo & Jiang, 2014; Men 2014). Specifically, Shin, Heath & Lee (2011) indicate that, "...insights into leadership styles can help academics gain insights for strategic planning, as well as academic and professional development pedagogy to help practitioners know how to best serve their clients, organizations, and society (pg. 168)." As indicated, this study contributes to greater understanding of leadership in public relations, particularly in a Canadian context. Through their work to develop the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical framework, Meng (2012), Meng et al. (2012), and Meng & Berger (2013) have paved the way for this study, which will apply the theoretical frame while adding to its development. The excellent leadership in public relations construct encompasses leadership traits and behaviours, situational and organizational influences and transformational leadership. It is akin to leadership as a general concept, but specific to public relations as a discipline. Public relations leaders are distinguished particularly by their communication knowledge and expertise (Meng et al., 2012), but must also employ the remaining five dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations: self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship building, and strategic decision-making capability to facilitate effective public relations. Meng et al. draw connections between excellent public relations leadership and the public relations managerial role, however, no such connection has been drawn between the technical role and public relations leadership. With regard to gender and public relations leadership, studies have exposed differences in how men and women

perceive themselves as leaders and how they perceive effective leadership (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009); however, other studies of public relations leadership have either paid little attention to the potential for gender differences (Meng et al., 2012; Meng 2012; Meng & Berger 2013; Luo, Jiang & Kulemeka, 2015) or found little to no gender differences (Berger, Reber, Heyman, 2007; Choi & Choi, 2009; Vieira & Grantham, 2015b). I consider both role and gender potentially significant variables to leadership in public relations and thus will explore both in this study.

Within higher education, scholars have called for application of the excellence theory (J. Grunig, 1992; L. Grunig, J. Grunig & Dozier, 2002), particularly the two-way symmetrical communication model, as a way of building relationships with stakeholders that benefit both the university and its stakeholders (e.g., K. Leeper & R. Leeper, 2005; Kim, Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2006; Pirozek & Heskova, 2003; Pompper, 2006; Szymanska, 2003; and Kohring et al., 2013). The excellence theory, while not without its critics, is the most widely accepted public relations theory and has been established as the standard of excellence for public relations (Greenwood, 2010). As such, the excellence theory is considered the framework for effective communication and public relations practice and communication excellence in the literature on excellent leadership in public relations (Meng & Berger, 2013).

The principles of the excellence theory are not reflected universally in higher education; however, studies show that public relations within higher education increasingly reflects the principles of excellent public relations (Rooney & Hall, 2003; Whitaker-Heck, 2014). As the postsecondary education landscape in Canada, particularly funding and governance models, continues to evolve, accountability to stakeholders grows. This, in turn, increases the need for Canada's public universities to build and maintain relationships with their stakeholders – effective public relations being the mechanism to establish and retain positive stakeholder

relationships. As the antecedent of effective public relations, public relations leadership is a critical concept to both the public relations discipline and to organizational success, and as the literature reveals, there is a need for further study.

Meeting the Need for Greater Understanding of Public Relations Leadership

This review of the literature shows that, while leadership has been a long-studied phenomenon in management and organizational behaviour, it has received little attention in public relations until relatively recently (Meng et al., 2012; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). Juan Meng and Bruce Berger can be credited with the most recent and comprehensive work on public relations leadership. They conceptualized excellent leadership in public relations and identified the leadership dimensions practitioners should employ to facilitate public relations effectiveness. What remains unknown; however, is a) whether there is agreement between practitioner understanding of public relations leadership and the prescribed definition of excellent leadership in public relations; b) whether practitioners perceive themselves as aligning with the key dimensions; and c) how practitioner role and gender influence this alignment. This study aims to fill these gaps.

In their most recent work, Meng and Berger (2013) argue that “Future research should continue investigating the leadership construct and further confirm those crucial leadership issues that affect effective communication management” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 163). As noted, I contend that self perception of public relations leadership, the degree to which that understanding and interpretation align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct and how practitioner role and gender influence that alignment meet the threshold for such issues, and thus merit attention through an academic lens.

Meng and Berger (2013) provide a framework for continued research of excellent public

relations leadership and argue that the study of public relations leadership should be extended across different regions and cultural settings. The study proposed here will answer this call, extending exploration of public relations leadership into Canada and to one organization type: public universities. Despite its widespread use in higher education, public relations in this context has not been well studied (Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003) and is not well understood (Luo, 2005). This is particularly true of public relations within Canadian universities. Rooney Hall & Baker (2003) perhaps best summarized the gaps in the public relations in higher education literature: “higher education studies have provided little research on the public relations function, the roles and responsibilities of public relations professionals, or the impact of universities’ efforts to establish, maintain, or improve relationships with key publics through public relations programs” (p. 129).

Academic discourse on public relations leadership in Canadian universities within the framework of excellent leadership in public relations will help to illustrate whether Canada’s public universities employ senior public relations practitioners who align with excellent leadership and offer insights into public relations in Canadian universities, benefitting the universities and their stakeholders particularly, but also adding to the body of literature pertaining to public relations practice in Canada. As Flynn et al. (2014) contend, “The practice of public relations in Canada has been one of the most understudied and researched academic disciplines within the communications studies programs across the country” (p. 5).

CHAPTER FOUR

Methodology

This study is the first to explore self-perception of public relations leadership. Construction of public relations leadership theory to date has sought to define leadership in public relations by way of literature reviews and qualitative research wherein public relations and communications practitioners defined and assessed leadership in public relations as an external phenomenon rather than one we enact. I argue that public relations leadership is a phenomenon defined by individuals based on their lived experience. Thus, to gain a richer understanding of public relations leadership, the primary aim of this study, I elected to take a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews of mid- and senior-level public relations practitioners in public universities in Canada. Qualitative methodologies such as those employed in this study – semi-structured interviewing, thematic analysis, and researcher interpretation of the data – are generally understood to align with the aim of exploring and understanding social and human phenomena through individuals' interpretation of the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2007; Stark, 2007; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006; Groenwald, 2004). To gain a richer understanding of public relations leadership by examining self-perception of leadership, I also incorporated elements of grounded theory (Starks, 2007; Creswell, 2014). It is understood that qualitative research designs may be fluid, appreciating that the researcher keeps the study goal and objectives top of mind (Creswell, 2014; Starks, 2007). Public relations leadership is both a phenomenon and a process and must be considered as both to be explored fully, as this study, with its fluidity, allowed.

Though this study builds on the work of Meng et al. (2012) and Meng & Berger (2013) by attempting to gain a richer understanding of leadership in public relations and contribute to a theory of excellent leadership in public relations, I expanded on their work by employing a

qualitative rather than quantitative approach. I chose a qualitative approach, and thus to take a different approach than had been taken in related studies previously, in consideration of several factors including:

- a) my view that public relations is a social phenomenon experienced differently by each individual;
- b) my objective to gain insight into how public relations practitioners understand and interpret their leadership;
- c) a practical concern that few would complete a survey should I have chosen a quantitative approach; and
- d) consistency with previous studies of public relations leadership (Berger et al., 2007; Luo & Jiang, 2014).

Below, I discuss the steps I took in conducting this study, including design, data collection, study sample, and the data analysis process.

Developing the Research Questions

Research Gaps

With this study I aimed to add to the work by Meng and Berger and their colleagues to develop the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. In reviewing their work and conducting a larger literature review, I identified the following knowledge gaps:

- a) whether there is agreement between practitioner understanding of public relations leadership and the prescribed definition of excellent leadership in public relations;
- b) whether practitioners perceive themselves as aligning with the key dimensions as described by Meng & Berger; and
- c) how practitioner role and gender influence this alignment.

Further, in Meng & Berger's most recent work, they argue that researchers should identify the leadership issues that influence effective communication management (Meng & Berger, 2013).

Research Questions

With the above in mind, this study was guided by the following central and subsequent questions:

1. How do practitioners understand and interpret leadership in public relations in reference to their behaviours, characteristics and professional role?
2. To what extent do practitioner understanding and interpretation of public relations leadership align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct?
3. How do public relations role and gender influence practitioner alignment with excellent leadership in public relations?

The above questions were determined to encapsulate my desire to contribute as much as possible to the development of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct and address the knowledge gaps I had identified when examining previous studies and literature on public relations leadership.

The central research question (#1) makes a significant assumption, based on my belief as a public relations practitioner with 20 years' experience working with others in the field, that public relations practitioners internalize public relations leadership to some degree. Appreciating this, the study allowed for participation of additional public relations practitioners should any participant not be comfortable with the idea that their professional values, characteristics or behaviours align in some way with public relations leadership.

Research Design

As noted above, the steps I took to carry out this study are in keeping with the study aim

(to gain a richer understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context), and objectives (provide insights into how public relations practitioners in Canada's public universities understand and interpret their leadership; whether that interpretation and understanding aligns with the excellent leadership in public relations construct, including its definition of excellent leadership in public relations and key dimensions; and how practitioner role and gender may influence leadership). They include 1) Participant recruitment 2) data collection via semi-structured interviews, 3) data interpretation and analysis via thematic content analysis, 4) validation of my interpretation and analysis of the data, and 5) recording of the study findings. This study design was presented to and approved by my research supervisor and committee along with the Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University.

Study Participants

For this study, I interviewed eight senior- and mid-level public relations practitioners, each of whom had at least five years of experience as a practitioner (a pre-condition of participation in the study) and were employed with public universities in Atlantic Canada. Five years' experience was set as a precondition of participation because I believe that most practitioners would require such experience to have the confidence that would enable them to speak earnestly about their own leadership in public relations. Participants were identified via university websites and LinkedIn, which resulted in a list of 24 eligible participants. Ten potential participants were first invited to participate in the study via an email, which is appended. I continued contacting potential participants via email until eight participants were secured. Each participant was advised that study participation was completely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time prior to the data from their interview being analyzed and each participant signed a consent form, which is appended to this report. Recruitment of study participants

continued through the time when some study participants were being interviewed as not all study participants had been recruited prior to when the first interview was scheduled. Recruitment and interviews took place over a two-month period. The final sample included six senior-level and two mid-level practitioners representing six Atlantic Canadian universities: six in Nova Scotia, and one in each of New Brunswick and Newfoundland. I was unable to recruit practitioners from universities in Prince Edward Island. The overrepresentation of universities in Nova Scotia is not surprising given the high number of universities in the province relative to other provinces in Atlantic Canada. Most study participants were senior-level practitioners (i.e. practitioners with more than 10 years of experience and in either senior management or directorship roles), which appeared to be a result of a combination of Atlantic Canadian universities having small public relations teams, a preference among universities for hiring senior practitioners and a greater willingness among senior practitioners to participate in this research study. All participants had experience in public relations prior to joining their respective universities and their years of experience in university public relations ranged from 20+ years to just two months. Participant titles ranged from Communications Officer to Associate Vice-President, Marketing & Communications. Three study participants identified as men while five identified as women.

Data Collection

I chose to collect data for this study via semi-structured interviews, which I conducted with the aid of an interview protocol (see Interview Guide, appendix D). Interviewing is a central data collection method in qualitative studies (Qu & Dumay, 2011; Creswell 2014; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006), the purpose of which is to “contribute to a body of knowledge that is conceptual and theoretical and is based on the meanings that life experiences hold for the interviewees” (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 314). I wanted interviewees to share with me

their perceptions, their understanding, and their meaning of their leadership in public relations. This is in keeping with what Qu & Dumay (2011) describe as a “localist” perspective on the interview, “an opportunity to explore the meaning of the research topic for the respondent and a site to be examined for the construction of a situated account.” (p. 241)

The interview questions included open-ended questions along with demographic variables such as gender, position, title, and years of experience in public relations. I employed the interview protocol for each interview, including probing questions, but iteratively varied the interview questions slightly based on learnings from prior interviews and the interview at hand to glean the richest possible data. I wanted to glean responses that were relevant to the study without confining interviewees to predetermined language or themes that had become apparent in previous interviews.

The interviews were conducted via phone from June through September 2018 at a date and time convenient for each participant. Though it wouldn't have been possible to conduct the interviews face-to-face without considerable expense and time, I could have elected to use an online video chat option. This, however, would have added inconvenience for interviewees, which, I believe would have made it more difficult to recruit participants. It's possible that the use of face-to-face interviews or video conference would have resulted in more nuanced responses from participants, but this isn't supported in more recent literature on qualitative interviews (Irvine, Drew, Sainsbury; 2012). The interviews ranged from 47 minutes to 65 minutes. While each of the interviews could be considered a conversation between me and the interviewee, I found it easier to establish a rapport with some participants than others and some participants were more forthcoming than others, which accounts for some of the variation in the lengths of the interviews. This noted, all of the participants eagerly responded to the interview questions. Further, all participants were reminded that they did not have to continue with the

interview and could choose to stop talking with me at any time. No participants chose to withdraw.

Each interview was audio recorded using Tape a Call Lite, a mobile phone app that proved very affordable, reliable and easy to use. To ensure the security of the interviews, the recordings were uploaded to a secure cloud storage site and saved on a thumb drive, which was stored in a locked safe at my residence. The recorded interviews were also uploaded to Trint online secure transcription software via a secure server and each was transcribed via the software. I then edited each transcript to ensure an exact match with the audio recording. Though Trint offered an affordable transcription service as compared with other transcription services, its use proved problematic because of the inaccuracy of the transcriptions. Though it would have been necessary to verify the accuracy of each transcription through comparisons to the audio recording, the inaccuracy of the transcriptions produced by Trint resulted in laborious word for word comparisons. I spent an estimated eight hours per transcript to ensure the interviews were captured accurately.

Throughout and immediately following each interview I made notes to record the parts of the discourse where interviewees placed emphasis, to make connections with previous interviews, to identify potential themes, and record my general reflections on the interview. I also made notes after re-listening to the interviews. Though I had intended to only make notes during and immediately following the interviews as per my proposed study design, I felt it important to also take notes upon relistening to the interviews to aid in the analysis of the data. As Phillippi and Lauderdale (2017) noted, the researcher's approach to field notes can be modified throughout a study and field notes about interviews can be generated at multiple points. My field notes formed part of the study data and were used in the analysis as an aid to coding the data and generating themes. A more detailed review of how I used my field notes is included in the data analysis

section. Field notes were taken by hand then scanned and securely saved as described at the end of this section.

Though interviews are valuable data collection methods, there is the potential for the researcher to misunderstand or miss what the interviewee is saying (Qu & Dumay, 2006). With this in mind, I listened intently to the interviewee throughout the interview and listened to the audio recording of each interview a minimum of two times to help ensure I understood and appropriately captured what was being said. Also, I read each transcript a minimum of two times. I completed this “routine” for each interview and transcript after ensuring the interviews were captured appropriately in the transcripts.

Though the interviewees were not known to the interviewer, we share a number of commonalities. Like the interviewees, I am a public relations practitioner, and have practiced public relations in a Canadian university. Being a senior public relations practitioner and having practiced public relations within one of Canada’s public universities, I recognize and acknowledge my interpretation of the interviews and resulting data is influenced by the following: my experiences, my support for leadership as a prerequisite for effective public relations, and my belief in the excellence theory as the framework for effective communication management and public relations.

Data Transfer and Storage

The participant consent forms, audio recordings of the interviews, interview transcripts, my notes and email correspondence with participants were stored electronically in several password protected locations including my hard drive, an external hard drive, and on Google Drive, both to ensure the materials would be retained and protected. Each tool used to store the material was protected via private usernames and passwords. Once the audio recordings were

saved to the hard drives and Google Drive, they were deleted from the recording device. All audio files will be deleted upon my attainment of a Master of Arts degree. This will also mark the beginning of a seven-year retention period for the consent forms, interview transcripts, my notes, and the MAXQDA and Excel files generated through the analysis. At the end of this period, the material will be deleted, as appropriate. Until then the material will be stored on Google Drive and will be password-protected. This will be the sole storage of the files.

I compiled a confidential administrative list of participants in an Excel document including names, university, job title, telephone numbers, and email addresses, and notes about my contact with them. Code number identifiers were assigned to each participant and were used in the MAXQDA program, Excel files and drafts of thesis chapters. Pseudonyms were substituted for code numbers on external drafts sent out for review and will be used in subsequent publications derived from this thesis.

Data Analysis

The analysis employed in this study is generally described in keeping with Starks & Trinidad's synopsis citing Ayres, Kavanaugh, & Knafel, 2003; Morse & Field, 1995: "interpretive analysis is an iterative, inductive process of decontextualization and recontextualization" (2007, p. 1375), the former being assigning codes to sections of the interview transcripts and the latter being examining the codes to identify themes. Once codes are assigned and themes identified, the themes are grouped into categories. This is the process, which I will refer to as thematic analysis, I used to analyze this study data; the data included audio recordings and transcriptions of the interviews as well as my notes. There is some confusion in the literature about what constitutes thematic analysis, with many researchers describing thematic analysis as content analysis (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013) and others who argue there is a distinct difference

between the two (e.g., Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013), but the process I followed is most aligned with that described by Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick (2008), Marshall & Rossman (1999), and Castleberry and Nolen (2018) as thematic analysis and included the following steps:

1. organise the data;
2. code the data;
3. generate categories or themes;
4. interpret the data;
5. test emergent understandings of the data; and
6. write-up the data analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 1999; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018).

Thematic analysis is a method of examining data that allows the researcher to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within data which provides a detailed, and nuanced account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006 as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). It is the most widely used analytical method in qualitative research (Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013; Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).

As referenced earlier, before coding the data, I ensured each interview transcript was accurate. This was critical to the coding process because the transcripts provided the central data for coding. Had the transcripts not been accurate, the data and thus the analysis would have been flawed. I began cross checking and revising the transcripts for accuracy after all of the interviews had been completed. Also, before beginning to code, I listened to the audio recording of each interview a minimum of two times to help ensure I understood and appropriately captured what was being said, and read each transcript a minimum of two times. I completed this “routine” for each interview and transcript after ensuring the interviews were captured appropriately in the transcripts. The result was a high degree of familiarity with each interview and transcript, to the

point where I felt I was incredibly familiar with each interviewee. It is critical with thematic analysis for the researcher to be intimately familiar with the data being analyzed as the researcher “acquires a sense of the entirety of the data” and achieves greater understanding (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018, p. 808).

I organized and coded the data with the help of MAXQDA coding software. I began the coding process after the interviews were completed. Delaying the start of the coding process until the interviews were completed lessened the potential for identifying codes and themes early on and limiting subsequent interviews to those codes and themes. The delay also allowed me to focus on the interviews and analysis as separate aspects of the study. The coding process, including ensuring accuracy of the interview transcripts at the outset, took several months due to unforeseen limitations on my time. The entire coding process involved a number of steps. Each interview was coded then recoded to consolidate some of the coded segments. I also began to code my field notes, however, upon reflection, my field notes often repeated what the interviewees had said and thus what was already included in the transcripts. After coding my field notes for about half of the interviews, I determined that the resulting coded segments were of little value because they were in many cases duplications of segments from the transcripts that had already been coded and took away from the value of the notes to provide context to the interviews. I retained my field notes as important data and continued to use them to help inform my data analysis, essentially helping me to identify how I may be imparting my own experiences onto the interviewees’ experiences and insights and to make sense of the data. Coding and recoding each interview, resulted in 386 coded segments, 46 codes and 14 sub-codes (see Coding Manual 1.0 in appendix E). The most often code used at this stage was “influence” with a frequency of 33.

Though I anticipated in the study design that I would derive the initial codes from the excellent leadership in public relations construct (Meng & Berger, 2013) and from the data itself, this did not ring true when it came to conducting the analysis. I didn't prescribe the codes from the excellent leadership in public relations construct after all, but rather let the data dictate the codes. This noted, analyzing data is done in context, allowing the researcher to make sense of the material and answer the research questions, providing researchers with a "frame of analysis" (Krippendorff 2004 as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen, and Bondas; 2013). It is expected that the literature review I undertook, which focused on leadership in public relations, influenced the coding process and, true to this, a number of the codes reflected the excellent leadership in public relations construct, including *communications expertise*, *organizational knowledge* and *relationship building*, as just a few examples.

Once each interview was coded then recoded, I began to identify similarities in the codes. In the next step, I reviewed all of the codes and sample coded segments in each code to identify those codes that could be grouped and, in some cases, merged with others. Through this process, I reduced the number of codes significantly and began to identify themes in earnest. I also reduced the number of coded segments by identifying segments with multiple codes attached and ensuring those codes were the most appropriate. At the end of this process, 368 segments were labeled with 10 codes and 38 subcodes (see Coding Manual 2.0 in appendix F). I repeated this process again several days later, allowing for time to reflect on the data and the codes with the intent of increasing my confidence in the themes that were appearing. As part of this reflection, I asked myself a series of questions from Castleberry & Nolen (2018, p. 809)

- Is this a theme (it could be just a code)?
- If it is a theme, what is the quality of this theme (does it tell me something useful about the dataset and my research question)?

- What are the boundaries of this theme (what does it include and exclude)?
- Are there enough (meaningful) data to support this theme (is the theme thin or thick)?
- Are the data too diverse and wide ranging (does the theme lack coherence)?

At this point, I had identified four themes in the data: *Elements that affect leadership*; *Leadership attributes*, which includes three sub-themes of *What leadership should do*, *What leaders should be*, and *What leaders should have*; *Work of study participants*; *Role of public relations and communications*; and retained a category for “Interesting” to capture a few coded segments that I wanted to retain but wasn’t sure what they were telling me quite yet (see Coding Manual 3.0 in appendix G). In an effort to identify and collate coded segments that pertained specifically to self perception of leadership in public relations, I extracted the coded segments in the three leadership attributes subcodes: What leaders should do, What leaders should be, and What leaders should have into an Excel spreadsheet and identified those segments that spoke to participants’ own self, actions, environment and aspirations. I then extracted those segments as a whole and by participant into separate spreadsheets. This allowed me to consider this set of segments in isolation from the others.

Though I describe the coding and theming process in linear terms, it’s important to note that the processes continued for more than a month, during which time, I reviewed and reflected on the data, codes and segments on numerous occasions, which continued through the writing of the discussions and findings chapter of this thesis. Also, through the capabilities of MAXQDA, I was able to focus on coded segments by code and by participant by extracting the coded segments in different ways. Thematic analysis allows for this process of trying to identify patterns in and across the data (Clarke and Braun, 2016), which was very helpful in my understanding of the data and its application to the research questions.

Once the interviews were coded and the themes identified, I provided the codes and themes from each interview and my respective interview notes to the interviewee as a way of verifying and validating the analysis of each interview – a member checking process described by Creswell (2014). Being a senior public relations practitioner and having practiced public relations within one of Canada's public universities, I acknowledged that my interpretation of the interviews and resulting data will be influenced by my experiences, my support for leadership as a prerequisite for effective public relations, and my belief in the excellence theory as the framework for effective communication management and public relations.

As an additional step in the analysis in keeping with the aims of this study, I cross referenced the categories and themes with the dimensions of excellent leadership in public relations. This step was taken to enable me to discuss the extent to which practitioner understanding and interpretation of their public relations leadership on the one hand aligns with the excellent leadership in public relations construct on the other.

Methodological Limitations

There are a few methodological limitations in this study worth noting. Though I believe the interviews provided a rich data set, I had intended to recruit participants who had a minimum of five years' experience at a university because I believed this level of experience was required to speak confidently about public relations leadership within a Canadian university environment. All participants in this study had more than five years of experience in public relations and communications; their years of employment at a university ranged from two months to more than 20 years. Further, three of the eight participants were employed at one university in Nova Scotia, reducing the number of universities represented in the study to six. Another limitation of the study is the time lapse between when participants were interviewed and when they were provided

with the codes and themes for validation. Participants were interviewed in the summer and early fall months of 2018 and provided with the codes and themes for validation in spring 2019. None of the participants identified issues with my understanding and interpretation of their interview, although the time lapse resulted in faded memories and recollections of the interviews.

CHAPTER FIVE

Results

To gain a richer understanding of public relations leadership, the primary aim of this study, I conducted then analyzed semi-structured interviews with eight mid- and senior-level public relations practitioners in public universities in Atlantic Canada. The interviews, which ranged from 47 to 65 minutes in length, provided insights into the interviewees' perceptions and interpretations of leadership in public relations and their own leadership, their work, and the environment in which they practice public relations and communication. A thematic analysis of the interviews resulted in four primary themes: 1) *Leadership attributes*, which includes three sub-themes of *What leaders should have*, *What leaders should be*, *What leaders should do*; 2) *Elements that influence one's ability to enact leadership*; 3) *Work of study participants*; and 4) *Role of public relations and communication*. Each theme was derived from multiple codes, with each theme having a minimum of two dominant codes (see Coding Manual 3.0 in appendix G) and the *Leadership attributes* theme encapsulating the largest number of codes and sub-codes. The following chapter is organized by theme and will outline the results for each theme and sub-theme (see table 2). Representative excerpts and quotes from participant interviews have been included as illustrations and examples. All participants' names have been changed to protect their privacy.

Table 2: Themes, sub-themes and sub-sub-themes

| Theme | Sub-theme | Sub-sub-theme |
|--------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. Leadership attributes | | |
| | 1.1 What leaders should have | |
| | | 1.1.1 Communication expertise |

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| | | 1.1.2 Confidence |
| | | 1.1.3 Organizational knowledge |
| | 1.2 What leaders should be | |
| | | 1.2.1 Coach and champion |
| | 1.3 What leaders should do | |
| | | 1.3.1 Influence |
| | | 1.3.2 Make decisions |
| 2. Elements that influence one's ability to enact leadership | | |
| | 2.1 Seat at the table | |
| 3. Work of study participants | | |
| | 3.1 Varied tasks and responsibilities | |
| | 3.2 Strategy and planning | |
| 4. Role of public relations and communication | | |
| | 4.1 Reputation management | |
| | 4.2 Support function | |

Theme 1: Leadership Attributes

The bulk of the conversations with participants during the interviews pertained to characteristics, attitudes or behaviours that individuals either demonstrate or should demonstrate to be considered a leader. More than 150 segments of the conversations with participants were coded as “what leaders should have,” (e.g. communication expertise); “should be,” (e.g., coach and champion); and “should do,” (e.g., influence). Prior to being interviewed for this study, however, few participants had given thought to their view of leadership or to defining a leader and fewer had considered that leadership in public relations may be distinct from leadership in other disciplines. In fact, all but two participants asked for clarification at the outset of my interview questions pertaining to leadership in public relations. Once clarified, however, the

conversations flowed freely. Notably, this was not the case for the interview questions designed to prompt conversation about participant reflections on their own leadership, which I will further discuss in the next chapter.

When discussing attributes of a leader (i.e. what leaders should have, should be, and should do), the interconnectedness of each of these attributes became evident. What leaders in public relations have, (e.g. communication expertise), allows them to be a coach and a champion, and establishing themselves as a coach and champion allows them to influence others, the organization and the field of public relations. Also, through the conversations with participants it became clear that with each leadership attribute a public relations practitioner has, expectations are placed on that individual. For instance, if a practitioner is considered to have communication expertise, whether determined by experience or education, they are *expected* to be a coach and champion and thus to influence others, the organization and the field of public relations. Notably, participants would not consider a practitioner to be a leader in public relations by virtue of one attribute alone. It is the combination of attributes that make a practitioner a leader in public relations.

The interconnectedness of the leadership attributes, the expectations and responsibilities along with the minimum requirements of a leader held true when the participants were discussing their own attributes, whether they considered themselves a leader and what their leadership responsibilities and actions may be. This noted, there were marked differences in the conversations about leadership attributes with some participants when they reflected on and discussed their own leadership. Some participants noted some of the same leadership attributes and discussed how they internalized them while other participants noted some of the same leadership attributes in themselves but didn't associate them with the concept of leadership or the corresponding responsibilities and expectations. In each of the sections below, I will indicate the

differences in the conversations about perceptions of leadership in public relations and perceptions of one's own leadership in public relations. As noted above, however, these differences along with other results pertaining to perceptions of one's own leadership versus perceptions of leadership in others will be discussed in the next chapter.

1.1 Leaders Should Have

1.1.1 Communication Expertise.

What participants described as requisite communication expertise was broad, but reception, interpretation and communication of information to benefit the organization and its stakeholders was a common topic of conversation. For Alison, who still considered herself new to university public relations but had more than 10 years in the field prior to being hired at a Halifax university, a leader in public relations must understand the goals of the organization and the needs of the audiences they are trying to reach and have the ability to balance the organizational goals and audience needs to help produce the best outcomes for the organization. She said, "...the longer I'm in the working world, the more I see ... communication and that skill around communication as really ... essential." With a similar reference, John, a senior practitioner at a Nova Scotia university with more than 15 years of experience in university public relations, noted that effective public relations practitioners must be adept at "temperature taking" and understanding the audiences they're attempting to reach. Lynn, a new-comer to university public relations with several years of experience in the private sector, spoke about a leader in public relations needing to have the ability to add value to organizational decisions, the ability to "paint a picture of how decisions affect organizations' stakeholders or publics," indicating that that would be the "mark of an effective leader." Similarly, in speaking about his own leadership abilities, John indicated that he is confident in his ability to paint a picture of how

business decisions will be received by various stakeholders. Melissa, a senior practitioner with more than 25 years of experience with university public relations, said that

knowing also when it's important to take a stand and when it's important to act quickly and decisively based on your own professional expertise and experience dealing with these issues in the past [is the desired approach]. It's trying to identify those areas where the consultations, the type and level and quantity of consultations, is important versus the professional expertise that you also bring to the table.

Related to this, participants often talked about the necessary ability for leading practitioners to distill information from a variety of sources and relay that information to others in a way that provides value, whether to the individual, the organization, stakeholders or other. Bill, a senior practitioner at a New Brunswick university, noted that practitioners must receive and interpret information in a way that allows them to help communicate and navigate topics or issues or events that are often complex or potentially controversial. Adding to this, he tied in requisite technical communication (e.g. writing, communication planning, social media use, media relations) skills,

I think you've got to have technical knowledge first, then organizational knowledge and then I think you've got to have a kind of a mindset that you are involved in things [and] ... you're trying to understand them to a degree that you can you can articulate them in a way that is beneficial to the organization.

Requisite communication skills such as writing, presenting and verbal communication were oft mentioned by participants. While much of the focus was on skills practitioners had acquired or would need to acquire to be considered a leader in public relations, there was an

underlying sense in the conversations with participants that leaders in public relations would have innate communication abilities. As Alison put it, “I think it all comes down to an aptitude for communication ... People that I have met and worked with were kind of cut from the same cloth, spun out of time.” And for Kevin, a practitioner who has focused on media relations for more than five years at a Nova Scotia university, a leader in public relations is

someone who has a bit of experience in the field, you know probably five years or more, but really understands strategic approaches and is very proactive in the way that they handle communication. So, I would say that's important for any good leader, that they are one step ahead, they're like two or three steps ahead, you know everyone's playing checkers and they're playing chess.

When participants spoke of communication expertise, they also spoke of the value of experience, as defined by years of service and involvement in public relations activity, in the field. With experience comes expertise, relationships, professional reputation and confidence. For Patti, who came from public relations in an academic health care centre to university public relations more than five years ago, a leader in public relations is “someone who's seasoned, who's seen the profession from various perspectives, ideally who's been around the block from a communication standpoint, who's had many relationships with media and been through various issues.” Alison linked wisdom and confidence to experience noting that with the “wisdom of experience” comes the confidence to make recommendations about how, when and with what messages to reach audiences. Judy, a senior practitioner with more than 25 years of experience in the field, more than 10 of which have been in university public relations, spoke of bringing value to her organization as an experienced practitioner: “So I was able to bring all of that skill and expertise and ... frankly the understanding that you gain over your career in the knowledge of the

players...That's a direct contribution to the institution or certainly one of the things that makes me valuable.”

1.1.2 Confidence.

As participants discussed various aspects of communication expertise as requisites for leadership in public relations, they also spoke about the need for practitioners to have confidence. The assertion wasn't that confidence is derived from communication expertise but rather to execute one's communication expertise effectively and thus to be a leading practitioner, one would need the courage to put forward ideas, to pose questions, to evaluate potential courses of action and to make recommendations. They would also need to be open to scrutiny and to criticism. As Bill put it, “I think you've got to ask and present difficult questions to people in a way that they don't feel threatened because a lot of times some issues are extremely emotional... You need to be not afraid to ask those questions and then to decide on a course of action: ” Just as Bill mentioned deciding on a course of action, John noted the discipline and confidence required to stick to and defend your course of action, “The other factor in leadership is being comfortable with being a contrarian. At any sort of senior leadership table you're likely to find yourself with colleagues who are not in the public relations business. You have to be comfortable with being the only person in the room with your point of view. And you have to be comfortable sharing it, to be comfortable arguing.” Where confidence most prominently showed up in the conversations was when the interviews turned to self perception. There were a few participants who clearly considered themselves leaders in public relations. They confidently spoke about their communication expertise, their experience, and the value they brought to the organization; for example:

“I’ve had a long, progressive career of steady progress in increments that would benefit a number of institutions and organizations that are a great fit for university. So, I was coming in bringing value in terms of my own expertise and professional reputation.”

“I’m good at identifying the university’s strengths and coming up with some very real and consistent ways to promote and advance those to enhance the institution's reputation.”

“I’m definitely a collaborator and a negotiator. I like to build consensus. I like to hear all perspectives. I’m a solid listener and I guess I didn't really say that out of the first piece but it's inherent in the collaboration piece. So, I align with that strongly and I think my years of experience across a few sectors are helpful from a leadership standpoint.”

The participants quoted above all hold positions as directors and have several years of experience as practitioners, which distinguishes them from other participants who were hesitant and uncomfortable when talking about their attributes and their potential as leaders in public relations; for example:

“Hmm. I would never, I wouldn't use that to describe myself because I feel like that would imply a bit of hubris ... this is a pretty large field.”

“I feel like ... I'm really stumbling because I honestly don't see myself as kind of in a leadership role.”

“I haven't done you know a lot of planning on my own ... the thought of being a public relations director I think oh my gosh, I don't know if I could do that.”

The excerpts above show a contrast in confidence when participants spoke of their attributes but also show linkages among communication expertise, experience in the field of public relations, confidence and whether one considers oneself as a leader in public relations.

1.1.3 Organizational Knowledge.

Participants highlighted knowledge of the organization, including familiarity with its “business,” (which I took to mean operations), and the people in it, as attributes of leaders in public relations in the context of universities. As John said,

...you have to understand the impact on the day to day operation of the organization regardless of what it is you're asked, you have to understand how the business would be impacted by whatever it is you're doing. Good leaders in public relations understand business and they understand business principles that are the key drivers for their organization.

For Bill, time spent in the organization provides knowledge of its business and its people, “... you have to try to understand your organization and that sometimes comes with time ... the more time you spend the more nuance and the more history of events that you can draw on.” According to one participant, knowing the organization and the people in it can help to bring the “right people around the table” facilitating consensus and enabling initiatives at hand to move forward, especially in “highly consultative environments.” In his discussion of how leading practitioners bring value to the organization, John again emphasized the importance of having experience with business principles and organizational knowledge to making sound decisions, “So again, putting your business hat on, if you know and understand the organization, then you know you *could*

invest in splashy public relations campaigns but maybe you *should* really just be investing in better customer service or a better, more resilient product [to get the same or better results].”

Lynn echoed this position in her interview indicating that she would expect someone in a chief communication role to have a “strong business acumen.”

In Summary.

The conversations with participants as outlined above show that to be considered a leader in public relations, a practitioner should have extensive communication expertise. This expertise may be acquired through education but must also be supplemented by experience in public relations and communication. With experience comes expertise, relationships, professional reputation and confidence. A practitioner must also possess confidence if they are to be considered a leader in public relations. Confidence would allow a practitioner to be comfortable with putting forward ideas, posing questions, evaluating potential courses of action, making recommendations and, as needed, arguing for their position which may not be the popular choice, all of which would bring value to the organization. While communication expertise and confidence are two attributes of a leader in public relations, a practitioner must also have organizational knowledge enabling the practitioner to put forward fiscally sound recommendations and more easily achieve consensus.

1.2 Leaders Should Be

1.2.1 Coach and Champion.

With their communication expertise, experience, confidence and organizational knowledge, participants see leaders in public relations as coaches of fellow, more junior practitioners and champions of public relations as a discipline that brings value to organizations and to society. A leader in public relations, as a coach, would be a mentor and role model to fellow practitioners, lending support and encouraging their professional development. A coach

would also advocate for their team and their work, which is where the role of champion is required of a leader in public relations. Melissa said that her philosophy as a leader is to “be a coach for my team and an educator, a champion to the rest of the university. So that's really how I have operated over the last 30 or so years.” For Lynn, a practitioner who effectively leads has the ability, using strong people management skills, to build consensus and demonstrate diplomacy and enables and empowers their team to make decisions independently and have accountability for their work. As a woman in public relations in a senior role in a reputable university who has established a strong professional reputation over many years, Judy says she feels the need to act as a “role model,” not only for her team, but for female practitioners outside her organization. As a coach, leading practitioners must lend a hand to other practitioners. As John said,

It's about making other people who practice our craft better at what they do because not only does it make the institutions and organizations we are working for better but it also makes people think more highly of the people who are practicing the craft. So I think it's an obligation on all of us to make the people who do our work the best that they can possibly be. Because if we go the other way and public relations practitioners and others in our business are systematically lousy then there soon will be none of us left. And I think that as a leader, if I have a person at another university call me, I help them. If I have a junior person in another university call me, I help them. As long as I'm not giving away any corporate institutional secrets I help them because I think it's a good thing. I think we have an obligation to do so. You know and I think being a leader is about extending a hand.

For participants there is a direct connection between being a coach and being a champion, someone who promotes the value of public relations and practitioners inside and outside of their organizations. Advocating for public relations and the work of those who practice it can facilitate public relations and communication and generate awareness and credibility. Melissa said that “Being a champion is to educate about what we do and what we can do for the institution because that helps your team be more effective. If the members of the [senior management team] understand what you do and how you can help them then your team has an easier job doing the job that they do.” Reflecting on his own leadership, John spoke of being a champion of public relations and communication and the outcomes of same:

I think that one of the things that allows us to be influential in the organization is when people see value in the work we do. One of the things that we've tried to do here, and it's partly resource-driven and it's partly my desire to not sucker-punch resources out of the organization, is to try to make more people on campus excellent communicators and understand the role public relations and communication play so that they understand that if they don't perform well on the communication front it could cost us something more, it could cause us to lose out on an opportunity. I'm actually leveraging greater resources without having to have a bigger budget line.

For participants, being a champion for the profession outside of the organization means taking part in professional associations such as the Canadian Public Relations Society or the International Association of Business Communicators, connecting with practitioners in senior roles and senior executives outside the profession, and keeping up with trends in the field. The benefit of connecting with fellow practitioners and maintaining those connections, whether

through a professional organization or other, was a common thread in participant interviews when talking about what leaders should be or do and when participants reflected on their own work and careers as practitioners. For example, Lynn said, “So I think that leaders, communication leaders, public affairs leaders, or whatever should build stronger networks and raise the profile of our profession when they are connected to other communication practitioners across sectors and industries.” One of the benefits of connecting with others is learning, which participants highly valued. Participants expect leading practitioners to be lifelong learners, to seek out and implement best practices consistently, to establish best practice whenever possible and share same, to be aware of trends in the profession. They also expect leaders in public relations to be comfortable with taking calculated risks, to do things just a bit differently than others. For example, Kevin said, “So an important leadership quality is the ability to evolve and to stay ahead of trends, not even to stay current but to be able to look ahead.” And in her interview, Patti noted that leaders must come up with different and creative ways of doing things and stay ahead of others by thinking “outside the box.”

A practitioner cannot be a coach and a champion unless they are also ethical. Whether a participant had a senior role, several years experience and considered themselves a leader in the field or a participant was a mid-level practitioner with 10 years in the field, they were unequivocal about the need for practitioners to be ethical – to have a “strong moral compass.” It’s helpful to consider here what Patti had so say;

I think the best leaders are collaborative, open minded, creative, thoughtful people who bring a solid moral commitment to the role and a willingness to listen to all kinds of perspectives. I think that's what makes a solid leader in public relations – someone who is also willing to stand

firm when it's necessary and stand up for the role, for the perspective, which is helpful for the organization.

One participant acknowledged this isn't always easy, 'You know in public relations you can sometimes get close to the line and it's important that you don't cross it ... I try to stay on the right side of that line ... you want to be able to support yourself with integrity and try to do the right thing.' Ethics and morality have to be reflected in practice to provide the most value to organizations. As one participant said, "Our job often entails being a mirror for the institution. You have to hold the institution and the decision up to that mirror so that the institution can see whether or not they like what they see." Patti expanded on this idea in her interview,

To me, that's the most important: Have you thought about this from all angles? Have you spoken to everybody for whom this matters? I think that is probably the most important in the field. And then are you serving as the, essentially, the moral compass for the organization. But most organizations have a more complex moral compass than just a PR person, but you need to be tuned into that and asking yourself if you're ensuring the institution is making the right decision for all these various constituents? I think that's probably most critically what our leadership brings to the table.

In Summary.

With communication expertise and confidence comes the responsibility to be a coach and a champion, supporting the public relations profession and practitioners while bringing value to your organization. A leader in public relations – as a coach – would be a mentor and role model to fellow practitioners, lending support and encouraging their professional development. A coach would also advocate for their team, their work and their profession, which is where the role of

champion is required of a leader in public relations. As a champion, a practitioner educates others on the value of public relations and communication to organizations and to society, generating awareness and understanding of the profession's value, and, when doing so inside their organization, propelling public relations and communication initiatives and lending an ethical voice to their organization. To fulfill the role of coach and a champion, a practitioner must be connected with senior practitioners and executives, be a life-long learner and practice ethically and morally.

1.3 Leaders Should Do

1.3.1 Influence.

To be a true coach and champion, a practitioner must influence others. A leader in public relations must influence others for the benefit of the organization, their teams, their colleagues, fellow practitioners and the profession. Influencing others enables the practitioner to facilitate public relations and communication initiatives, to bring about cultural change and to contribute to organizational decision making – all of which are marks of public relations leadership according to participants. To influence, practitioners must adeptly listen to others and build relationships to establish consensus and collaboration, the need for which is especially pertinent within universities where, as participants indicated, academic freedom is prioritized and the university's senior management and administration has less influence on the activities and priorities of faculty members than in a corporate setting. As an example,

So, in the university setting, faculty members don't actually need to work with you. They have academic independence and they don't have to ever deal with you, they literally do not. So developing strong relationships is an important part of it because it's not like when you work in government or private organization where a PR person might say we need this at this

time and the money might go out with it. It's, 'Hey, I've heard you've done something interesting, would you like to discuss it?' They can go to the media on their own and do what they want.... a lot of what you're doing is based on collaboration, based on partnerships and if you're not approaching it in a friendly and helpful manner, you won't get the great information to share or great stories to tell ... So I know it sounds silly to say, but being nice is a critical part of leadership in a setting where relationships are key. It really is.

It is not only about leveraging connections to help promote your organization; practitioners must influence others in a way that facilitates adoption of public relations and communication counsel and supports adoption of new directions, strategies or initiatives. The university within which Judy works is undergoing a period of change:

And you have to find a way, a very persuasive way based on best practices, on evidence, peer review, based on all the things that research universities value. You make those arguments for progressive change. Universities are not going to adopt change just because everybody else is doing it or because some consultant or guru says it's a thing to do just because it's worked somewhere out there. There really do need to be arguments based on data, on evidence, on expertise, on you know. And there has to be a recognition of the inherent values specific to that institution.

Having worked as a public relations practitioner in the private sector prior to joining her university, Alison says the need to influence others as a path toward collaboration was an eye

opener, “You really actually do have to try to get people to cooperate instead of taking it for granted.”

Participants routinely listen to others and build relationships to build consensus and to collaborate, bringing value to their organizations. As Patti puts it,

As we're negotiating with all of our clients across the institution and outside I think we're working towards a better product on the public relations side. I think we're ensuring that we're going to provide the right answers, if you will. We're going to provide the best advice if we're truly consultative and if we're thoughtfully listening to all of our constituents ... Really in the work we do, we're sitting around a table that involves people, students, faculty, other staff, various types of staff, and a leader is able to get consensus around that table.

Participants acknowledged, however, there are times when consensus isn't the desired course of action and practitioners must influence others. As Judy said, “Good leaders also have the ability to come in and talk truth to power in a very elegant way that doesn't offend anyone.” The importance of the ability to influence can extend beyond the individual to the department in which the practitioner works. The reporting structure that affects Alison's department recently changed, resulting in what Alison terms an increasing sphere of influence, “It's the increasing sphere of influence that we have in setting the, having a lot of say in the president's communication and the overriding messages of the university in large vehicles such as the university's website [that allows us to lead].”

1.3.2 Make Decisions.

For practitioners to be considered leaders, they must have the ability to make decisions; that is, they have the capacity to make decisions and they hold a minimum level of

organizational authority that would allow them to make decisions about public relations and communication priorities, budgets, initiatives and projects. They must also have the ability to contribute to decisions that go beyond public relations and communication by providing communication and public relations counsel that organizational leaders value enough to adhere to. Influence within the organization would enable a practitioner to contribute to decision making. As one participant explained, providing meaningful input into organizational decisions is a mark of a leader in public relations. Providing the right amount of value in any organization, is ensuring that people are making the right decisions and take the right actions in order to be consistent with their brand identity. For participants, the mark of a leader in public relations is to influence an organization, institution or a company to consider the communication issues and implications of a business decision. As Lynn said, “Yeah it is collaboration, but also counsel to operations...for a chair or the president's office, providing insight into what the communication or the potential communication outcome of a particular operational decision is.” Participants were careful to articulate, however, that while leaders in public relations must demonstrate decision-making and contribute to organizational decisions by providing communication counsel and advice, a leader should also respect and place limitations on their decision-making authority. There was agreement among participants that while public relations and communication considerations should factor into decisions about the operations of the university, neither practitioners nor their public relations and communication departments should be the authority over decisions outside of their areas of expertise. As Bill explained, “it isn’t for communication and public relations practitioners to intervene, it is our responsibility to articulate the impacts of that decision on stakeholders.” And in elaborating on her role in providing counsel on the university’s operations, Sara noted,

We would provide counsel to those making decisions outside of communication, [demonstrating how] their work could have an effect on overall reputation or other communication outcome. So we provide counsel in how to communicate operational decisions, whether to communicate operational decision[s] or when or how to communicate about operational decisions but not affect the operational decision itself, more how it affects communication.

In Summary.

To be a true coach and champion, a practitioner must influence others. A leader in public relations must influence others for the benefit of the organization, their teams, their colleagues, fellow practitioners and the profession. To influence others enables the practitioner to facilitate public relations and communication initiatives, to bring about cultural change and to contribute to organizational decision making – all of which are marks of public relations leadership according to participants. To influence, practitioners must adeptly listen to others and build relationships to establish consensus and collaboration. Within universities especially, implementing public relations and communication initiatives – those that strengthen the reputation of the institution – requires collaborating with others. As participants noted, faculty members enjoy a high level of autonomy and academic freedom within universities and thus are not required to work with practitioners. By building relationships with faculty and others within universities, practitioners can build influence, and encourage collaboration.

For participants, influence is a means of contributing to decision making within the organization. Practitioners must have the ability to make decisions; that is, they have the capacity to make decisions and they hold a minimum level of organizational authority that would allow them to make decisions about public relations and communication priorities, budgets, initiatives

and projects, *and* have the ability to contribute to decisions that go beyond public relations and communication by providing communication and public relations counsel that organizational leaders value enough to adhere to. There are, however, limitations to the decision-making authority of practitioners, and leading practitioners accept those limitations.

Theme 2: Elements that Influence One's Ability to Enact Leadership

Just as Meng et al. (2012) identified organizational culture as an antecedent of excellent leadership in public relations, study data showed that how leadership is enacted is influenced by whether communication and public relations are represented at the university's senior management table, granting the right to participate in organizational decision-making and affording a position of authority in the organization.

2.1 Seat at the Table

The consensus among study participants is that the opportunity to consistently sit around the senior management table where high-level discussions take place and decisions are made is critical to enacting the role of public relations leader. Without representation of communication and public relations at the management table, there is no opportunity to fulfill the requisites of public relations leader. Having a seat at the senior management table is of multi-dimensional importance to the role of public relations leader. There is a practical importance to the quality of the practitioner's work and that of their team. For instance, at the senior management table, the practitioner is privy to discussions and decisions that provide advance notice of potential issues or opportunities; has direct access to senior managers, which provides the practitioner opportunities to champion public relations or communication initiatives; has the opportunity for input into decisions that have an impact on public relations and communication; and has the opportunity to provide advice and counsel through a public relations and communication lens. All

of these practicalities enable the highest quality public relations and communication support within the university. As the participant with the most experience at a university, Melissa said,

The role that I carry out is an important role and has always been part of the senior management team. Not so much as a decider of a lot of things but certainly as an advisor and as information conduit. So that's really critical to my team that I have a seat at that table to make sure that their work is relevant and that they have access to the information and the people that they need when they need to do it.

John, also a senior practitioner, expressed his appreciation for being at his university's senior management table: "I've been lucky to be at the senior table the entire time I've been here. Because the presidents here have seen the value in our communication and public relations."

Other participants spoke of the need for communication and public relations to be represented at the senior management table in order to provide the best communication and public relations support to the university. For Lynn, when communication and public relations is not represented at the table, opportunities are missed, which has a detrimental effect on the university and undervalues the role of communication and public relations. As an example, she noted,

So having a seat around the table while decisions haven't been made yet even if they are operational or outside the scope of communication [allows for input into those decisions]. When you have someone at the table rather than you know... You can avoid having those incidents or a public relations crisis, if you can help it, ... before they become something that has reputational impact. And for every organization

reputational impact has a different outcome. You know so for a university it might mean there's a certain perception of your university from an incumbent, a potential student perspective, you know, reputational effects can affect, can influence, someone's decision to become a donor or to volunteer or...

For Bill, a seat at the senior management table affords the opportunity to make the connections and inform decisions that are necessary for effective communication and public relations.

So we need to be plugged in. And the degree to which we're plugged in and brought in you know in the right way, not every day, but in key times directly affects how we can do our job ... I mean the shorter way to say that is to be you know we need to have a seat at the table on key decisions.

A key role of a public relations leader within a university is as an advisor. The consensus among participants is that at the senior management table, the senior practitioner is an advisor to the senior management team, providing input and counsel through a communication and public relations lens that influences the discussions and decisions.

There is an intangible importance to public relations and communication being represented at the senior management table in that by virtue of occupying a seat, the practitioner and the communication and public relations portfolio is afforded authority and credibility within the university that is requisite of public relations leadership. For instance, as Bill said,

... if the communication area was seen as having its own kind of organizational mandate reflected through a senior leader then that would certainly help. It would help without even saying anything. I think it

would go some distance in helping people understand [the role and importance of communication]. It could help dispel the notion that communication is somehow something we do after we do decisions. [And see] that the person who is kind of leading the communication effort actually has a meaningful role in making decisions. Again not because of communication impacts or things like that but they just are allowed to have that role.

Among participants, the credibility and authority that comes with being part of the senior management team is both a certainty reflected in the senior practitioner's ability to provide advice and contribute to decisions, and a wider cultural perception that contributes to the willingness of faculty and other employees of the university to work with the public relations and communication team to achieve desired goals. According to participants, both the certainty and perception of credibility and authority contribute to the amount of funding communication and public relations is afforded, and the amount of funding allotted to communication and public relations directly affects the ability to meet communication and public relations goals, participate in professional development, attend meetings and conferences to connect with fellow practitioners – all requisites of public relations leadership. Melissa and her team spend a great deal of time educating others on communication and public relations to ensure that when she asks “With the budget you've given us, does this represent an appropriate allocation given your knowledge of the University's priorities?” she gets the answer she's hoping for. As she noted, if the university community is saying things like, “we don't know what they do,” “are they really adding value,” and “do we need a marketing and communication department if our budgets are being crunched,” appropriate funding for communication and public relations is unlikely. Having a seat at the senior management table is an opportunity to answer those questions and often

mitigates the questions altogether because public relations and communication is represented at the senior most table within the university. For Judy, her ability to often present public relations and communication strategy to her university's senior management team and Board of Directors has positively affected budget allocation to her portfolio. As she explained,

...the need for overall a plan and focused strategy; strategic plans that look [at] everything you know from the opportunities and the threats specific for this institution, and the recognition that certain priorities are set and that resources should be realigned to support that. I mean the budget planning process has certainly swung behind recognizing when the university is making an investment in the area of the advancement and that would have a direct positive impact on communication or external affairs.

The representation of public relations and communication at the senior management table facilitates achievement of public relations and communication goals and indicates an organizational culture where public relations and communication is valued as a contributor to the organization's success. With this, whether the university's management team prioritizes communication and public relations to the degree it establishes a seat at the management table for same, affects the enactment of public relations leadership.

In Summary.

The opportunity to consistently sit around the senior management table is of multidimensional importance to enacting the role of public relations leader. It is directly correlated to a) the quality of the practitioner's work and that of their team, b) the ability to act as a strategic advisor and inform decisions, and c) authority and credibility within the university.

When communication and public relations is not represented at the table, opportunities are

missed, which has a detrimental effect on the university and undervalues the role of communication and public relations.

Theme 3: Work of Study Participants

The nature of participants' day to day work as public relations practitioners within a university environment permeated the interviews. The discussions did not always appear to have a direct link to leadership but what became clear is that certain elements of public relations and communication work are indicative of public relations leadership while others are not. Further, how participants understand public relations leadership correlates with the daily work they do and with the position they hold. Daily responsibilities involving communication strategy development and issues management are indicative of public relations leadership as is directing others. These findings will be discussed in greater detail in relation to the research questions in the next chapter, however, the following provides the more complete results of discussions about the work activities of participants and their position within their respective universities.

3.1 Varied Tasks and Responsibilities

Regardless of position within the university, all participants expressed variability in their activities and responsibilities, day-to-day and overall, and the variability is greatest when the communication and public relations team is the smallest. Those participants who are in director roles expressed that they could be engaged in what can be considered tactical elements of public relations (e.g. writing an article for a publication), as easily as they can be engaged in what can be considered strategic elements of public relations (e.g. communication planning for a large public relations and communication initiative). As Judy explained,

So it's a really great mix. Every day you come in, there are those operational realities ... such as you know press conferences, media events

you know, web development, web promotion you know it's a lot of stakeholder engagement.

Her role in that mix is oversight but also to jump in to lend a hand with whatever needs to get done. Participants in advisor rather than director roles discussed the range of tasks they may be engaged in and responsibilities they hold. The unpredictability of Kevin's workdays is what adds to the interest of his position.

Actually the nice thing about it is that you never know what the day is going to bring. For example, yesterday, I fielded a couple of media calls and prepped a news release. I did some work with a couple of our professors doing media training and I did part of an interview. We started work on one of our comms plans so really kind of touching a lot of different areas.

With the variability, the range of tasks and responsibilities is often broad. The breadth increased when the communication and public relations team was smaller and decreased when the team was larger. For example, one participant who holds a communication and public relations management title and is part of a very small communication and public relations team, discussed her responsibilities spanning government relations, media relations, issues management, internal communication, and event management. These include a range of activities: writing web content and news releases, social media monitoring, producing and implementing event plans, developing social media content, and more. While she manages plans and projects, she does not manage people. The activities and responsibilities of participants who were part of larger communication and public relations teams, though varied, were more often confined to the role. For example, as the media relations advisor for a larger university, Kevin noted, "I am the media relations person

so I get the calls coming to me and the news releases go out through me. I work with key stakeholders to prepare them for [the] media environment, conduct interviews, write releases...”

In Summary.

All participants expressed variability in their activities and responsibilities, day-to-day and overall, and the variability is greatest when the communication and public relations team is the smallest.

3.2 Strategy and Planning

Strategy, including communication planning, was an area of activity and responsibility that participants spoke of frequently either as a central part of their role, in the case of the more experienced and senior participants, or a desired part of their role, in the case of the participants who had less experience. Through the interviews, it became apparent that participants feel that the responsibility for strategy is indicative of a senior communication and public relations role in a university.

For Judy, strategy is a dominant part of her role,

I have a large communication strategic framework for the whole university that flows directly from those other large initiatives from those other large clients. But very much I'm very conscious that everything I do and everything that my staff do must relate directly to those plans which I have frankly developed. You need to see the bigger picture and constantly be sharing that with your team. There could be obstacles and frustrations that can ... be sometimes burdensome in a university environment.

Strategy is also a significant part of Bill's role as communication and public relations lead at his university,

I do a lot of the strategizing behind messages and work with our executive team and our department heads or directors and managers with respect to any content that touches their areas. [I also serve as] advisory to my own VP, which is VP of advancement, and to other VPs. I think a good communicator, as in a good communication person, should ultimately be viewed as offering value strategically to the organization.

And for Melissa,

Well we drive it [communication strategy]. This is the central office responsible for University public relations so we are responsible for sort of setting the pan-university strategy around communication and marketing and then helping to deliver on that, whether that is directly doing the work ourselves or working collaboratively with faculty and schools that have administrative units in the university or delegating part of that work off to them. So we walk that line between setting strategic direction but then also delivering on some or all of it depending on what the project might be.

Other participants spoke of wanting more opportunities to be engaged in communication planning and embed strategic communication into their work. For example, when speaking of how to develop his own public relations leadership, one participant said, "I need more time to work on and focus on the strategic pieces as opposed to the day to day operations...I would like to do more strategic work." And for another participant, strategy and leadership are closely related,

... I try to approach things that come across my desk with a strategic lens, a leadership lens, and take opportunities to demonstrate that I have an

appreciation of those qualities. And so you know the ability to be an effective listener, to reframe an issue, and suggest an action out of that issue.

In Summary.

Communication strategy and planning is a coveted area of activity and responsibility. For the more senior participants in the study, communications strategy and planning was part of their role, and for others, they were desired activities and responsibilities.

Theme 4: Role of Public Relations and Communication

Regardless of whether the participant embedded strategy into their respective communication and public relations activities and responsibilities, all were consistent in their view of the overall role of public relations and communication and the practitioners who hold its responsibility. The communication and public relations team, irrespective of size, is the steward of the university's reputation.

4.1 Reputation Management

As John put it,

So, my job, I think, on a day to day basis is about half providing advice, working with my senior colleagues and their direct reports, and the other half would be actually producing material that is shared and becomes part of publicly available documents. And all of that, by the way, is within my mandate for managing the brand and reputation of the institution.

The desire among participants for stakeholders to understand the university's mandate and "personality" and to relate to same positively drives participants' work in that it is the intended outcome. As Judy explained, "The biggest responsibility I have every day that I come to work is

the reputation of the university and both proactive efforts and large communication plans, individual projects, new programs, new personnel, all designed to move [the] University right along its strategic path.”

Though participants were unanimous in referencing reputation management as the primary responsibility of public relations and communication teams within a university, Bill noted that reputation isn't within the control of any one unit of the university:

...I don't know that ... you can control a lot of this stuff and people understand the university through not only the communication department but by how the university manifests through the employees, through students sometimes. These perceptions are created in all kinds of ways. And so I think I've [tried to not] be so idealistic about the fact that we can manage quote unquote things you know. I mean we all say that, we all kind of know. But I think the nature of the world is that it's hard to manage, and increasingly with social media and so on and so forth you can't really manage your message recently. You can try to construct it in a thoughtful and meaningful way. You can try to navigate--I guess that probably is maybe a better word-- and navigate and react to requests for information or things like that.

In Summary.

The communication and public relations team, irrespective of size, is the steward of the university's reputation.

4.2 Support Function

In the same vein, participants were definitive in their shared view that communication and public relations is a support function – one that supports the university's operations as opposed to

one that drives the university's operations. As Lynn explained in reference to her current role in the university,

...My role might have influence over or collaborate with decision makers in operations roles so our departments could influence how the issue is managed but very often, as is probably the case of much of my experience in the public sector or the private sector, operations is going to do its thing and then, you know, it is our role to support that unless we see a reputational factor potential impact and, therefore, try to influence the operation in a way that wouldn't maybe have a negative impact on reputation. But I would say that's collaborative rather than... I would say we would attempt to be collaborative rather than to be influential with the operation.

At both Allison's and Melissa's universities, the activities and responsibilities of the communication and public relations function are derived directly from the university's strategic plan. As Allison noted, "We have a strategic plan for university and then there is a strategic communication framework with communication goals and initiatives to support that." There are critical responsibilities that come with communication and public relations as a support function, which are reflected in the results to this point, but there is a responsibility to be a mirror for the organization that deserves mention before concluding the results. In Bill's words, "I think the role of a communicator is to smartly and respectfully and in other ways try to understand the organization and at the same time as you're engaging in an inquiry on certain communication matters you're reflecting the organization back on itself a little bit. That's the impact you have." Communication and public relations practitioners, as the

stewards of the university's reputation and as a support to the university's operations, help the university's management team to see itself in the eyes of its stakeholders. As John indicated when speaking about the importance of ethics, "We then have a responsibility, as leaders in our field and in our organizations, to ask if they like what they see [in the mirror]."

In Summary.

Communication and public relations is a support function – one that supports the university's operations as opposed to one that drives the university's operations. Indicative of this, in the cases where the university has a business or strategic plan, the activities of the communication and public relations function are derived from that plan and are intended to facilitate achievement of the goals and objectives outlined in the business or strategic plan.

Conclusion

The bulk of the conversations with participants during the interviews pertained to characteristics, attitudes or behaviours that individuals either demonstrate or should demonstrate to be considered a leader. Leaders in public relations have communications expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge. They leverage that expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge to act as a coach and champion – coaches of fellow, more junior practitioners and champions of public relations as a discipline that brings value to organizations and to society. With their expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge and as a coach and champion, public relations leaders influence others and hold a minimum level of organizational authority that allows them to make decisions about public relations and communication priorities, budgets, initiatives and projects, *and* to contribute to decisions that go beyond public relations and

communication by providing communication and public relations counsel that organizational leaders value enough to adhere to.

What leaders in public relations have, (e.g. communication expertise), allows them to be a coach and a champion, and establishing themselves as a coach and champion allows them to influence others, the organization and the field of public relations. Also, with each leadership attribute a public relations practitioner has, expectations are placed on that individual. That is, with communications expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge, practitioners are expected to act as coach and champion. As a coach and champion, practitioners are expected to influence others and have the ability to make decisions.

Participants indicate, however, that to enact public relations leadership, communication and public relations must be represented at the university's senior management table. Occupying a seat at the senior management table is directly correlated to a) the quality of the practitioner's work and that of their team, b) the ability to act as a strategic advisor and inform decisions, and c) authority and credibility within the university. Thus, the opportunity to consistently sit around the senior management table where high-level discussions take place and decisions are made is critical to enacting the role of public relations leader.

In addition to leadership attributes and influencers of leadership enactment, participants discussed their everyday work and the role of communication and public relations within the university. All participants expressed variability in their activities and responsibilities, day-to-day and overall, and the variability is greatest when the communication and public relations team is the smallest. Those participants who are in director roles expressed that they could be engaged in what can be considered tactical elements of public relations (e.g. writing an article for a publication), as easily as they can be engaged in what can be considered strategic elements of public relations (e.g. communication planning for a large public relations and communication

initiative). Of the communication and public relations activities discussed, communication strategy, including planning, was the most coveted, and the outcome of the communication and public relations activities is to contribute positively to the university's reputation.

The communication and public relations team, irrespective of size, is the steward of the university's reputation. The greatest role of communication and public relations within the university is to establish and maintain a positive reputation of the university, however, reputation isn't within the control of any one unit of the university. In the same vein, participants were definitive in their shared view that communication and public relations is a support function – one that supports the university's operations as opposed to one that drives the university's operations.

CHAPTER SIX

Discussion

With this study, I aimed to expand understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context and contribute to development of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) by employing qualitative research guided by a constructivist worldview. I interviewed public relations practitioners in Atlantic Canadian public universities to gain insights into how they understand and interpret their leadership; whether that interpretation and understanding aligns with the excellent leadership in public relations construct, including its definition of excellent leadership in public relations and key dimensions; and how practitioner role and gender may influence leadership. With that in mind, this study was guided by the following central and subsequent questions:

- How do practitioners understand and interpret leadership in public relations in reference to their behaviours, characteristics and professional role?
- To what extent do practitioner understanding and interpretation of their public relations leadership align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct?
- How do public relations role and gender influence practitioner alignment with excellent leadership in public relations?

This study is the first to explore self-perception of public relations leadership. Construction of public relations leadership theory to date has sought to define leadership in public relations by way of literature reviews and qualitative research wherein public relations and communication practitioners defined and assessed leadership in public relations as an external phenomenon rather than one enacted. I argue that public relations leadership is a phenomenon defined by individuals based on their lived experience. Thus, to gain a richer understanding of public relations

leadership, the primary aim of this study, I conducted then analyzed semi-structured interviews of eight mid- and senior-level public relations practitioners in public universities in Atlantic Canada. The data was analyzed through a process aligned with that described by Burnard, Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick (2008), Marshall & Rossman (1999), and Castleberry & Nolen (2018) as thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a method of examining data that allows the researcher to identify, analyze and report patterns (themes) within data which provides a detailed, and nuanced account of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006 as cited in Vaismoradi, Turunen & Bondas, 2013; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The results of the thematic analysis are outlined in the previous chapter. Here I discuss the findings from the analysis in relation to each of the research questions.

RQ1. How do practitioners understand and interpret leadership in public relations in reference to their behaviours, characteristics and professional role?

The study interview questions were intended to invite interviewees to reflect on and discuss their views on their own leadership. However, overall, interviewees more freely discussed leadership in public relations as an external phenomenon rather than one they themselves enact, have the ability to enact or are working toward enacting. For instance, when discussing leadership attributes participants were comfortable in describing *What leaders should have*, *What leaders should be* and *What leaders should do* and the conversation rarely turned to *What I do as a leader*, *What I am as a leader* and *What I want to do as a leader*. The fact that few participants seemed comfortable reflecting on and discussing themselves as leaders or potential leaders is not surprising as it's fair to say that generally many people are uncomfortable turning attention on themselves. The four senior practitioners in the study sample, those with more than 15 years of experience in public relations and who held a title of "manager" or "director," were more comfortable talking about leadership in themselves and discussing how they enact leadership in

the field while the remaining four study participants understood leadership in public relations as a presumed goal they are working toward and not a phenomenon they currently enact.

The determining factors in whether a study participant was comfortable acknowledging self as a leader in public relations appear to be years of experience (years of experience in public relations and communication combined with professional experience in other fields), title and position of authority in the organization. By virtue of acknowledging themselves as leaders in public relations, the senior practitioners impose on themselves certain responsibilities and expectations as leaders in public relations based on their construction of “public relations leader.” These roles and responsibilities constitute their enactment of public relations leadership. As noted in the results chapter, leadership attributes are interconnected and dictate responsibilities and expectations. A practitioner’s communication expertise, especially when recognized by others, allows them to be a coach and a champion, and acting as a coach and champion allows them to influence others, the organization and the field of public relations. These actions are actually responsibilities and expectations imposed on the practitioner by oneself and others. For instance, when a practitioner is considered to have communication expertise, whether determined by experience or education, they are *expected* to be a coach and champion and thus to influence others, the organization and the field of public relations. The interconnectedness of the leadership attributes and the expectations and responsibilities along with the minimum requirements of a leader held true when the participants were discussing their own attributes, whether they considered themselves a leader, and what their leadership responsibilities and actions may be. By carrying out those responsibilities and expectations, the senior practitioners are indeed enacting their interpretation of public relations leadership. In turn, they are reinforcing their interpretation of leadership in public relations as coaches and champions, a role of a leader in public relations according to participants, for example:

“There's always something new to learn. I'm constantly learning. And I'm trying to transfer that knowledge to my staff.”

And I actually think that's what leadership is. It's about making other people who practice our craft better at what they do because not only does it make the institutions and organizations we are working for better but it also makes people think more highly of the people who are practicing the craft. So I think it's an obligation on all of us to make the people who do our work the best that they can possibly be...And I think that as a leader, if I have a person at another university call me, I help them. If I have a junior person in another university call me, I help them.

So I guess as I mentioned earlier my philosophy is about being a coach for my team and being an educator, a champion to the rest of the university. So that's really how I have operated over the last 30 or so years.

The senior practitioners in the study sample possessed a wealth of communication expertise derived from their education or a myriad of experience over years in the field, a related field, and/or in the organization. They were also confident in their abilities as communication and public relations practitioners; acted as coaches and champions inside and outside of their universities; felt they had the ability to influence others; and had responsibility for decision making pertaining to the university's communication and public relations initiatives. For these

practitioners, their communication expertise, their attributes, behaviours and actions, constitute public relations leadership.

Despite that the remaining group of four study participants did not identify themselves as leaders in public relations, they were enacting aspects of public relations leadership, as defined by study participants, to some degree. These aspects of public relations leadership include acting as coach and champion, influencing others, and participating in strategy development. Further, each practitioner in this group possessed communication and public relations expertise derived from formal education and having worked at least five years in the field. They did not; however, have a title of “director” or “manager” (with the exception of one participant who had a title of “communication manager”), a place at the senior management table, or cite opportunities to make primary decisions on communication or public relations initiatives. These distinctions represent a gap between this group and the group of senior practitioners who saw public relations leadership in themselves, and also illustrate the gap between these practitioners’ self-perception of leadership and the participants’ overall views of public relations leadership when described and discussed as an external phenomenon. As noted in the results chapter, there were marked differences in the conversations about leadership attributes with some participants when they reflected on and discussed their own leadership. Some participants noted some of the same leadership attributes and discussed how they internalized them (the former group) while other participants noted some of the same leadership attributes in themselves but didn’t associate them with the concept of leadership or the corresponding responsibilities and expectations (the latter group).

Whether study participants considered themselves a leader in public relations, enacting public relations leadership through their attributes, behaviours and actions, or as practitioners working toward leadership in public relations, they, as a group, indicated that a leader in public

relations is a public relations practitioner with extensive communication expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge who should act as a coach and champion, make strategic decisions pertaining to communication and public relations, and influence others. Notably, participants would not consider a practitioner to be a leader in public relations by virtue of one attribute alone, rather it is the combination of attributes, behaviours and actions that constitute public relations leadership. This finding supports previous academic study of leadership in public relations, including Aldoory & Toth (2004), Werder & Holtzhausen (2009) and Meng et al. (2012), that considered public relations leadership to be multi-faceted. What participants felt to be influencers of public relations leadership corresponds too with previous studies of leadership in public relations. The consensus among study participants is that the opportunity to consistently sit at the senior management table where high-level discussions take place and decisions are made is critical to enacting the role of public relations leader. Among participants, the credibility and authority that comes with being part of the senior management team is both a certainty reflected in the senior practitioner's ability to provide advice and contribute to decisions, and a less-tangible cultural perception that contributes to the willingness of faculty and other employees of the university to work with the public relations and communication team to achieve desired goals. According to participants, representation of public relations and communication at the senior management table facilitates achievement of public relations and communication goals and indicates an organizational culture where public relations and communication is valued as a contributor to the organization's success. With this, whether the university's management team prioritizes communication and public relations to the degree it establishes a seat at the management table for same, affects the enactment of public relations leadership. This finding is consistent with the literature on leadership in public relations. Most of the limited literature on leadership in public relations recognizes that the nature of the organization affects the function,

success and outcomes of public relations leadership. As Meng (2012) puts it, “the success of communication leaders should be linked to the flexibility in the organizational structure, a culture that embraces communication efforts, and a distinct process to encourage, value, and share open communication among members” (p. 338). This argument is reflected in the framework of excellent leadership in public relations.

RQ2. To What Extent do Practitioner Understanding and Interpretation of Their Public Relations Leadership Align With the Excellent Leadership in Public Relations Construct?

Excellent leadership in public relations is understood to be:

a dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produces ethical and effective communication practice. Such practice fuels and guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimizes organizations in society. (Meng et al., 2012, p. 24)

Consistent with the above definition, this study found that leadership in public relations is a combination of skills, attributes, values and behaviours that contributes to effective public relations and communication counsel and initiatives designed to manage the university’s brand and reputation, and in so doing, contribute directly to the university. The study also found that public relations leadership benefits the public relations and communication profession. Public relations leadership involves leaders acting as champions of the profession and its value to organizations inside and outside of the university and as mentors and support to other practitioners, bolstering their public relations skills and abilities and improving the quality of their work. If applied, this finding would extend the above definition of leadership in public relations. Further, with regard to ethics, participants were unequivocal about the need for

practitioners to be ethical – to have a “strong moral compass.” Ethics and morality have to be reflected in practice to provide the most value to organizations. As one participant said, “Our job often entails being a mirror for the institution. You have to hold the institution and the decision up to that mirror so that the institution can see whether or not they like what they see.” A practitioner could not be a leader in public relations and could not enact public relations leadership in the absence of a strong moral compass. As a final point here, this study found that it isn’t only effective communication practice that contributes to successful communication and public relations teams but rather the public relations leader. For one participant, a practitioner who effectively leads has the ability, using strong people management skills, to build consensus and demonstrate diplomacy and enable and empower their team to make decisions independently and have accountability for their work. And another said that her philosophy as a leader is to “be a coach for my team and an educator, a champion to the rest of the university.” So, it is the mix of skills, attributes, values and behaviours in addition to ethical and effective communication practice that fuels successful communication and public relations teams.

The second significant aspect of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct is an integrated model that suggests six dimensions – self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship building, strategic decision-making capability and communication knowledge management capability – are “crucial for communication executives to expand their influence in the institutional context and generate desired communication outcomes” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 141). As further explanation of the dimensions, leaders in public relations must possess strategic decision-making capabilities, problem-solving abilities and communication knowledge and expertise, and it is the latter that distinguishes leaders in public relations from leaders in other fields (Meng et al., 2012) Further, “public relations leaders can apply traits and explicit knowledge and take actions to reduce constraints, strengthen internal

and external relations, and favorably influence strategic decision-making” (Meng et al., 2012, p. 24). A more fulsome description of the six dimensions is provided in Table 1.

Aligning with the dimensions, and as noted in RQ1, this study found that a leader in public relations is a public relations practitioner with extensive communication expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge who acts as a coach and champion, makes strategic decisions pertaining to communication and public relations, and influences others. Communication expertise encompassed both years of experience in public relations and communication and in a related field(s) and the skills and abilities, primarily, but not exclusively, gained through that experience. The study found that leaders in public relations ably distill information from a variety of sources and relay that information to others in a way that provides value, whether to the individual, the organization, stakeholders or other. Further, public relations leadership as described through this study requires understanding the goals of the organization and the needs of the audiences it is trying to reach and the ability to balance the organizational goals and audience needs to help produce the best outcomes for the university. Requisite communication skills such as writing, presenting and verbal communication were often mentioned by participants, and there was an underlying sense in the conversations with participants that leaders in public relations have innate communication abilities. This study’s findings related to communication expertise are consistent with the excellent leadership in public relations construct.

This study found that leaders in public relations have the confidence and courage to put forward ideas, to pose questions, to evaluate potential courses of action and to make recommendations. Confidence also allows them to be open to scrutiny and to criticism. These findings are supported in previous studies of leadership in public relations (Choi & Choi, 2009; Berger, Reber & Heyman, 2007) and are directly aligned with the self-dynamics key dimension

in the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. As Meng (2012) indicates, “Leaders who do not understand themselves or do not present traits such as high self-confidence, emotional maturity, initiative, and stress tolerance are unlikely to create a compelling vision of the situations or to be sensitive to the environmental changes” (pg. 337).

This study found that communications expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge allows practitioners to act as a coach and champion – a requirement, according to study participants, of public relations leadership. A leader in public relations, as a coach, would be a mentor and role model to fellow practitioners, lending support and encouraging their professional development. A coach would also advocate for their team and their work, which is where the role of champion is required of a leader in public relations. These findings are also aligned with the self-dynamics key dimension, which encompasses self-confidence and the ability to “impart a vision and inspire others” (Meng and Berger, 2013). The finding related to a public relations leader as a coach and champion also aligns with the Team Collaboration dimension, in that a leader as a coach and champion would set a quality standard for their public relations team’s work and support their team to meet that standard, including as one participant put it, “moving obstacles and frustrations out of the way.”

While communication expertise and confidence are two attributes of a leader in public relations, this study also found that a leader in public relations has a level of organizational knowledge that enables them to put forward fiscally sound recommendations and more easily achieve consensus. It also found that a public relations leader is able to “paint a picture of how decisions affect organization’s stakeholders or publics.” This is also a key point in the excellent leadership in public relations strategic decision-making dimension as Meng & Berger (2013) indicated, “As a unique dimension, strategic decision-making capability refers to public relations

leaders' astuteness about an organization's external sociopolitical environments, as well as the internal power relations.”

Further, study participants noted that leaders in public relations recognize when to be resolute with their communication advice pertaining to organizational decisions in the face of resistance from others. And building on this, one participant indicated that public relations leadership encompasses identifying those areas where the consultations (the type and level and quantity of consultations), are important versus relying on the professional expertise that you also bring to the table. As a final point on strategic decision making, this study found that understanding an appropriate scope of decision-making authority is the mark of a leader in public relations. A leader in public relations puts forward advice and counsel related to the reputational impacts, audience needs and expectations of the university, and how a decision may be strategically communicated, but does not expect to make decisions that fall outside of this scope or on behalf of the senior management team. To do so would jeopardize the practitioner's ability to act as boundary spanner, providing advice and counsel in consideration of both organizational and audience/stakeholder needs and goals. This study's findings related to decision making and organizational knowledge are consistent with the strategic decision-making key dimensions in the excellent leadership in public relations construct. Public relations leaders are able to “identify power relations structures, use a variety of resources and tactics, and engage in various forms of communication with both internal and external publics” which is invaluable to organizations (Berger, 2005; Berger & Reber, 2006; Choi & Choi, 2009 as cited in Meng & Berger, 2013).

Another key finding in this study is that public relations leadership encompasses the ability to influence others in order to achieve consensus and cooperation on public relations and communication initiatives, including funding and prioritization of same. Within universities especially, implementing public relations and communication initiatives – those that strengthen

the reputation of the institution – requires collaborating with others. As participants noted, faculty members enjoy a high level of autonomy and academic freedom within universities and thus are not required to work with practitioners. By building relationships with faculty and others within universities, practitioners build influence, and encourage collaboration. While relationship building is a key contributor to influence, this study found that credibility is critical to one's ability to influence others. Within the key dimensions, influence is encompassed in self-dynamics, team collaboration and relationship-building. A leader in public relations creates a compelling vision and enlists followers to that vision, and has the ability, through relationship building, to “facilitate a productive environment among team members and organizational members, as well as an open, participative, and less authoritarian relationship between employees and senior managers” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 148).

In the integrated model of excellent leadership in public relations, Meng (2012) identifies organizational and social culture as antecedents of excellent leadership in public relations. The success of communication leaders is linked to “flexibility in the organizational structure, a culture that embraces communication efforts, and a distinct process to encourage, value, and share open communication among members” (Meng, 2012, p. 338). In this study, participants viewed being part of the senior management table as a requisite for leadership in public relations and effective public relations and communication. As noted in RQ1, according to study participants, representation of public relations and communication at the senior management table facilitates achievement of public relations and communication goals and indicates an organizational culture where public relations and communication is valued as a contributor to the organization's success. With this, whether the university's management team prioritizes communication and public relations to the degree it establishes a representative seat at the management table, affects the enactment of public relations leadership.

Overall, how study participants understand and interpret public relations leadership is consistent with the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. Notably extending the integrated model, this study found that it is the attributes of a leader in public relations in addition to the communication and public relations work she produces that supports and elevates the quality of the communication team's work; and that public relations leadership boosts the credibility of the profession as well as the organization. Further, this study found that both self-perception and perception of leadership in others is contingent upon one's title and position of authority in the university. To be considered a leader in public relations, a practitioner must hold the title of "manager," but may not necessarily manage people, or "director" and thus have a measure of formal authority within the organization. This suggests that study participants' understanding and interpretation of public relations leadership does not allow for informal leaders, i.e., those without formal authority to influence others. This is contrary to the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. Though professional title is not addressed specifically in the literature in the excellent leadership in public relations construct, Meng et al. (2012) propose that role activities are relevant to public relations leadership, drawing a connection between the public relations managerial role and public relations leadership. A similar connection has not been made between the technical role and public relations leadership; however, Meng & Berger (2013) assert that leadership is not limited to senior levels in organizations and can be found at every level. This assertion is in keeping with McKie and Willis (2015) who advocate for developing "leaderful" organizations by fostering leadership everywhere in public relations (p. 634).

RQ3. How do Public Relations Role and Gender Influence Practitioner Alignment with Excellent Leadership in Public Relations?

While this study's findings related to the relationship of professional title to public relations leadership are discussed above, here I address practitioner role and leadership specifically. This study provides interesting insights into role and perception of one's leadership; however, it does not provide enough insights to draw firm conclusions about the relationship between role and leadership and gender and leadership. As outlined in the literature review, though researchers have developed a number of indexes and typologies to measure role, the manager/technician dichotomy (Dozier & Broom, 1995), which suggests practitioners fulfill either a manager, technician, or manager/technician role, has been the most widely used framework in public relations roles research (Moss, Newman & DeSanto, 2005). The manager role encompasses problem-solving, decision-making and counsel, while the technician role focuses on creating and disseminating messages. Study participants with a "manager" or "director" title, regardless of whether they managed a public relations team, described a range of tasks and responsibilities indicative of the combined manager/technician role. The study found that the directors could be engaged in what can be considered tactical elements of public relations, e.g. writing an article for a publication, as easily as they can be engaged in what can be considered strategic elements of public relations. Those participants in communication advisor or coordinator roles described a range of tasks and responsibilities indicative of only the technician role. Strategy, including communication planning, was an area of activity and responsibility that participants spoke of frequently either as a central part of their role, in the case of the more experienced and senior participants, or a desired part of their role, in the case of the participants who had less experience. It became apparent that participants feel that the responsibility for strategy is indicative of a senior communication and public relations role in a university and public relations leadership. This study found that all participants who fulfill a manager/technician role were comfortable talking about leadership in themselves and discussing how they enact

leadership in the field while the study participants who fulfill a technician role understood leadership in public relations as a presumed goal they are working toward and not a phenomenon they currently enact.

With regard to how gender may influence practitioner alignment, this study did not identify noticeable differences in how male participants and female participants understood or interpreted their leadership in public relations. This is inconsistent with previous studies of leadership in public relations that exposed differences in how men and women perceive themselves as leaders and how they perceive effective leadership, with men perceiving themselves as leaders and as effective leaders more often than women (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009). This inconsistency may be related to the time, context and size of this study. This study was conducted more than 15 years after the Aldoory & Toth study, in a Canadian university setting (a first for a public relations leadership study), and is very small when compared with other studies of communication and public relations leadership. The primary factors that determined whether participants in this study considered themselves leaders were years of experience in communication and public relations and professional title. Those participants who considered themselves leaders held a professional title of either manager or director and significantly more experience in communication and public relations than did the participants who didn't appear to consider themselves leaders.

Public Relations Leadership Within the Atlantic Canadian University Context

All participants in this study were communication and public relations practitioners within Atlantic Canadian universities and were asked at the outset of each of their interviews to discuss leadership in the context of their current employment and experience at the university. This approach allowed me to glean several insights about the communication and public relations

practice in addition to leadership within Atlantic Canadian universities. The most salient learnings are outlined below in relation to the public relations in higher education literature.

Communication Expertise

Though the literature on public relations in higher education shows that a) higher education public relations professionals mainly serve a technical rather than managerial role (Kohring et al., 2013; Pirozek & Heskova, 2003; Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003; Peyronel, 2000); b) there is a misunderstanding or disregard of the public relations function as a management function among university leaders and public relations professionals (Rooney Hall & Baker, 2003; Whitaker-Heck, 2014); and c) public relations in higher education has been primarily one-way asymmetrical (Pirozek & Heskova, 2003) and has emphasized media relations (Kohring et al., 2013; Luo, 2005), there is significant support in the literature for the strategic importance of public relations as a management function within higher education (Pirozek & Heskova, 2003). The results of this study contrast the former and align with the latter.

Firstly, regardless of position within the university, all participants expressed variability in their activities and responsibilities, day-to-day and overall, and all noted that communication strategy and planning was part of their role, which is indicative of a management function. Further, on the topic of communication expertise, participants emphasized the importance of a practitioner's ability to receive, interpret and communicate information in a way that benefits the organization and its stakeholders. For example, one participant noted that a leader in public relations must understand the goals of the organization and the needs of the audiences they are trying to reach and have the ability to balance the organizational goals and audience needs. Further, all participants shared in a belief that strategic communication and public relations benefits universities by helping the university to attract funding, students, faculty and staff and to bring about change inside and outside of the university. In keeping with this, a lack of support for

communication and public relations whether real or perceived did not enter into any of the discussions with participants. There was some indication that there should be greater understanding of communication and public relations within the university and with this greater valuation of same would come, but no indication that practitioners nor the communication and public relations function were not valuable contributors to the university.

Reputation Management

This study found that the greatest role of communication and public relations within the university is to establish and maintain a positive reputation of the university. Add to this consideration of existing case- and function-based literature on public relations in higher education, which show that establishing and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships with community stakeholders would positively impact public confidence in the university (Kim, Brunner & Fitch-Hauser, 2006). We can infer from this that a university's favourable reputation positively impacts public confidence and that, as stewards of the university's reputation, a strategically driven communication and public relations team is of value and brings benefit to the university.

Consider too that the literature on Canadian universities shows that universities have moved from closed systems wherein they paid little attention to their environment to open systems wherein they consider the environment in which they operate (Warner, 1996; K. Leeper & R. Leeper, 2005; Chan & Richardson, 2012). Universities, then, are recognizing the importance of their many stakeholders to their operations. It logically follows that they also recognize the importance of establishing ongoing relationships with those stakeholders.

This study's findings that communication and public relations is primarily a strategic function within Atlantic Canadian universities, is valued (though perhaps not to the degree that all participants would like) by senior management and holds primary responsibility for building

and maintaining a positive reputation of the university further points to recognition of communication and public relations' benefits to the university.

Academic Freedom

Within universities especially, implementing public relations and communication initiatives – those that strengthen the reputation of the institution – requires collaborating with others. As participants noted, faculty members enjoy a high level of autonomy and academic freedom within universities and thus are not required to work with practitioners. By building relationships with faculty and others within universities, practitioners can build influence, and encourage collaboration. As one participant put it,

So, in the university setting, faculty members don't actually need to work with you. They have academic independence and they don't have to ever deal with you, they literally do not. So developing strong relationships is an important part of it because it's not like when you work in government or private organization where a PR person might say we need this at this time and the money might go out with it. It's, 'Hey, I've heard you've done something interesting, would you like to discuss it?'

Pertinent to the excellent leadership in public relations construct, which indicates that relationship building is a key dimension, this study shows that relationship building may be an even more important dimension within a university context because of the emphasis on academic freedom and subsequent high degree of autonomy among faculty members.

Conclusion

Whether study participants considered themselves a leader in public relations, enacting public relations leadership through their attributes, behaviours and actions, or as practitioners

working toward leadership in public relations, they, as a group, indicated that a leader in public relations is a public relations practitioner with extensive communication expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge who should act as a coach and champion, make strategic decisions pertaining to communication and public relations, and influence others. Notably, participants would not consider a practitioner to be a leader in public relations by virtue of one attribute alone, rather it is the combination of attributes, behaviours and actions that constitute public relations leadership.

The determining factors in whether a study participant was comfortable acknowledging self as a leader in public relations appear to be years of experience (years of experience in public relations and communication combined with professional experience in other fields), title and position of authority in the organization. By virtue of acknowledging themselves as leaders in public relations, the senior practitioners impose on themselves certain responsibilities and expectations as leaders in public relations based on their construction of “public relations leader.” These roles and responsibilities constitute their enactment of public relations leadership.

For those study participants who did not identify themselves as leaders in public relations, they were enacting aspects of public relations leadership, as defined by study participants, to some degree. These aspects of public relations leadership include acting as coach and champion, influencing others, and participating in strategy development. Further, each practitioner in this group possessed communication and public relations expertise derived from formal education and having worked at least five years in the field.

Overall, how study participants understand and interpret public relations leadership is consistent with the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. Notably extending the integrated model, this study found that it is the attributes of a leader in public relations in addition to the communication and public relations work one produces that supports

and elevates the quality of the communication team's work; and that public relations leadership boosts the credibility of the profession as well as the organization. Further, this study found that both self-perception and perception of leadership in others is contingent upon one's title and position of authority in the university. To be considered a leader in public relations, a practitioner must hold the title of "manager," but may not necessarily manage people, or "director" and thus have a measure of formal authority within the organization. This suggests that study participants' understanding and interpretation of public relations leadership does not allow for informal leaders, i.e., those without formal authority to influence others. This is contrary to the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct.

With regard to the affect of role on leadership in public relations, this study found that all participants who fulfill a manager/technician role were comfortable talking about leadership in themselves and discussing how they enact leadership in the field while the study participants who fulfill a technician role understood leadership in public relations as a presumed goal they are working toward and not a phenomenon they currently enact. This supports alignment of a manager role with leadership in public relations, which is consistent with Meng et al. (2012).

This study did not identify noticeable differences in participants' understanding or interpretation of leadership between genders. This is inconsistent with previous studies of leadership in public relations. The primary factors that determined whether participants in this study considered themselves leaders were years of experience in communication and public relations and professional title.

As a final note, this study identified a few salient learnings related to the Atlantic Canadian university context:

- Strategic communication and public relations is of benefit to Atlantic Canadian universities and is valued by senior management teams.

- Within universities especially, implementing public relations and communication initiatives – those that strengthen the reputation of the institution – requires collaborating with others and with an emphasis on academic freedom and subsequent high degree of autonomy among faculty members, relationship building to facilitate collaboration may be an even more important key dimension of leadership in public relations in the context of universities.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusion

With this study, I aimed to expand understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context, contribute to development of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013), and, by conducting the study within Atlantic Canadian universities, gain insights into the practice of communication and public relations in this context. Leadership has been a long-studied in the context of management and organizational behaviour (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Berger, Reber & Heyman, 2007; Meng et al., 2012) but didn't appear in earnest in public relations literature until the early 2000s (Meng et al., 2012; Aldoory & Toth, 2004; Werder & Holtzhausen, 2009; Jin 2010; Choi & Choi, 2009). The literature review revealed significant work to develop an excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) but no studies of relevance having been conducted in Canada nor studies on self perception of leadership in public relations.

This study employs the existing principles of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical concept (Meng, 2012; Meng, Berger, Gower & Heyman, 2012; Meng & Berger, 2013) to increase understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context *and* expand on development of the excellent leadership in public relations theory. In her work to examine leadership in public relations, Meng (2012) ventured to “explain the multi-faceted nature of the leadership construct” in public relations (p. 336). This work led to an understanding of excellent leadership in public relations as

a dynamic process that encompasses a complex mix of individual skills and personal attributes, values, and behaviors that consistently produces ethical and effective communication practice. Such practice fuels and

guides successful communication teams, helps organizations achieve their goals, and legitimizes organizations in society. (Meng et al., 2012, p. 24)

Defining excellent public relations leadership paved the way for the integrated model of excellent leadership in public relations. This model suggests that six dimensions – self-dynamics, team collaboration, ethical orientation, relationship building, strategic decision-making capability and communication knowledge management capability – are “crucial for communication executives to expand their influence in the institutional context and generate desired communication outcomes” (Meng & Berger, 2013, p. 141). In reviewing their work and conducting a larger literature review, I identified the following knowledge gaps: a) whether there is agreement between practitioner understanding of public relations leadership and the prescribed definition of excellent leadership in public relations; b) whether practitioners perceive themselves as aligning with the key dimensions; and c) how practitioner role and gender influence this alignment. Further, in Meng & Berger’s most recent work, they argue that researchers should identify the leadership issues that influence effective communication management (Meng & Berger, 2013). I contend that self perception of leadership, the degree to which that understanding and interpretation align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct, and how practitioner role and gender influence that alignment meet the threshold for such issues, and thus merit attention through an academic lens. There began the central theme of this study, which was guided by the following central and subsequent questions:

1. How do public relations practitioners understand and interpret their public relations leadership?
2. To what extent do practitioner understanding and interpretation of their public relations leadership align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct?

3. How do public relations role and gender influence practitioner alignment with excellent leadership in public relations?

I took a qualitative approach, employing semi-structured interviews of mid- and senior-level public relations practitioners in public universities in Atlantic Canada. This study is the first to have explored self-perception of public relations leadership. Construction of public relations leadership theory to date has sought to define leadership in public relations by way of literature reviews and qualitative research wherein public relations and communication practitioners defined and assessed leadership in public relations as an external phenomenon rather than one we enact.

Study Findings in Brief

This study shows that a leader in public relations is a public relations practitioner with extensive communication expertise, confidence and organizational knowledge who acts as a coach and champion, makes strategic decisions pertaining to communication and public relations, and influences others. By examining self perception of leadership, it also shows that a leader in public relations must have many years of experience in public relations and communication combined with experience in other fields; a professional title of manager, director or above; and a position of authority within the organization. Only those study participants with many years of experience inside and outside the field of communication and public relations, a manager or director professional title, and a position of authority within the organization considered themselves a leader in the field. Further, those participants who didn't consider themselves leaders in the field, indicated that they must gain more experience, have a director or manager title and occupy a position of authority in order to be a leader in public relations.

Overall, how study participants understand and interpret public relations leadership is consistent with the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct. Notably extending the integrated model, however, this study found that it is the attributes of a leader in public relations in addition to the communication and public relations work one produces that supports and elevates the quality of the communication team's work; and that public relations leadership boosts the credibility of the profession as well as the organization. Further, this study also suggests that public relations leadership does not allow for informal leaders, i.e., those without formal authority to influence others, because participants indicated that a leader in public relations must be in a position of authority within the university. This finding is contrary to the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct.

Having controlled for context, this study identified a few salient learnings related to the practice of communication and public relations within Atlantic Canadian universities:

- Strategic communication and public relations is of benefit to Atlantic Canadian universities and is valued by senior management teams.
- The greatest role of communication and public relations within the university is to establish and maintain a positive reputation of the university.
- Within universities especially, implementing public relations and communication initiatives – those that strengthen the reputation of the institution – requires collaborating with others and with an emphasis on academic freedom and subsequent high degree of autonomy among faculty members, relationship building to facilitate collaboration may be an even more important key dimension of leadership in public relations in the context of universities.

Limitations of this Study

I had intended to recruit 10 study participants, being communication and public relations practitioners with more than five years of experience in universities of varying sizes in all Atlantic provinces. Through repeated attempts within a two-month timeline, I was able to recruit eight participants. The final sample included six senior-level and two mid-level practitioners representing six Atlantic Canadian universities: four in Nova Scotia, and one in each of New Brunswick and Newfoundland. I was unable to recruit practitioners from universities in Prince Edward Island. Three participants were from one university in Nova Scotia and although these participants offered unique perspectives based on their differing years of experience, positions and roles, their common context may have limited the breadth and depth of insights into a wider range of Atlantic Canadian Universities. Ideally, each participant would have been from a different university in order to gain richer insights into the practice of communication and public relations at Atlantic Canadian universities. Further, this is a very small study relative to previous studies of leadership in public relations.

Though the study findings were validated by study participants, this study may be further limited by my previous experience in public relations and communication, including at an Atlantic Canadian university, as the study data was interpreted with this frame. From the study outset, I acknowledged my previous experience and current role as a communication and public relations practitioner.

Future Research Directions

As noted above, this study identified potential extensions of the integrated model of excellent leadership in public relations, finding that it is the attributes of a leader in public relations in addition to the communication and public relations work the leader produces that

supports and elevates the quality of the communication team's work; and that public relations leadership boosts the credibility of the profession as well as the organization. Further, this study also suggests that public relations leadership does not allow for informal leaders. With this, future research in follow up to this study may explore the relationship between leadership in public relations and the communication and public relations profession and leadership in public relations is inclusive of those who are not in positions of authority within their organizations. The insights that this particular area of study could offer are intriguing and far reaching when one considers the implication that failure to occupy a position of authority within an organization is a barrier to leadership in public relations.

Final Thoughts

This is the first study of its kind in a Canadian context and one of few studies that relate to communication and public relations in an Atlantic Canadian context. As such, it offers:

- senior management teams and public relations and communication leads within universities insights into what constitutes leadership in public relations, its role within and benefits to the organization;
- guidance to communication and public relations practitioners who wish to grow their profession and its credibility;
- some direction to those communication and public relations practitioners who aspire to be leaders in their field; and
- for senior management teams and communication and public relations portfolios in Atlantic Canadian universities, insights into the role of communication and public relations and the responsibilities of its practitioners within this context.

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Appendix A: Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance



University Research Ethics
Board (UREB)

Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance

| | | | | |
|---|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Clearance | <input type="checkbox"/> Secondary Data Clearance | <input type="checkbox"/> Renewal | <input type="checkbox"/> Modification | <input type="checkbox"/> Change to Study Personnel |
|---|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|

| | | | |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|
| Effective Date | May 15, 2018 | Expiry Date | May 14, 2019 |
|----------------|--------------|-------------|--------------|

| | |
|-----------------------------|--|
| File #: | 2017-142 |
| Title of project: | Public Relations Leadership in the Context of Canada's Public Universities |
| Researcher(s): | Cindy Bayers |
| Supervisor (if applicable): | Tess Laidlaw |
| Co-Investigators: | n/a |
| Version : | 1 |

The University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has reviewed the above named research proposal and confirms that it respects the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and Mount Saint Vincent University's policies, procedures and guidelines regarding the ethics of research involving human participants. This certificate of research ethics clearance is valid for a period of one year from the date of issue.

| Researchers are reminded of the following requirements: | |
|---|---|
| Changes to Protocol | Any changes to approved protocol must be reviewed <u>and</u> approved by the UREB prior to their implementation. Form: REB.FORM.002 Info: REB.SOP.113 Policy: REB.POL.003 |
| Changes to Research Personnel | Any changes to approved persons with access to research data must be reported to the UREB immediately. Form: REB.FORM.002 Info: REB.SOP.113 Policy: REB.POL.003 |
| Annual Renewal | Annual renewals are contingent upon an annual report submitted to the UREB prior to the expiry date as listed above. You may renew up to four times, at which point the file must be closed and a new application submitted for review. Form: REB.FORM.003 Info: REB.SOP.116 Policy: REB.POL.003 |
| Final Report | A final report is due on or before the expiry date. Form: REB.FORM.004 Info: REB.SOP.116 Policy: REB.POL.003 |
| Privacy Breach | Researchers must inform the UREB immediately and submit the Privacy Breach form. The breach will be investigated by the REB and the FOIPOP Officer. Form: REB.FORM.015 |
| Unanticipated Research Event | Researchers must inform the UREB immediately and submit a report to the UREB within seven (7) working days of the event. Form: REB.FORM.008 Info: REB.SOP.115 Policy: REB.POL.003 |
| Adverse Research Event | Researchers must inform the UREB immediately and submit a report to the UREB within two (2) working days of the event. Form: REB.FORM.007 Info: REB.SOP.114 Policy: REB.POL.003 |

*For more information: <http://www.msvu.ca/ethics>



Daniel Seguin, Chair
University Research Ethics Board

APPENDIX B: Letter to Potential Participants

Hello – I'm reaching out to you as the principal investigator of a study into public relations leadership, for which I'm recruiting mid- to senior-level public relations practitioners in universities in Atlantic Canada. Participation would include a one-hour phone interview conducted at your convenience in June/July and potential follow up questions to validate the data analysis and study findings. The study findings would be provided to you as a participant in the study upon its conclusion late this year. Of note, participation is very much voluntary. Further, should there be a potential for workplace risk as a result of participating, you should not feel any obligation to participate.

With this study, which is being conducted through Mount Saint Vincent University and supervised by Dr. Tess Laidlaw, I aim to probe:

1. How public relations practitioners understand and interpret their public relations leadership.
2. The extent to which practitioner understanding and interpretation of their public relations leadership align with the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct.
3. How public relations role and gender influence practitioner alignment with excellent leadership in public relations.

This study is the first of its kind in Canada and will expand understanding of public relations leadership and contribute to development of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct.

If you could please reply confirming or declining your participation in this study by June 18, I would greatly appreciate it.

Thank you!

Cindy Bayers

MA (Communications) student

Mount Saint Vincent University

APPENDIX C: Informed Consent Form**PARTICIPANT INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM****Public Relations Leadership in the Context of Canada's Public Universities**

Study Description: You are being asked to participate in a study of public relations leadership in the context of Canada's public universities. This study will expand understanding of public relations leadership in a Canadian context and contribute to development of the excellent leadership in public relations theoretical construct.

The study is guided by the following central and subsequent questions:

1. How do public relations practitioners understand and interpret their public relations leadership?
2. To what extent do practitioner understanding and interpretation of their public relations leadership align with the excellent leadership in public relations construct?
3. How do public relations role and gender influence practitioner alignment with excellent leadership in public relations?

The study is being conducted in partial fulfillment of a master level thesis and has been approved by the Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board. It involves interviewing 10 purposely selected mid to senior level public relations practitioners in public universities in Canada, drawing as many of the participants as possible from the Atlantic Provinces.

Study author: Cindy Bayers
MA (Communications) student
Mount Saint Vincent University
Tel: 902-XXX-XXXX
Email: XXX.XXX@XXXXX.ca

Professor: Dr. Tess Laidlaw, PhD
Assistant Professor, Department of Communication Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University
Tel: 902-XXX-XXXX
Email: XXXX.XXXX@XXXX.ca

Your participation: Your participation will include a one-hour phone interview scheduled at your convenience in June/July and potential follow up questions to validate the data analysis and study findings. The interview will be conducted by the study author, audio recorded and then transcribed. You will be emailed the transcript of your interview to review, edit and approve. The audio recording of your interview will be available only to the study author. Following your approval of your interview transcript, the audio recording will be destroyed by the study author. Participant names and organizations will not be included in the study findings. Also, identifiers will be removed from direct quotes. The study findings will be emailed to you as a study participant, will be publicized by Mount Saint Vincent University and may be published in an appropriate academic journal. Though efforts will be made so that study participants are not identified, it may be possible for people who read the study findings to identify you based on your disclosures. Of note, participation is very much

voluntary. Further, should there be a potential for workplace risk as a result of participating, you should not feel any obligation to participate.

Potential risks:

There are no significant risks associated with your participation in this study. However, you will be disclosing information that may be considered personal during the interview, which carries with it some social and professional risk. Of note, it is possible to withdraw from the study at any time and have your data destroyed up to the start of the data analysis period, which the study author will advise you of as soon as possible. Again, your participation is voluntary; you should not feel any obligation to participate.

Consent Form:

I, the undersigned (participant), understand the foregoing and consent to being interviewed for the purposes and uses of this study of Public Relations Leadership in the Context of Canada's Public Universities, as described above. I understand that by consenting to participate, I agree to having my interview be audio-recorded. Further, I understand my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time up to the start of the data analysis phase.

Participant Name (Print): _____

Organization (if applicable): _____

Participant Signature: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX D: Interview Guide**Interview Guide: Public relations leadership in the context of Canada's public universities**Category: Role

- Q1. How would you describe the work you do at the university?
Prompt: What does your day-to-day work include?
- Q2. What is the relationship between your work and the university's public relations?
- Q3. What affects your department's influence on the university's operations?

Category: Leadership

- Q4. How would you describe a leader in public relations?
Prompts: What are the abilities, characteristics and behaviours of a leader in public relations?
- Q5. In consideration of what you've just described, what, if any, elements do you align with?
Prompt: What are your leadership abilities, characteristics and behaviours?
- Q6. Of your leadership abilities, characteristics and behaviours, which are most important to effective public relations?
- Q7. What would make you a stronger public relations leader?
Follow up: Are there barriers to you becoming a better/stronger leader in public relations?
- Q8. What is the relationship between your leadership abilities, characteristics and behaviours and the university's public relations?
Prompt: How important is your leadership to the university's public relations?
- Q9: What would enable you to be more influential on your university's public relations?

Category: Leadership

- Q10. How would you describe the relationship between your leadership abilities, characteristics and behaviours and the day-to-day work you do?
- Q11. Is there anything more you'd like to share about your leadership in public relations?
Prompts: What important points about your leadership might I have missed in our discussion?

Appendix E: Codebook: Before merging or creating themes

Codebook

PR Leadership.mx18

2019-06-03

Code System

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----|
| 1 Calmness | 2 |
| 2 Friendly | 3 |
| 3 collaboration | 4 |
| 4 Comms counsel and advice | 3 |
| 5 Government relations | 1 |
| 6 Integrity | 3 |
| 7 Listening | 3 |
| 8 Ethics | 4 |
| 9 Relationship building | 6 |
| 10 Storytellers | 6 |
| 11 Gender barrier | 1 |
| 12 Business knowledge | 5 |
| 13 Measurement | 2 |
| 14 Coach and champion | 10 |
| 14.1 Lead by example | 5 |
| 14.1.1 Mentorship | 5 |
| 14.1.2 Role model | 4 |
| 14.2 Professional reputation | 1 |
| 14.3 Public relations trends & issues | 5 |
| 15 Communications priorities | 3 |
| 16 Staffing/Human resources | 2 |
| 17 Humility | 4 |
| 18 Inquisitive | 1 |
| 19 conscience of the organization | 3 |
| 20 Decision making | 9 |
| 21 Planning | 6 |
| 22 External communications | 4 |
| 22.1 Media relations | 7 |
| 23 Gratitude | 3 |
| 24 Courage | 3 |
| 25 Values | 3 |
| 26 Organizational reputation | 18 |
| 27 Org culture affects leadership | 8 |

| | |
|--|----|
| 27.1 University mandate | 2 |
| 28 Funding | 8 |
| 29 Experience | 7 |
| 30 Leadership role | 7 |
| 30.1 Oversight | 2 |
| 31 Quality of work | 7 |
| 32 Confidence | 11 |
| 32.1 Don't see self in leadership role | 4 |
| 33 Learning | 12 |
| 33.1 Professional Development | 7 |
| 33.1.1 Education | 2 |
| 33.1.2 Leadership training | 1 |
| 34 Communications expertise | 15 |
| 35 Organizational knowledge | 8 |
| 36 influence | 33 |
| 36.1 Building consensus | 8 |
| 37 Innovation | 5 |
| 38 Comms as support function | 17 |
| 39 Change | 3 |
| 40 Seat at the table | 20 |
| 40.1 work for the president | 3 |
| 41 Interesting | 5 |
| 42 Tactics | 8 |
| 43 issues management | 11 |
| 44 Varied tasks & responsibilities | 8 |
| 45 Strategy | 19 |
| 46 internal communications | 5 |
| 46.1 employee engagement | 1 |

Appendix F: Codebook: After First Round of Merging Codes

Codebook

PR Leadership.mx18

2019-06-03

Code System

| | |
|--|----|
| 1 Leadership attributes | 0 |
| 1.1 Professional reputation | 1 |
| 1.2 Working with others | 0 |
| 1.2.1 Staffing/Human resources | 1 |
| 1.2.2 Coach and champion | 10 |
| 1.2.2.1 Lead by example | 5 |
| 1.2.2.1.1 Mentorship | 5 |
| 1.2.2.1.2 Role model | 4 |
| 1.2.2.2 Public relations trends & issues | 4 |
| 1.2.3 Comms counsel and advice | 3 |
| 1.2.4 Friendly | 3 |
| 1.2.5 influence | 32 |
| 1.2.5.1 Listening | 3 |
| 1.2.5.2 Building consensus | 8 |
| 1.2.5.3 Relationship building | 6 |
| 1.2.5.4 collaboration | 5 |
| 1.3 Calmness | 2 |
| 1.4 Ethics | 4 |
| 1.4.1 Integrity | 3 |
| 1.4.2 conscience of the organization | 3 |
| 1.5 Business knowledge | 4 |
| 1.6 Humility | 5 |
| 1.7 Decision making | 9 |
| 1.8 Gratitude | 3 |
| 1.9 Values | 3 |
| 1.10 Experience | 7 |
| 1.11 Quality of work | 5 |
| 1.12 Confidence | 13 |
| 1.12.1 Don't see self in leadership role | 4 |
| 1.13 Learning | 11 |
| 1.13.1 Professional Development | 8 |
| 1.13.1.1 Education | 2 |
| 1.13.1.2 Leadership training | 1 |

| | |
|-------------------------------------|----|
| 1.14 Communications expertise | 16 |
| 1.15 Organizational knowledge | 9 |
| 1.16 Innovation | 3 |
| 2 Work of study participants | 0 |
| 2.1 Tactics | 6 |
| 2.2 Manage/supervise | 4 |
| 2.3 Measurement | 1 |
| 2.4 Storytellers | 5 |
| 2.5 Priority setting | 4 |
| 2.6 Oversight | 4 |
| 2.7 internal communications | 6 |
| 2.8 Varied tasks & responsibilities | 8 |
| 2.9 issues management | 11 |
| 2.10 External communications | 4 |
| 2.10.1 Media relations | 7 |
| 2.11 Government relations | 1 |
| 3 Gender barrier | 1 |
| 4 Organizational reputation | 19 |
| 5 Org culture affects leadership | 10 |
| 5.1 University mandate | 1 |
| 6 Funding | 8 |
| 7 Comms as support function | 20 |
| 8 Seat at the table | 21 |
| 9 Interesting | 1 |
| 10 Strategy | 19 |
| 10.1 Planning | 6 |

Appendix G: Codebook: After Second Round of Merging Codes

Codebook

PR Leadership.mx18

2019-06-04

Code System

| | |
|--|----|
| 1 Elements that affect leadership | 0 |
| 1.1 Seat at the table | 21 |
| 1.2 Funding | 8 |
| 1.3 Org culture affects leadership | 11 |
| 1.4 Gender barrier | 1 |
| 2 Leadership attributes | 0 |
| 2.1 What leaders should do | 1 |
| 2.1.1 Planning | 1 |
| 2.1.2 Manage career | 1 |
| 2.1.3 influence | 32 |
| 2.1.3.1 Listening | 4 |
| 2.1.3.2 Building consensus | 8 |
| 2.1.3.3 Relationship building | 7 |
| 2.1.3.4 collaboration | 5 |
| 2.1.4 Comms counsel and advice | 3 |
| 2.1.5 Decision making | 9 |
| 2.1.6 Learning | 11 |
| 2.1.6.1 Professional Development | 8 |
| 2.1.6.1.1 Education | 2 |
| 2.1.6.1.2 Leadership training | 1 |
| 2.2 What leaders should be | 0 |
| 2.2.1 Friendly | 3 |
| 2.2.2 Coach and champion | 10 |
| 2.2.2.1 Lead by example | 5 |
| 2.2.2.1.1 Mentorship | 5 |
| 2.2.2.1.2 Role model | 4 |
| 2.2.2.2 Public relations trends & issues | 4 |
| 2.2.3 Gratitude | 3 |
| 2.2.4 Ethics | 4 |
| 2.2.4.1 conscience of the organization | 3 |
| 2.2.5 Calmness | 2 |
| 2.2.6 Innovation | 3 |

| | |
|---|----|
| 2.3 What leaders should have | 0 |
| 2.3.1 Discipline | 1 |
| 2.3.2 Professional reputation | 1 |
| 2.3.3 Values | 3 |
| 2.3.4 Confidence | 13 |
| 2.3.4.1 Don't see self in leadership role | 4 |
| 2.3.5 Humility | 5 |
| 2.3.6 Business knowledge | 4 |
| 2.3.7 Integrity | 3 |
| 2.3.8 Experience | 7 |
| 2.3.9 Organizational knowledge | 9 |
| 2.3.10 Communications expertise | 16 |
| 2.4 Quality of work | 5 |
| 3 Work of study participants | 0 |
| 3.1 Reputation management | 9 |
| 3.2 Outcomes | 5 |
| 3.3 Strategy | 15 |
| 3.3.1 Planning | 6 |
| 3.4 Relationship buiding | 1 |
| 3.5 Staffing/Human resources | 1 |
| 3.6 Tactics | 6 |
| 3.7 Measurement | 1 |
| 3.8 Storytellers | 5 |
| 3.9 Priority setting | 5 |
| 3.10 Oversight | 5 |
| 3.11 internal communications | 6 |
| 3.12 Varied tasks & responsibilities | 8 |
| 3.13 issues management | 13 |
| 3.14 External communications | 4 |
| 3.14.1 Media relations | 7 |
| 3.15 Government relations | 1 |
| 4 Role of PR/Comms | 13 |
| 4.1 Communications as a support function | 4 |
| 4.2 Listening | 1 |

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| 4.3 Collaboration | 1 |
| 5 Interesting | 1 |