

PR/COMMUNICATION: IN SEARCH OF A PEDAGOGICAL MODEL FOR THE MBA

Public Relations & Communication Management:  
In Search of a Pedagogical Model for the MBA Curriculum in Canada

by

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### **Dedication**

Thank you to my family, friends, supervisors and coworkers who have supported me throughout this academic and professional pursuit. It has been a labour of love, so thanks to everyone who allowed me to share my passion about my thesis concept over the last several years; I realize it probably wasn't nearly as exciting for you to listen as it was for me to tell you about it.

My late father was often heard asking people, "Are we having fun yet?" I asked myself this question many times over the course of this journey and often realized that it *was* fun. While a lot of people may not share my love of school and enthusiasm for academic research, my Dad taught me to be comfortable in creating my own definition of fun and finding joy in whatever it was I pursued in life. I know he would be very proud of me.

Mum, thank you for your unwavering love and support. I admire your joie de vivre and its accompanying laughter. From you, I have learned to never give up on myself, to take time to pick the wildflowers along life's path and to laugh at whatever, whenever.

Donnie, thank you for believing in me more than I believe in myself. Your love, patience, kindness and support know no bounds and for that I am grateful. You could be sainted for putting up with my fretting, rapid-fire questions and late study nights, all of which came in excess.

Finally, I dedicate this work to my late friend and mentor, Michael O'Connell. Thank you for believing that I was one of the most talented communicators to ever grace your door. I fondly remember your tireless work ethic, hilarious New Yorker attitude and fierce pride. From you, I learned to speak up, be tenacious and believe even more strongly in my convictions.

**Abstract**

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) curriculum in Canada is lacking in that it does not include a public relations (PR) and communication management component. This is counterintuitive to the belief that effective management and leadership are tantamount to effective communication, and flies in the face of both the onus on organizations to communicate with their publics and those publics' right to know. This study strives to illuminate the void in the Canadian MBA curriculum as it relates to PR and communication management, and to determine Canadian business leaders' acceptance of such content therein. It uses a mixed methods approach to inquiry; the author first conducts a conceptual content analysis of Canadian MBA program websites which demonstrates the absence of strategic communication concepts in the graduate business school curriculum, and subsequently interviews Canadian business leaders to determine PR and communication management's possible place in the MBA, the findings of which overwhelmingly call for such instruction in the graduate business school curriculum. When considered both individually and collectively, the quantitative and qualitative research findings inform the creation of a pedagogical model for a PR and communication management curriculum in the MBA which is steeped in PR/communication, ethical and pedagogical theories. This work stands to advance the pedagogy and practice of PR and communication management, bolster the MBA curriculum and create scores of Canadian MBA graduates – our future business leaders – who understand and value the PR and communication management function, and ultimately embrace their responsibility for it in their professional pursuits.



### **Acknowledgements**

Thank you to Professor Patricia Parsons, my thesis supervisor, for her steadfast support and guidance. She recognized that one sentence I wrote in a paper for a master's elective course in 2010 represented a viable research concept, and greatly assisted me in morphing that idea into this thesis. Her knowledge and expertise of public relations and strategic communication is second to none. Thanks to Dr. Jeff Young for serving on my thesis committee and providing rich insight into the business perspective as it related to my study.

I must also recognize the work of two very special women – Patricia Pegley and Wendy Mansfield. Patricia, my co-worker, close friend and classmate, served as my second coder for the quantitative research portion of my thesis. As a result, she gave up her free time last summer to analyze more than 887 Canadian MBA courses to help establish the reliability of my data. As if that isn't enough, she was an amazing sounding board throughout this process and during our entire time together in the Master's program. Wendy Mansfield, my friend and colleague, designed some of the figures in this document and was an extraordinary proof reader of its many versions.

I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the 10 business leaders who participated in the qualitative research portion of my thesis. Both their willingness to take time out of their incredibly demanding schedules and their knowledge of and experience in public relations and communication management humbled me. It is abundantly evident to me why they are leaders in corporations, government departments/agencies and institutions across Canada.

**Public Relations & Communication Management:**

**In Search of a Pedagogical Model for the MBA Curriculum in Canada**

**Introduction**

It has long been thought that communication is an essential management skill. Likewise, there is a well-established belief that organizations have an obligation to communicate with their publics and those publics have a right to know about and participate in organizational decisions which impact them. This study will build on these concepts by positing that if (a) effective management and leadership are tantamount to effective communication and (b) that communication can only be effective if it satisfies an organization's obligation to its publics so they are well-informed, then formal instruction in public relations and communication management should be an essential component of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) curriculum in Canada. This has never been more important than now given the increased public demand for corporate social responsibility, ethics and honesty in the wake of the most recent economic crisis, the effects of which are still being felt today.

In illustrating the need for public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA in Canada, this thesis study, in its first chapter, articulates the problem statement; outlines the study's objectives, phases and scope; defines key terms; provides various categories within which to justify the study – academic/pedagogical; professional/practical; strategic; theoretical; and ethical – and concludes with the study's research questions and hypotheses. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of relevant literature, including that which relates to the theoretical framework supporting the study. Chapter 3 describes the research strategy, including methodological approaches, data collection and analytical procedures that were used to

meet the study's objectives while Chapter 4 outlines the research findings. Finally, Chapter 5 presents the analysis of the research findings and provides recommendations, including the resulting pedagogical model which provides rich context for public relations and communication management's fit in the Canadian MBA curriculum. Further, it helps to fulfill the ethical requirement for organizations to communicate with their publics. This work stands to advance the pedagogy and practice of public relations and communication management, bolster the MBA curriculum and create scores of MBA graduates – our future business leaders – who both recognize and understand the importance and value of the public relations and communication management function and, ultimately, embrace their responsibility for it.

## **Chapter 1: Overview of the Problem**

### **Problem Statement**

The Master of Business Administration (MBA) curriculum in Canada is lacking in that it does not include a public relations and communication management component. This is counterintuitive to the long-held belief that effective management and leadership are tantamount to effective communication, and flies in the face of both the onus on organizations to communicate with their publics and those publics' right to know. A mixed methods study was used to illustrate this strategic communication gap in the Canadian MBA curriculum, and ultimately enhance future managers' and leaders' public relations and strategic communication skills, while at the same time addressing organizations' moral obligation to communicate with their publics and their publics' rights to true information and to participate in decisions which affect them. Ultimately, this represents an opportunity to advance the pedagogy and practice of public relations while at the same time strengthening the MBA curriculum.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study needed to be done now for a variety of reasons. It provides a pedagogical, professional, strategic, theoretical and ethical context regarding the need for public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum. Never has this been more important than now, given public demands for openness, honesty and transparency in the wake of the most recent financial meltdown, the effects of which are still being felt today. By raising ethical questions regarding the strategic communication gap in the MBA curriculum, this study strived to answer its own queries by recommending a pedagogical model to fill the void. Thus, it will enable organizations to fulfill both their social contract and the participatory premise through

which publics are able to partake in organizational decisions which affect them, bolstering the practice and pedagogy of public relations.

### **Objectives, Phases and Scope**

The objectives and phases of the study are as follows:

- In its initial and quantitative phase of research, it outlines the current status of public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA core program. This was accomplished through a conceptual content analysis of MBA program websites which utilized a stratified sample. Ultimately, this phase highlights the status of public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA and substantiates the strategic communication gap therein.
- A qualitative-research phase involving in-depth interviews with Canadian business leaders helped to ascertain their opinions on the need for communication in the MBA and the related content in order to bridge the gap.
- Finally, it makes recommendations and suggests a model for a public relations and communication management curriculum in the Canadian MBA based on the research conducted during the first two phases.

The scope of the study is focussed squarely on the Canadian MBA given an obvious void in the literature in this regard, thereby building on similar American and international studies on this subject. Whereas students in other master programs, namely those enrolled in a Master of Public Administration, could no doubt benefit from instruction in public relations and communication management, this study focuses only on the MBA. Additionally, it is important to note that this study only recommends a model for public relations and communication

management instruction in the Canadian MBA program; it neither develops nor tests a full-fledged public relations and communication management curriculum. Rather, this phase and its corresponding pilot will be left to a doctoral dissertation.

### **Limitations**

The study was limited by the following practical considerations:

- The availability of curriculum information on Canadian MBA program websites.
- The willingness of Canadian business leaders to participate in a discussion about the need for public relations and communication management in both organizational and educational settings.
- The ability of business leaders to respond with knowledge regarding the need for public relations and communication management in both organizational and educational contexts.

### **Delimitations**

The following delimitations were imposed on the study, some of which were mentioned previously in the scope of the study section:

- The study focussed only on Canadian MBA core programs, not specialized or executive MBA programs.
- The study only considered the MBA curriculum and did not focus on other master programs which would undoubtedly benefit from a similar study; the Master of Public Administration is one such example.

- The study considered only half of the MBA schools in Canada as part of the conceptual content analysis due to time constraints and the fact that this is a graduate-level thesis as opposed to a doctoral dissertation, the latter of which would, in all likelihood, delve deeper, be more exhaustive and, therefore, possibly employ a census-style approach to the research.
- The study used only one published ranking regarding successful businesses in Canada, an annual and national competition (Eluta.ca, 2012) to which businesses must apply. This means that many other successful Canadian organizations were not considered as part of this research.
- The study considered only the potential views of executives from 55 randomly-selected organizations within Canada's Top 100 Employers 2012 (Eluta.ca, 2012) due to time constraints. Further, it considered only the views of 10 business leaders in its qualitative research phase as saturation was reached within this sample.
- The study neither recommends nor tests a full-fledged public relations and communication management curriculum for the MBA. Rather, it recommends a model for public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA.

### **Assumptions**

- a. This author assumed accuracy in the representation of the MBA curriculum presented on each of the websites analyzed.
- b. This author assumed that the companies included as part of Canada's Top 100 Employers (Eluta.ca, 2012) are led by progressive and forward-thinking leaders, drawing the inference that organizations which value their employees and offer exceptional working conditions and benefits have strong leadership.

- c. This author assumed the chosen business leaders were well positioned to make recommendations about what constitutes best practice in public relations and communication management in an organizational setting.

### **Key Terms**

The joint concept of *public relations and communication management* is at the core of this study. This terminology is adapted from Grunig (1992a) who defines it as "... the overall planning, execution, and evaluation of an organization's communication with both external and internal publics – groups that affect the ability of an organization to meet its goals" (p. 4). It is this definition, with its strategic intent, that represents the ideal when considering the incorporation of public relations and communication management into the MBA curriculum in Canada.

Just as public relations and communication management in concert figures centrally in this study, so do management and leadership. Thus, they must also be defined up front. Management is the act of planning, organizing, leading and/or or controlling whereas leadership is the act of leading and inspiring others to achieve a compelling and shared organizational vision in order to ultimately progress the organization. While management and leadership is clearly not the same thing, each role brings with it a profound sense of responsibility for the public relations and communication management function. This inherent sense of responsibility for strategic communication is carried throughout this study, thus the terms are, in a sense, used interchangeably. Other terminology to which this study subscribed will be defined in Chapter 2.



### **Justification for the Study**

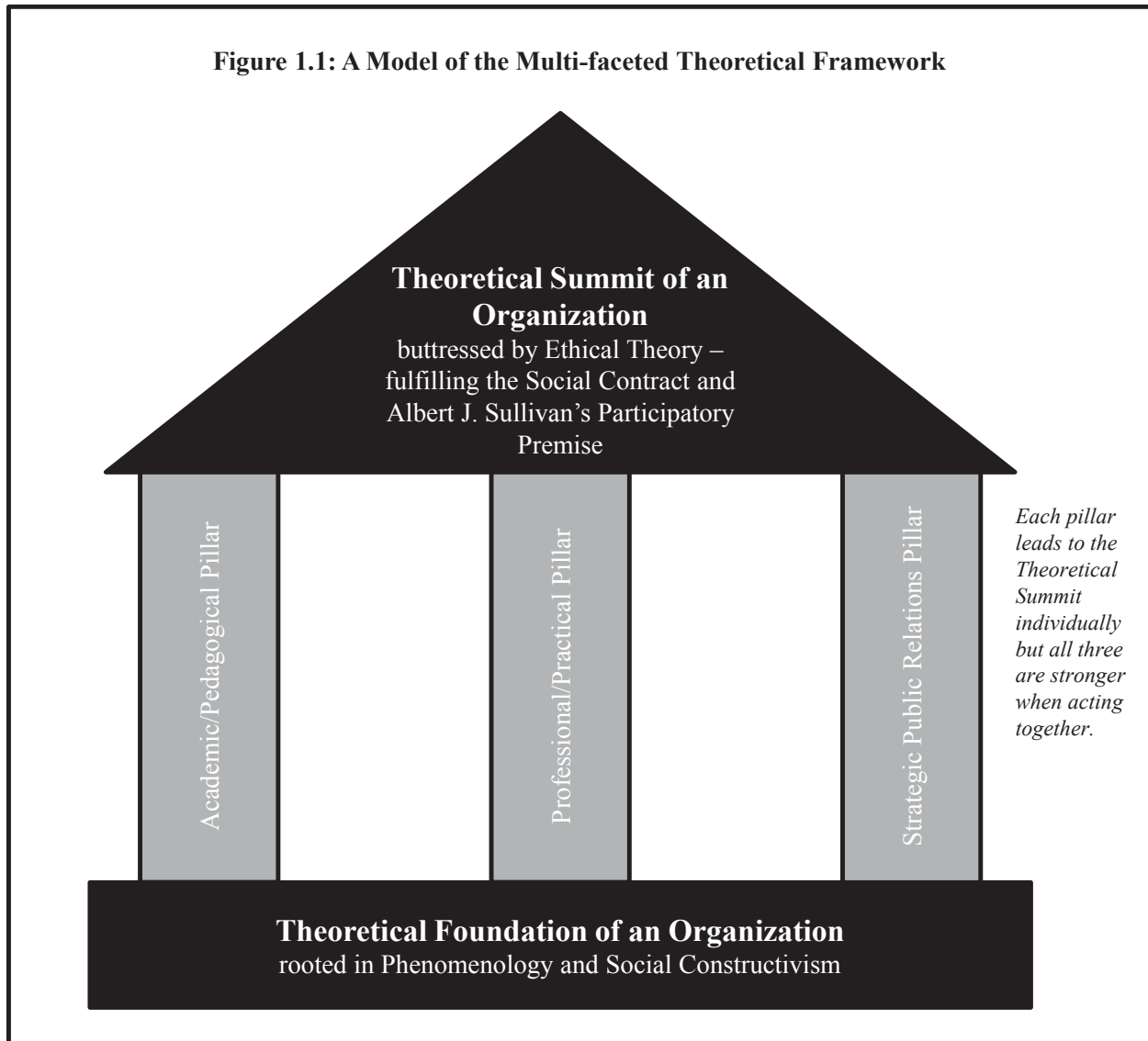
This author asserts that a multi-faceted theoretical framework exists to justify this study. Specifically, there are five categories within which to justify it. While these categories will be described fully in the literature review in the following chapter, this author synthesizes them and provides an accompanying graphic below:

- 1) **Academically/pedagogically:** Business scholars have largely failed to recognize the value of communication education in the MBA curriculum (Pincus & DeBonis, 1994); those who do, have emphasized technical communication skills (Beebe & Mottet, 2010; Hildebrandt, Bond, Miller & Swinyard, 1982; Munter, 1992, 2009). This issue is heightened in Canada in that little to no research exists on communication in the MBA curriculum, as will be illustrated in Chapter 2. This study strived to change that.
- 2) **Professionally/practically:** Communication is a vital skill for both leaders and managers (Bowman, 1964; Hildebrandt et al., 1982; Katz, 1955; Mintzberg, 1973; Pincus & DeBonis, 1994), particularly given that they have a profound responsibility for strategic communication with an organization's internal and external publics (Barrett, 2008). Thus, communication should be taught in the MBA given that such programs are breeding our future leaders and managers.
- 3) **Strategically:** Public relations is a strategic management function on which an organization's leadership must learn to rely for communication to be effective (Dozier, Grunig & Grunig, 1995). This concept should be inculcated in our future leaders and managers while in the MBA.

- 4) **Ethically:** Organizations have a moral obligation to communicate with their publics, which is hinged on relationship management (Parsons, 2001), corporate social responsibility and a communicative culture (Awad, 1985), and is situated squarely within social contract theory. Further, Albert J. Sullivan's (1965) theory of public relations ethics, otherwise known as the participatory premise, gives rights to an organization's publics, including the rights to true information and to participate in organizational decisions which impact them. There is no better place to touch on the organization's obligation and the publics' rights than in the MBA and inculcate in future leaders and managers their responsibility to fulfill both.
- 5) **Theoretically:** Over and above social contract theory and Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics as mentioned above, this study leans on the principles of phenomenology and social constructivism. Phenomenology will assist students in considering an organization's publics, and social constructivism will allow them to construct their own knowledge (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008) as it relates to public relations and communication management and their responsibility for this strategic function.

Figure 1.1, a building-like diagram which represents an organization, illustrates the facets that contribute to the justification for the study. The organization's structure sits on a theoretical foundation which is rooted in the communication theory of phenomenology and the pedagogical theory of social constructivism. From a phenomenological perspective, the organization must put itself in its publics' shoes (Craig & Muller, 2007), so to speak, to understand their right to know about the organizations' business, particularly that which affects those publics. Further, the organization's business leaders and managers must develop their own knowledge and sense of

what is right and just with respect to public relations and communication management, thereby explaining the social constructivist perspective (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008).



The building is supported by three pillars: the academic/pedagogical pillar, the professional/practical pillar and the strategic pillar. While each pillar supports the roof of the building in its own way, the three pillars are stronger when acting together and being done in concert. In other words, it is helpful if the academic/pedagogical pillar, professional/practical pillar and strategic pillar are all being advanced at the same time with business students and

business leaders and managers alike, all of which strive to bolster understanding of public relations and communication management in an organization.

Finally, the building's roof is a theoretical summit which is buttressed by ethical theory. Building on its theoretical foundation of phenomenology and social constructivism and the support offered by the three pillars, an organization is able to, at its literal and figurative peak, fulfill its social contract and Albert J. Sullivan's participatory premise.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

It is integral to outline the various research questions this study strived to answer as well as the corresponding hypotheses it sought to explore. Following are the research questions this study addressed:

***RQ1:*** What is the status of public relations and communication management in the MBA in Canada today?

***RQ2:*** What form does public relations and communication management instruction currently take in the MBA in Canada?

***RQ3:*** What is Canadian business leaders' opinion of public relations and communication management's fit in the MBA?

***RQ4:*** What content should be taught with respect to public relations and communication management in the MBA and in what pedagogical format?

Following are the corresponding hypotheses this author formed prior to undertaking the quantitative and qualitative research for this study:

**H1:** A gap exists in the Canadian MBA curriculum given the long-standing absence of public relations and communication management instruction therein.

**H2:** The recommended way to fill the void is to develop a pedagogical model for public relations and strategic communication management in the Canadian MBA which is rooted in ethical, communication and pedagogical theories.

This chapter served to introduce the problem and describe the many facets of the study, including its significance, objectives, phases, scope, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, key terms, justification, research questions and hypotheses. The following chapter provides a comprehensive literature review regarding public relations and communication in the MBA curriculum, and the state of the MBA today and public relations and communication management's possible fit therein. It also provides rich background on the study's various theoretical perspectives.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

To provide solid context for this study, it was necessary to first examine the scholarly literature available regarding its various facets. This literature review first considers public relations and communication in the MBA, including the long-standing call for public relations and communication in the graduate business school curriculum, the various approaches to incorporating public relations/communication in the MBA curriculum, course content, terminology, instructors and their qualifications, and the lack of Canadian studies. It then examines the state of the MBA today and whether or not public relations and communication fit in the curriculum. Further, the literature review then provides a thorough analysis of the literature supporting the justification for the study and concludes with an exploration of the theoretical perspectives underpinning the study.

### **Public Relations and Communication in the MBA Curriculum**

The concept of public relations and communication in the MBA curriculum is not new. As far back as the 1980s, business and public relations/communication scholars alike began lobbying for public relations and communication to be a part of the business school curriculum to allow future managers and leaders to hone soft-skills which were relevant to the business world and meet the constantly evolving demands of business (Baskin, 1989; King 1982; Porter & McKibbin, 1988; Wright, 1982). Some scholars looked upon public relations and communication as strategic in nature (Baskin, 1989; King, 1982; Wright, 1982) while others viewed communication solely in the context of technical skills (Porter & McKibbin, 1988).

**The long-standing call for public relations and communication in the MBA.** This section of the literature review considers both the historical perspective on public relations and

communication in the MBA as well as more recent research on the topic. Spanning three decades, these perspectives, coupled with a later examination of the state of communication in the Canadian MBA today, illustrate this is a long-standing problem that has yet to be addressed to the extent necessary in the graduate business school curriculum.

*The historical perspective.* The late public relations practitioner Kerry King (1982) and communication scholar Donald K. Wright (1982) can be trumpeted as the founding fathers of the idea of public relations and (strategic) communication being a part of the MBA. They were part of a core team of concerned public relations practitioners and scholars who dedicated a significant amount of time and energy to the Foundation for Public Relations Research and Education/Business School Project to try to interest American business schools in public relations (King, 1982; Wright, 1982). In this vein, Wright (1982) conducted a qualitative study with American business school administrators and ascertained that public relations was not being taught in the MBA curriculum, but that no one was railing against the idea of it being contained therein.

In looking for ways to make their vision a reality, both pioneers offered several options. King (1982) cautioned heavily against a packaged public relations course for business schools, and instead suggested a public relations module/overview for existing courses, an overview public relations course in business programs at journalism schools, bibliographies which illustrate the discipline's scholarly body of knowledge, or public relations case studies. In stark contrast to King (1982), Wright's (1982) primary option was a packaged stand-alone public relations course, including a course outline, course texts and readings, for business schools' use. Wright's (1982) other options resembled King's (1982). Regardless of the approach, both King (1982) and Wright (1982) stressed the importance of public relations practitioners and scholars

working in concert to assist business schools in inviting public relations into the curriculum to allow organizations to better serve their publics.

*More recent research on the continued importance of public relations in the business schools.* Scholars and practitioners in both the public relations and business disciplines have carried on King's and Wright's tradition over the last 25 years, keeping the concept of communication in the business school curriculum in the foreground, however, much of this discourse has been centred on technical communication. Based on a three-year study of management education and development, management academics Porter and McKibbin (1988) determined communication, in terms of oral, written and interpersonal skills, was an area of weakness for both undergraduate and graduate business students. Specifically, deans and faculty members indicated communication in this context was not sufficiently covered in the MBA curriculum and business leaders acknowledged MBA graduates were not sufficiently trained in soft-skills such as communication and leadership. As a result of a survey of key individuals at American business schools, Pincus, Rayfield and Ohl (1994) asserted that strategic communication had not reached appropriate heights in the MBA curriculum as many schools had failed to recognize or act on the benefits of incorporating public relations into their programs. Baskin (1989) was slightly more positive, crediting business schools for offering courses in public issues management, public affairs/government relations and public policy but raising concerns that MBA students were receiving instruction about public relations theory rather than communication strategy and tactics. MBA schools' management communication instructors were also concerned about the state of communication in their programs, primarily in its technical facets, and consequently formed the Association for Business Communicators' (ABC) MBA Special Interest Committee, assuming responsibility for information dissemination on the



relationship between communication and other disciplines (Bogert & Butt, 1996b). While it appears as though this Committee is still in existence today under the new moniker of the MBA Consortium (Association for Business Communication, 2012), it is unclear from the Association for Business Communication's website exactly what it has accomplished during its tenure.

When considering the implications for *the Excellence Study* on public relations education, Grunig and Grunig (2002) called for public relations to be incorporated into the MBA curriculum to enhance business students' appreciation for the public relations function, particularly given they are tomorrow's executives. Although Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) found that few MBA programs offered instruction in public relations, they credited some graduate business schools for offering training in public policy and communication, both of which they considered essential elements of the public relations function. They further noted the situation was improving in that schools were starting to recognize public relations as a management function.

Most recently, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has taken up the cause ("Public Relations," 2011). Recognizing that the subject of public relations has not been given its due in the MBA, PRSA is striving to incorporate corporate communication and reputation management into the curriculum. The pilot program, which was scheduled to launch at five American graduate business schools in the 2012-13 school year, appears on first blush to be strategic in its content, with a focus on communication strategy, corporate responsibility, reputation management and investor relations ("Public Relations," 2011). However, upon reading further, it also discusses technical communication, including writing and speaking skills. Regardless, this appears to be an advancement of the issue on the American stage.

### **Approaches to incorporating public relations/communication in the MBA**

**curriculum.** Various scholars over the years have examined the state of communication in the graduate business school curriculum, studies which illustrate that the topic has taken a foothold in the MBA in various forms. That said, it is important to note that many of these studies have focused largely on technical communication. Some include elements of strategic communication whereas others clearly sport a misnomer in that they indicate they focus on strategy, but in reality are centred around what Forman (1999) described as managerial literacy – “a sophisticated, advanced literacy that encompasses discourse in both the business school and the workplace” (p. 10). These studies seldom considered public relations and communication management in its strategic glory alone.

According to Munter’s (1983) and Williams’ (1996) studies, the most common approaches to communication in the MBA included a stand-alone communication course which is often mandatory and/or part of the core course offerings; communication electives, course segments, or workshops, the latter of which may or may not have been credit-bearing; and an integrated approach through which communication underscored individual business courses or the entire graduate business school curriculum. In determining the various pedagogical approaches, Munter (1983) concentrated on technical communication whereas Williams (1996) considered both the technical and the strategic – “listening skills, communication strategy, corporate identity, media training and ... writing skills...” (p. 36).

***Stand-alone communication courses.*** Based on studies of top-ranked business schools, stand-alone communication courses, which were intended to be both technical and strategic in nature, are the dominant model of communication instruction in the MBA in the United States (Barrett & Knight, 2005; Knight, 1999). Top-ranked business schools are typically those that

have recently been ranked in various reputable business magazines and newspapers; there are both supporters and opponents of such rankings (Holloway, 2010), however, the benefits and drawbacks of these different measures will not be discussed herein due to both space and time constraints. Knight (1999) utilized published rankings to determine a sample from which to examine top American graduate business schools' curricula. She conducted a content analysis of program websites and ascertained that a stand-alone communication course, which was strategic only in the sense that it encompassed managerial literacy as discussed previously, was the most prevalent approach to communication instruction in the MBA. Barrett and Knight (2005) drew the same conclusion regarding the pedagogical approach to communication based on the findings of their mixed methods study which combined content analysis of program websites with in-depth interviews of MBA faculty at top-ranked American business schools; communication in this context was both technical and strategic and combined theory with practice. In employing a content analysis of non-United States MBA programs, Knight (2005) determined that almost half the sample (10 of 24 top-ranked business schools outside the United States) required a communication course, the majority of which were technical in nature and focused on writing, speaking and interpersonal communication.

*Electives/course segments/workshops in communication.* With respect to electives/course segments and workshops, Knight's (1999, 2005) aforementioned studies of top-ranked United States and non-United States graduate business schools also determined that communication electives are relatively common; about a third of the schools sampled – 11 of 32 and 8 of 24 respectively – offered communication electives, which focused on managerial literacy and were technical in nature. Navarro's (2005) study of the 50 top-ranked American business schools netted a higher percentage in that he determined 60% of MBA programs offered

a course in business communication – the definition of which is unclear – but many offered it as a half course or workshop. For this reason he opted to eliminate the topic of communication from his book, *WHAT THE BEST MBAs KNOW: How to Apply the Greatest Ideas Taught in the Best Business Schools*, signifying that communication is not a ‘great idea’ in the graduate business school curriculum and that the best MBAs know not of communication.

***Integration of communication in MBA courses and/or curriculum.*** The integration of the tenets of communication in the MBA was less evident in the literature. Specifically, in Knight’s (1999) study she determined that very few schools in her sample of top-ranked American business schools (two of 32) followed an integrated approach. Several examples are available, however, to illustrate integration of communication in the MBA, whether through individual courses or across the curriculum. Shelby and Reinsch (1996) utilized a communication audit to teach graduate business students both theoretical and practical communication management abilities. Through the exploration of organizational communication (communication within an organization, whether horizontally or vertically or both), the audit required students to consider, analyze and manage a communication issue, which was often interpersonal or team-oriented in nature, from a strategic point-of-view. Similarly, Wolff (1996) exposed her students to experiential learning through which they were required to be both technical and strategic in their communication approach as it related to a comprehensive, multi-national project. This undertaking required them to exercise their written communication, organizational communication, cross-cultural and oral communication skills. Luse, Jauch, Rettenmeyer, McConkey, Parker and Roshto (1999) also employed experiential learning in an integrative business seminar to foster soft-skills, including leadership and communication. While their approach is heavily concentrated on case studies which foster critical thinking and

reasoning, it primarily focused on technical communication including writing, preparing and making presentations, and persuasive tactics. All of these examples are far from being strategic in nature.

Kelly and Sokuvitz (1996) integrated communication across the first year of the MBA curriculum. As opposed to requiring individual courses, their fully-integrated communication approach followed the business development model through specific phases, requiring students to view managerial communication through a strategic lens while executing technical tasks. In spite of its claim of being strategic, it too focused largely on technical communication skills including writing, speaking and delivering presentations. Cyphert, Worley and Dyrud (2002) posited that integration of communication across the curriculum, as opposed to individual communication course units, was the more effective way in which to foster students' communication skills, allowing for "...concentrated practice in business communication skills while exploring subjects of managerial significance" (p. 81). Even though the communication topics in this integrated pedagogical approach included both technical and strategic elements, they were categorized in a highly technical way as either writing intensive or presentation intensive. It is important to note that none of these integrated programs appears to have been formally evaluated, and only one contained a whiff of informal feedback in that an alumna realized the benefit of the course only after working in business. While proponents see the benefit of the integrated approach as fostering integrative thinking and applying technical communication skills, its detractors can certainly argue that communication instruction, particularly that which is strategic in nature, gets short shrift among (business) instructors who may know less than they should about it and its importance (P. Parsons, personal communication, September 7, 2010).

**Course content.** While the above discussion illustrates that communication instruction is present in the MBA curriculum, it is obvious the course content is highly varied across graduate business schools in that it tends to be primarily technical, occasionally strategic and sometimes a hybrid of the two.

**Technical communication.** Based on the findings of Hildebrandt, Bond, Miller and Swinyard (1982); Hynes and Bhatia (1996); and Knight (2005), the course content appears to have had a highly technical bent. In a survey of newly-promoted business executives from a variety of fields about business curricula, Hildebrandt et al. (1982) determined that oral and written business communication was ranked as very important, more than any other subject as it relates to preparing business graduates for a career in general management. Using recent business graduates as their population, Hynes and Bhatia (1996) found that oral presentations, oral communication and writing letters/memos were the most valuable course topics. The concern with this audience, however, is troubling in that recent graduates may not have a wholly informed opinion on what it is they do not know or have not been exposed to, such as communication strategy, public relations and communication management. Along similar lines, Knight (2005) included communication-related courses in her study of the state of communication in non-American graduate business schools, thereby encompassing courses that were technical in nature, including interpersonal skills. Consequently, it was very broad in its focus on course content.

**Strategic communication.** To a lesser degree, the content of some communication courses focuses on strategic communication rather than technical skills. Knight's (1999) study of top-ranked American business schools determined that most required communication courses emphasized communication strategy rather than acquisition of technical skills, however, strategy

in this context is merely managerial literacy as discussed previously, not public relations and/or communication management. Rubin (1996) outlined two dominant categories of graduate business skills based on his research, both of which he viewed as communication strategy-centric: (1) managerial communication with a focus on technical skills "...but more and more from the integrated standpoint of communication strategy in order to deal with channels and modes of communication that are quickly changing" (p. 13), and (2) corporate communication which emphasized key business operations and was aligned with corporate strategy and direction. He viewed the strategic perspective, even when it pertained to students' technical communication abilities, as integral to future business managers' skills given the rise in management consulting and the ever-changing, increasingly complex business culture.

*Hybrid of strategic and technical communication.* At times, communication courses in the MBA strive to achieve a balance between strategic and technical communication skills. In their quest to define the 'typical' MBA communication course, Bogert and Butt (1996a) surveyed the syllabi of graduate business schools' communication courses and postulated that most mandatory communication courses were a blend of both strategic and technical communication. However, in scrutinizing the syllabi further, it appears many of these courses leaned heavily on the technical facets of communication in spite of being labelled as strategic. Likewise, while Barrett and Knight (2005) asserted that most top-ranked graduate business schools offered a hybrid communication course, most appear to have emphasized technical communication skills. As mentioned previously, Munter (1992) was much the same in that her managerial communication guide began with an overview of strategic communication but quickly segued to the technical facets of communication and stayed firmly entrenched in writing, speaking and grammar throughout the rest of the book. The eighth edition of this how-to-guide

remained focused on technical communication skills (Munter, 2009). Barrett (2008) struck a better balance between the strategic and technical elements in her book on leadership communication, balancing information on presentations with communication strategy to reach both internal and external publics.

**Terminology.** Just as communication course content varies, so too does the terminology related to communication in the MBA curriculum. In fact, public relations and communication were used interchangeably so often in the literature that it was necessary for the purpose of researching this study to treat them as synonyms while at the same time attempting to differentiate between technical communication and strategic communication. Sadly, if this thesis were to have considered only public relations in the MBA curriculum, it would have been abbreviated indeed, just as Pincus et al. (1994) noted in their study on the same subject.

The issue becomes even more complicated in that communication in the MBA can be further explicated and/or specialized as business communication (Navarro, 2005), corporate or employee communication (Williams, 1996), leadership communication (Barrett, 2008; Barrett & Knight, 2005), managerial communication (Hynes & Bhatia, 1996; Knight, 1999, 2005; Munter, 1983, 1992, 2009; Rubin, 1996; Wolff, 1996) and organizational communication (Shelby & Reinsch, 1996). Additionally, there are two distinct levels of communication as it relates to the graduate business school curriculum:

(1) At the elementary or basic level is technical communication which is defined as a manager or leader's personal ability to communicate effectively in terms of speaking, writing and interacting with and/or persuading others (Beebe & Mottet, 2010; Hildebrandt et al., 1982; Hynes & Bhatia, 1996).



(2) at the more advanced level is strategic communication which involves possessing a complex strategy to communicate with internal and external stakeholders (Barrett, 2008) and is often defined as “corporate communication (employee communication, change communication, external relations)” (Barrett & Knight, 2005, p. 22).

Sometimes, however, the two overlap (Barrett, 2008) and take place in concert (Mai & Akerson, 2003). It is important to note that strategic communication, if it truly is strategic in nature and is not just labelled as such, fits perfectly within *public relations and communication management* as described above. Technical communication, while advantageous to MBA students who may eventually become leaders and managers, does not.

The varied terminology offers a cornucopia of confusion in that various explications and specializations of communication in the context of the MBA are oft either undefined or ill-defined in the literature, leaving readers to devise their own definition or wonder if the terms used are synonyms or antonyms. A lack of (clear) definitions, which are commonly accepted across the disciplines of business and communication, is at the core of the issue. This highlights a gap in the literature and an obvious need going forward in order to ensure consistency and understanding of the terminology across the MBA curriculum. It also calls for this author to demarcate the terminology contained in this study as follows:

***Public relations:*** the strategic development and management of relationships between an organization and its publics, preferably through two-way, symmetrical communication

***Communication:*** written or spoken words or nonverbal clues used to inform, persuade or share ideas with others

**Communication management:** the strategic management of an organization's overall communication program with its myriad publics, including on-going creation, implementation and evaluation

**Public relations and communication management in concert:** the strategic development and management of relationships between an organization and its publics coupled with the strategic management of an organization's communication program with those publics (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002)

**Technical communication:** speaking, writing, interacting with and/or persuading others

**Strategic communication:** purposefully and artfully creating and executing a detailed and well thought out plan to effectively communicate with an organization's publics

This author proposes that the various disciplines need to consider Grunig et al.'s (2002) label of public relations and communication management in concert as defined above to reconcile the differentiation in communication-related terminology in the MBA curriculum.

**Instructors and their qualifications.** An additional gap in the literature is that many previous studies, with the exception of a few, failed to consider who is teaching public relations and communication in the MBA curriculum. Baskin (1989) noted that business schools must consider the short supply of Ph.D.-trained faculty before adding public relations and/or communication courses, particularly at times of staffing shortages. Pincus et al. (1994) sought to discover who teaches communication in the MBA, including qualifications, status and specialties of administrators and instructors. Their study unearthed that some instructors held a doctoral degree while others held a Master's degree, though it is unclear if they were communication related, and that the majority of communication faculty were from the business department rather than from a communication department. As previously acknowledged, there is also the concern

about communication underscoring the MBA curriculum and who may be teaching courses from an integrated standpoint.

**Lack of Canadian studies.** A gaping hole in the literature is the lack of a detailed Canadian study regarding public relations and communication in the MBA curriculum. Knight (1999) recognized that studies on this subject were solely American-centric and suggested a complementary study of graduate business schools outside the United States. She responded accordingly several years later, conducting a review of communication courses in non-U.S. business schools herself (Knight, 2005). In doing so, she assessed a few Canadian MBA programs. Similarly, Williams' (1996) study considered two Canadian schools. Likewise, in their recent study of leading MBA programs worldwide, Datar, Garvin and Cullen (2010) made mere mention of two Canadian graduate business programs. This represents a future research opportunity, one which will be plumbed further in the next section of this paper.

### **The State of the MBA Today: Do Public Relations & Communication Management Fit?**

Amongst this extensive discussion regarding communication in the graduate business school curriculum, it is important to consider the state of the MBA in general today and specifically whether or not public relations and communication management have a place therein. It is first vital to recognize that as times have changed, so too has the MBA. In the 1990s it evolved from the previous two decades to address criticisms from the business sector that the degree was theory-centric, thereby lacking in providing students' practical experience, as well as crude in its pedagogical approach given its instructors were inexperienced both academically and professionally. In response, the MBA became a program that balances theory with practice and

whose instructors often have education or experience in business, or are both practiced and educated in the discipline (canadian-universities.net, 2010).

More recently, the MBA has had to again reinvent itself to offer myriad options and provide greater flexibility in response to globalization, a bleak financial picture of late and a changing marketplace. The increasing diversity of the MBA includes countless specializations, blended learning opportunities, exclusively on-line programs, condensed programs, full-time and part-time offerings, executive programs, international projects/experiences and co-operative education work terms (Bao, 2009; “Resilient Wreckers,” 2009). Likewise, Thomas (2007) contends that societal changes, namely shifting demographics, have impacted and will continue to affect the business school curriculum in the form of an increased desire for life-long learning opportunities and a heightened need for more flexible and condensed programming.

The 2007-2010 global financial crisis, also dubbed the ‘Great Recession,’ has raised questions as to whether graduate business schools are partly to blame (Damast & Gloeckler, 2009). Regardless, business schools recognize they must be a part of the solution and move the underlying ideology of their teaching away from a shareholder focus toward a stakeholder-centric approach, a philosophy to which the Association of MBAs has subscribed (Purcell, 2010). One business writer contended that responsive and progressive business schools are evolving their educational models to reflect current business challenges, with some emerging stronger from the economic crisis due to curricular enhancements such as an integrated approach as well as offering new courses which focus on issues such as corporate social responsibility and governance (Anonymous, 2010). Cornuel (2007) implored business schools globally to train students to be socially responsible managers and leaders when considering how to meet future issues in the business school dynamic.

Datar et al. (2010), who view the MBA as being at a crossroads, argued that key business needs are currently going unanswered at graduate business schools but that administrators and faculty can view and seize these as opportunities to enhance their programs. Two of their identified needs relate directly to this discussion: 1) ‘thinking critically and communicating clearly’ which, if lacking, negatively impact the effectiveness of leadership; and 2) ‘understanding the role, responsibilities and purpose of business’ which correlate with social responsibility and require business schools to teach students about companies’ accountability to their various publics. It is important to note, however, that Datar et al. (2010) viewed communication as wholly technical in nature and thus emphasized MBA graduates’ lack of oral and written communication skills.

If communication instruction, whether technical or strategic in its approach, is indeed lacking in management education (Datar, Garvin & Cullen, 2010) and there is a heightened onus on MBA programs to foster ethical decision making and corporate social responsibility (Anonymous, 2010; Cornuel, 2007; Purcell; 2010), it is this author’s position that it again brings into view the possibility of public relations and communication management being an integral part of the graduate business school curriculum. This would only serve to bolster the inculcation of communication skills, which, as mentioned previously, businesses have been demanding of graduate business school programs given they were once viewed as greatly lacking (canadian-universities.net, 2010). What MBA administrators and faculty may not yet know is that communication, ideally, should be strategic in its approach.

Of course, not everyone has been or will be in favour of public relations becoming part of the MBA curriculum. King (1982), one of the pioneers of this very idea, was open about the fact that a number of respondents to a survey on the subject intimated that some business professors

may view public relations as beneath them. Similarly, in their analysis of the state of public relations education, Wright and VanSlyke Turk (1990) noted that “[p]ublic relations isn’t wanted in MBA land” (p. 11). Wright (1982) suggested it was not an oversight but rather ignorance in that some MBA program administrators and/or faculty simply never gave the idea of public relations in the curriculum any thought. Overt detractors, on the other hand, simply did not perceive a need for public relations or communication in the MBA curriculum (Pincus, Rayfield & Ohl, 1994). Pragmatists considered the MBA curriculum as already overburdened with mandatory courses and could not rationalize sacrificing a more or equally important course to accommodate a public relations and communication course (Wright, 1982). Then there was also the situation where the topic of communication was recognized as a hole in the curriculum, but the need somehow lost both the momentum and the sense of urgency behind it when competing with other subjects in the hierarchy of the MBA curriculum (Pincus et al., 1994). While it is important to consider these possible rebuttals to the idea of public relations and communication in the MBA, it is equally important to consider a Canadian business school which recently and nimbly responded to the global economic crisis with “...a two-part required course built around leadership and communication skills. Part one is taken at the beginning of the program, with part two coming later so students leave the program with a clear sense of what a business leader looks like” (Anonymous, 2010, p. 4). It is unclear, however, whether this course is technical or strategic in nature.

Communication underpins management (Penley, Alexander, Jernigan & Henwood, 1991) and the apparent inextricable link between the two concepts is proving to be true in the context of the MBA, particularly its ability to foster communication skills, confront today’s organizational realities and ensure students are considering their responsibility to the community

(Datar et al., 2010). If ever there has been a need for organizations to reach their publics with clear, open and honest communication, it is now (Sebastian, 2011). It is fundamentally about relationship management with an organization's publics, which is an important concept to consider in the context of public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA curriculum.

The two most important aspects of an organization's relationships – both internal and external – are as follows:

- The development and nurturing of strong, long-term relationships with a variety of publics is key to any organization's image and identity, public goodwill, and ultimate ability to achieve its mission.
- Communication with these publics, whether that communication is intentional, unintentional, proactive or reactive, is what builds those relationships. (Parsons, 2001, pp. 124-125)

Whether rebuilding fractured relationships in the wake of a financial crisis or otherwise, creating relations in their infancy with a new public or fostering current ties with a long-standing one, public relations and communication management in concert is the course to chart.

Ultimately, business students – the managers and leaders of tomorrow – will at some point need to assume the role of communicator and hone their public relations skills to reach their many publics (King, 1982). In other words, they will need to build and sustain relationships. Therefore, a mandatory public relations and communication management course fits in the MBA perhaps now more than ever before. It is not enough to leave it to students to uncover the strategic depths of public relations and communication management, rather such a course must be mandatory to

ensure they discover its full potential before entering the work world. It is imperative, however, to determine how to get there through additional research which will be explored in the following chapter of this study.

### **Theoretical Perspectives**

This section will consider the literature supporting the justification for the study and its theoretical underpinnings.

**The literature supporting the justification for the study.** As was described briefly in Chapter 1, there are specific categories within which to justify the imminent need for this study, including: (1) academic/pedagogical; (2) professional/practical; (3) strategic; (4) theoretical; and (5) ethical. This section will highlight the literature which situates the various rationales for the study.

*Situating the rationale academically/pedagogically.* As a result of the lack of public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA, graduate business schools are perpetually turning out scores of graduates who fail to understand or appreciate the strategic value of public relations and communication (Pincus & DeBonis, 1994). This is primarily due to the fact that business scholars fail to see the value of communication education in the MBA curriculum (Pincus & DeBonis, 1994), and those few who do, for the most part, view communication as technical in nature (Beebe & Mottet, 2010; Hildebrandt et al., 1982; Munter, 1992, 2009). When communication is part of the MBA curriculum, it often leans heavily on oral and written communication (Knight, 1999, 2005), even when it purports to emphasize strategy. In spite of long-standing thinking and more recent revelations that communication instruction is lacking in the MBA (Datar et al, 2010; Porter & McKibbin, 1988), these assertions were wholly



focussed on the technical facets of communication and did not include assisting business managers and leaders to understand communication strategy or its importance. While some scholars view communication instruction in its ideal form as a blend between the strategic and technical facets (Barrett, 2008) and others attempt to emphasize strategic communication (Barrett & Knight, 2005; “Public relations,” 2011), public relations and communication management has yet to reach the strategic heights it should have in the MBA curriculum. This issue is compounded in Canada in that little to no research exists in the literature regarding public relations and communication management’s status in the Canadian MBA. In fact, Canadian-centric studies on this subject appear to be non-existent. This study strived to change that.

*Situating the rationale professionally/practically from a business perspective.* At various points in time over roughly the last half century, both scholars and practitioners in the disciplines of management and public relations/communication have asserted that communication is a vital skill for business executives; Katz (1955), Bowman (1964), Mintzberg (1973), and Hildebrandt et al. (1982) spoke to technical communication; Pincus and DeBonis (1994) discussed communication in the strategic sense; and Barrett (2008) viewed the two as working best when in tandem. The question becomes whether it matters if these executives are managers or leaders, and if communication skills and knowledge, whether strategic, technical or a blend of the two, benefit both roles given their positions of influence in an organization. Before advancing the discussion, it is vital at this juncture to consider the definitions of management and leadership and the functions of each role.

It is a common turn of phrase that managers manage and leaders lead. From there, the discussion quickly becomes muddled as it appears there is no commonly accepted definition for management or leadership; it is as though there are almost as many theories on this subject as

theorists. Some theorists assert that management involves planning, organizing, leading and controlling (Robbins & Coulter, 2009) and that leadership involves influencing others (McLean, 2005) to strive to achieve a shared vision (Senge, 2008). This author views management as a gatekeeper role, directing others and/or controlling a business function, and ensuring that existing policies and procedures are followed to support organizational goals; management is positional in nature in that a manager is assigned a team and/or a business function to oversee. On the other hand, leadership is equated with possessing a compelling vision and fostering intrinsic motivation in others to work collaboratively to achieve that shared vision; it is not necessarily positional in nature as it can be evidenced at any level of an organization.

In the myriad literature available on management and leadership, many scholars recognize these terms are often used interchangeably (Armandi, Oppedisano & Sherman, 2003; Kent, 2005; McLean, 2005; Nienaber, 2010). However, several theorists (Armandi et al., 2005; Kotter, 1990; Toor & Ofori, 2008 ) cite distinct differences between the two roles. By way of example, management instructors Armandi, Oppedisano and Sherman (2003) posited that “[a] manager is appointed by the organization and is given formal authority to direct the activity of others in fulfilling organization [sic] goals. A leader is a person who influences others because they are willing to do what he or she requests” (p. 1076).

Leadership is commonly viewed as hierarchically superior to management (Gull, 2010). Timm (2010) asserts that in the wake of the fall of corporate America and the corresponding economic downturn, we can no longer afford to view leadership and management as exclusive domains. In that same vein, some view the two concepts as independent but complementary (Kotter, 2001); intertwined (Nienaber, 2010); or interrelated (Kent, 2005). McLean (2005) concluded that both management and leadership “...are essential to enable objectives and

strategies to be achieved, business activities and human resources to be managed, change to be effectively achieved, and projected profits and organisational [sic] success to be achieved” (p. 16).

It can be argued that management and leadership are inextricably connected in that both managers and leaders, whether acting in formal or informal capacities, have inherently profound responsibilities within an organization, the success of which is contingent on effective communication being used to propel business forward (Gillis and the International Association of Business Communicators, 2006). Whether a manager is planning, organizing, leading or controlling or a leader is influencing others to realize a compelling and shared vision, it is this author’s assertion that effective communication is the vehicle through which the elements of management and leadership are conveyed and realized.

Barrett (2008) posited that the considerable amount of time both managers and leaders spend communicating in their respective roles, both in the technical and strategic sense, illustrates the importance of strong communication skills. She views the leadership role, however, as the hierarchical pinnacle, suggesting that effective leadership skills are required for an individual to progress from a managerial position to a leadership position. Beebe and Mottet (2010) assert that communication, strictly in the technical sense, makes work possible, and that workplace communication is directly linked to influencing others through leadership. Mai and Akerson (2003) contended that leadership communication, which is both technical and strategic but focuses only on communication with an organization’s internal publics, has never been more important than in today’s perpetual and rapidly-changing business environment given that employees should understand and participate in the organizational vision and related goals. For the purpose of this paper, the requisite communication skills of managers and leaders will be

treated as one and the same, whether labelled as leadership communication for leaders or management/managerial communication for managers or as another moniker. Regardless of the designation, strategic communication should be at the core of management and leadership roles and such skills must, therefore, be fostered in our current and future MBA students if we wish for them to be effective managers and/or leaders when they enter the work world.

Effective communication in the workplace is multi-faceted. Ideally, it encompasses both technical and strategic communication approaches (Munter, 1992), however, the emphasis should be on public relations and communication management. Despite laying the strategic groundwork for effective communication, including consideration of communicator and objectives, audience, message, channel choice and culture, Munter's (1992, 2009) work focused squarely on technical communication skills, including writing and speaking in a business environment and proper grammar. Barrett (2008) placed writing, speaking and strategy at the centre of her leadership communication framework, which reaches outward in a spiral formation to envelop managerial and corporate communication skills as a business person's perspective and area of control expand. More specifically, she posited that strategy, writing and speaking are core communication skills, with strategy serving as the foundation for effective leadership communication; managerial communication skills are capabilities used when working with others in an organization, encompassing interpersonal communication and employee communication; and corporate communication skills come into play when representing an organization to a broader community (Barrett, 2008) or, in public relations terms, external publics. She also recommended the development of a leadership communication strategy which employs effective and strategic communication to lead both internal and external publics.

As managers and leaders hone their strategic communication skills, they will undoubtedly come to recognize their role in communication strategy, particularly as it relates to communication with internal and external publics. For example, communication professors Pincus et al. (1994) posited that:

[a]t the heart of the manager's ... profile is the ability to communicate effectively with a variety of constituencies inside and outside the organization. Many chief executive officers have maintained for some time that communication is vital to good management and to meaningful organizational life. (pp. 58-59)

Further, Gollner (1984) suggested that with the growth of domestic and global interdependence, leadership must be grounded in understanding, communication and concrete actions in relation to the needs and wants of an organization's publics. Whether communication is global or local, it is paramount that internal audiences receive key information first, thereby allowing employees to serve as ambassadors and messengers for the organization. Pincus and DeBonis (1994) view Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) specifically as having increasing responsibility for communication, in the strategic sense, and human relations, a role they dub as Chief Communication Officer which involves articulating a vision, establishing two-way communication and fostering trust with key publics; "[t]his has been true concerning external stakeholders for some time now. Less obvious, however, is that CEOs today have an equally important responsibility to forge lasting relationships with internal groups" (p. 21).

Along those same lines, three professors at Western Carolina University conducted a study at an institution undergoing organizational change to determine the degree to which the leader and employees share a vision and internal communications' role in achieving that vision (Farmer, Slater & Wright, 1998). Their results indicate there is a statistically valid correlation

between effective communication with internal publics and shared organizational vision.

Likewise, Mai and Akerson (2003) argue that successful organizations view communication from leaders as integral to their strategic direction. They call for leaders to become the organization's Chief Information Officer and assume responsibility for effective communication both within the company, in the form of top-down and bottom-up communication, and with the workplace community as a whole. While these views of communication may be ambitious, it can nevertheless be inferred that leaders and managers, either in serving as or supporting the CEO in the role of Chief Communication Officer or Chief Information Officer, bear a shared responsibility for effective strategic communication with internal and external publics.

Although there are various options available to educate managers and leaders about their vital communication role, such as executive development opportunities and public relations-business school seminars (Institute for Public Relations, 2010), the one way to achieve consistency is through the requirement of a public relations and communication management course or component in the MBA curriculum (Grunig & Grunig, 2002). This prerequisite will allow future managers and leaders to realize the vital role strategic communication plays with internal and external publics in organizational success, and grow to appreciate and value the communication function. They need exposure, in the form of instruction and practice, to the communication function and its role in achieving business goals and strategic direction; there is no better starting place than the MBA to receive such instruction and practice. That said, it is imperative that the content matches the graduate-level curriculum. While the importance of strong written and verbal communication skills (Munter, 1992 and 2009) which allow an individual to be a skilled communicator cannot be overstated, it would be unfortunate if this is the level of communication that needs to be taught in graduate business schools. However,

today's issues of grade inflation and student entitlement and the resulting ramifications cannot be overlooked (Cote & Allahar, 2007; Rubin & Dierdorff, 2009). Technical communication skills should be well-developed in students at the undergraduate level of university if not in the secondary school system, allowing a graduate-level communication course to be wholly strategic in nature, focusing on public relations and communication management (Grunig et al., 2002), communication strategy and communication with an organization's various publics (Barrett, 2008). This study will enable such a course to be offered in the Canadian MBA.

*Situating the rationale strategically from a public relations perspective.* In addition to possessing strong technical communication skills and understanding and appreciating that communication with various publics is, ideally, strategic in nature, it is important that managers and leaders harness the communication expertise in their organizations and put stock in the communication function (Dozier et al, 1995). It is these necessary elements which Dozier, Grunig and Grunig (1995) cite as part of an excellently managed organization according to the International Association of Business Communicators' \$400,000, three-nation examination of public relations and communication management known as *the Excellence Study*. To provide context, Grunig (1992b), one of the team members on *the Excellence Study*, explained the attributes of management excellence and their impact on public relations:

- symmetrical communication with an organization's various publics, thereby requiring an excellent public relations function;
- leadership, calling for leaders who are visionary and provide direction for an organization, thus requiring them to embrace public relations and create a culture for its practice; and

- strategic planning, the act of charting a course for the organization's future, which requires an excellent public relations function that is integrated into the strategic planning process.

Each of these attributes on its own, and even more so collectively, illustrates that public relations is a strategic management function on which an organization's leadership should rely.

Grunig (1992), another team member on *the Excellence Study*, took a different stance on the idea of public relations being a strategic management function, exploring the concept of power as it relates to public relations. She proposed that power comes to the public relations function in myriad ways: (1) through organizational decision makers – the dominant coalition – valuing public relations as a strategic management function, (2) through public relations practitioners who further their expertise in the discipline to increase their access to the organizational decision makers, (3) through the public relations department being situated at the top of the organizational structure, and (4) through the public relations function being a key player of the dominant coalition. While this author believes it is less about power for the public relations function and more about organizational effectiveness, Grunig's (1992) power propositions illustrate it is important that management understands and values the strategic public relations function, seats the top public relations practitioner at the management table and appropriately places the function at the top of the organizational hierarchy alongside the CEO. Thus, it creates an environment where strategic communication counsel is consistently sought and provided in a give-and-take relationship between public relations practitioner and CEO, and is discussed as part of everyday organizational decisions. In essence, strategic communication becomes a part of the corporate DNA – public relations and communication management becomes innately ingrained in leadership and management decisions and actions.



Further corroborating this, Dozier et al. (1995) suggest that an organization cannot achieve communication excellence, purely in its strategic sense, without the management and public relations teams achieving shared understanding of strategic communication as well as its function and role – ideally that “...knowledgeable communicators assist in the overall strategic management of organizations, seeking symmetrical relations through management of communication with key publics on whom organizational survival and growth depends” (Dozier et al., 1995, p. x). They also challenged CEOs to acknowledge that their top communicator, through strategic counsel, is a key to communication excellence, as is a senior management team that values the work of the public relations/communication department. Likewise, Cutlip, Center and Broom (1994) suggested that effective public relations starts with the organization’s leaders who must support, commit to and actively participate in the public relations function. Schumann (2006) viewed things slightly differently, arguing that strong leadership, particularly as it relates to corporate communication, is directly correlated with the communication counsel who guide and support the leader. He purported that such counsel hinges on professional communicators’ ability to capture the leader’s authenticity and feed employees what they need and want in order to create and maintain an emotional connection to the organization. This idea becomes rapidly and wholly unrealistic, however, if the leader is not supportive of the communication function, does not realize its strategic value and/or is unwilling to accept strategic communication counsel. Ultimately, the responsibility for strategic communication needs to be shared between leader/manager and communicator.

The above ideals are well aligned with this author’s assertion that top management must understand, support and effectively and strategically utilize the public relations function. The best way to inculcate this concept in managers and leaders is to start with a baseline of current

MBA students who receive public relations/communication management training in graduate business schools' curricula and who can later place value on, and breed and foster a culture of respect for, the public relations function in their organizations. In considering the impact of *the Excellence Study* on public relations education, Grunig and Grunig (2002) provided an apt position as it relates to public relations and the graduate business schools:

MBA programmes are generalist programmes aimed at students who might begin in a specialty such as finance or marketing but who eventually might advance into executive positions. At that level, organisational [sic] executives work with the PR unit or seek the counsel and services of PR firms. Few understand the need to empower PR people to provide counsel on how to deal with the PR components that are part of all management decisions. Their management education would be enhanced greatly if they were required to complete a subject area in PR or communication management or if a PR component were included in the subject areas of strategic management, public affairs or corporate social responsibility and business ethics. (p. 39)

As its title indicates, *the Excellence Study* represents the ideal situation for public relations and its place and value in organizations. Not everyone, including both business executives who see it as beneath them and public relations practitioners who strive to be nothing more than mere tacticians, positions the public relations function at such lofty heights, lavishes it with such respect or envisions it within the MBA (King, 1982). Pincus et al. (1994), however, purported that there are obvious drawbacks if public relations is absent from the graduate business school curriculum:

Without public relations in MBA programs, future managers will lack the understanding of how it fits into the corporate game plan. Perhaps even more damaging is the perceived notion that if public relations isn't important enough to be taught in the MBA program it is not important to management. (p. 57)

This, however, is not the case as illustrated by an abundance of literature regarding communication and its possible positions within the MBA. This study concludes with a recommended model for a public relations and communication management curriculum in the MBA program.

*Situating the rationale ethically.* From an ethical standpoint, the timing could not be more perfect for this study. Given the recent economic crisis and the accompanying cry for corporate social responsibility and a stakeholder versus a shareholder focus (Anonymous, 2010), there has never been a more critical time than the present for organizations to be forthright, open, honest and transparent with their publics. According to social contract theory, organizations have a moral obligation to communicate with their publics (Aviv, 2002) and those publics deserve to actively participate in decisions which affect them based on Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics (Pearson, 1989a). Given this study's basis in ethical theory, it is integral to explicate both social contract theory and Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics.

Social contract theory dates back to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, with prominent philosophers Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau serving as its founding fathers and greatest proponents (Dunfee, Smith and Ross Jr., 1999; Waluchow, 2003). Diana Aviv (2006) provided a global view of the importance of the social contract when she defined it as "that intricate set of explicit relationships and implicit understandings that connect

“we the people” to one another and that connect us all to the government, to the world of commerce and business, and to ... civic and charitable organizations...” (p. 28). In essence, the social contract morally binds an organization to those whom it serves. It is important, then, to consider the definition of morality. Luckmann (2002) views morality as “a reasonably coherent set of notions of what is right and what is wrong, notions of the good life that guide human action beyond the immediate gratification of desires and the momentary demands of a situation” (p. 19).

With respect to the MBA, it is important to specifically consider the corporate social contract given that the majority of graduates will likely work in corporations and become leaders and managers. Dunfee, Smith and Ross Jr. (1999) credit Donaldson for constructing:

... a social contract for business that provides for corporate legitimacy on the basis of the consent of those affected by business; that is, corporations exist only through the cooperation and commitment of society. This suggests an implied agreement between the corporation and society (p. 17).

Based on the above discussion, it becomes obvious that social contract theory fits well with public relations given its focus on relationships, and morally binds organizations to communicate effectively with their publics to achieve cooperation and commitment and ultimately uphold their social contract.

Moving from the organization to the organizations’ publics, Albert J. Sullivan’s theory of public relations ethics provides an apt theoretical foundation for this discussion. Just as the organization has a duty to communicate with its publics, those publics have rights with respect to information and participation. In his classic article regarding the values of public relations,

Sullivan (1965) articulated two rights of importance to public relations with respect to disseminating information:

These two rights derive from the nature of man as a rational human being and as a free being. They may be stated: (1) Each person has a right to true information in matters which affect him. (2) Each person has a right to participate in decisions which affect him. (p.428)

Further, Sullivan (1965) believed that upholding these rights established the mutual values of public relations. By his definition, mutual values consisted of moral and personal values based on a person's rights; in essence, everyone has rights as a person and everyone else has an obligation to respect the rights of others. Pearson (1989b) describes Sullivan's mutual values as those placing "...emphasis on the rights of the audience to full information about issues that effect [sic] them" (p. 124), thus bringing together his discussion on rights and values.

In his analysis of this ethical framework for public relations, Pearson (1989a) credited Sullivan for highlighting the moral need for on-going communication that created balanced and equal involvement from both an organization and the organization's publics. Essentially, Sullivan illustrated the value of two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue, particularly when considering the ethical practice of public relations.

Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics clearly depicts the public's rights with respect to information and communication. This theory directly supports the need for MBA students, our future managers and leaders, to understand their role in fulfilling those rights with their organizations' publics, thereby upholding the values of public relations as Sullivan articulated decades ago.

To fulfill their moral and ethical obligation, organizations ultimately must inform, engage, consult, respect, listen to and complete the information loop with their various publics. This is fundamentally about relationship management with both internal and external stakeholders (Parsons, 2001), an element of which is an effective communication strategy.

It is also about a corporate social responsibility and a communicative corporate culture, as Awad (1985) suggested in his book, *The Power of Public Relations*. He acknowledges the criticism of business schools and the public relations profession alike regarding the lack of public relations instruction in the MBA:

There is a need, one that is often neglected in MBA sequences, to develop in future managers and administrators the kind of mindset that takes the long view, that places a higher value on an organization's human assets than on numbers and machines. Such minds can view and comprehend the totality of a corporate culture in relation to the world in which it operates and cultivate those values and relationships that nurture organizational life, health, and growth. (p. 18)

Relationship management, corporate social responsibility and a communicative culture are all particularly important to consider in the context of the Master of Business Administration (MBA) curriculum, since it serves as the training ground for today's students (Carroll, 2000) who at some point may be in a management or leadership position where they will need to communicate effectively with their organization's publics (King, 1982) and understand the related ethical responsibility of doing so. Therefore, they must grow to understand the strategic depths and full potential of public relations and the implied ethics of effective communication before they enter the work world. On face value, this does not appear to be happening across the

graduate business school curriculum at present, including in Canada. This study strives to change the learning landscape with respect to public relations and communication management and allow for such strategic understanding.

*Situating the rationale theoretically.* Over and above the ethical theories described above, this study leans on the principles of phenomenology and social constructivism in determining the appropriate pedagogical model for public relations and communication instruction in the MBA in Canada.

Phenomenology is a communication theory which can be described simply as the dialogue or experience of others. Following capitalism and industrialization, the need to recognize people and their experiences became apparent, giving rise to phenomenology early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. While Edmund Husserl is considered its founding father, phenomenology involves various perspectives and numerous explications of otherness (Craig & Muller, 2007), some of which this author relates directly to pedagogy.

Philosopher and theologian Martin Buber's (2007) genuine dialogue considers both the self and the other, and requires turning to one another while simultaneously maintaining individuality and building community. Another perspective is that of Hans Gadamer (2007) whose Hermeneutical Experience necessitates openness to foster a genuine human bond. In his view of phenomenology, Briankle Chang (2007) regarded communication as bounded by a contract whereby we communicate based on reciprocity, which is akin to social contract theory. All of these principles of phenomenology relate directly to pedagogy as they foster a collaborative, respectful, open and accepting learning environment. Such an approach was critical in this study to ensure this author considered otherness, particularly with respect to the

business discipline, at every phase of the study. It was also integral that the public relations and business disciplines are open to learning from each other and respectful of one another throughout this undertaking. Further, it is incumbent on this author to subscribe to the principles of phenomenology when determining the best model for public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum. Essentially, it is paramount that leaders' perspectives are reflected in the recommendations.

This study also employed a social-constructivist approach with respect to the recommended model for public relations and communication management education in the MBA. Founded by Lev Vygotsky, this view of learning posits that "...knowledge is shaped and evolves through increasing participation within different communities of practice" (Price, O'Donovan & Rust, 2007), thus representing an ideal rationale for exposing MBA students to the public relations discipline. Social constructivism is a sub-category of constructivism which is grounded in a problem-based and learner-centred approach through which learners construct their own knowledge (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008), think independently, value diversity and creativity, rectify problems collaboratively, self-assess their decisions, and are likely to become self-aware and caring professionals (Magolda, 1992). It is imperative that MBA students learn in this way and possess such skills with respect to public relations and communication management so they will understand its inherent value and their implicit responsibility for strategic communication as future managers and leaders.

**The study's theoretical underpinnings.** It is also integral to consider the literature on the theoretical perspectives underpinning this study. This includes social contract theory and Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics as background for why public relations and communication management instruction is necessary in the MBA. It also encompasses



phenomenology and social constructivism in the context of the preferred pedagogical format which this study will recommend for use with respect to public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA in Canada. As a result, this section expands on the theories discussed previously.

***Social contract theory.*** The literature on social contract theory is immense in scope. From a historical perspective, the concept of the social contract is said to have originally focussed more on the unwritten moral obligation owed to society by its government but later grew to encompass business as well (Donaldson, 1982). For the most part, the literature discusses social contract theory in the context of the social responsibility and business ethics of organizations (Aviv, 2006; Dunfee et al., 1999; Waluchow, 2003; Wempe, 2005; Wempe, 2009). A large portion of the scholarly contributions to this discussion applies integrative social contracts theory as an ethical framework (Gilbert & Behnam, 2009; Gosling & Huang, 2009; Spicer, 2009) for organizations, be they private corporations, government or non-government organizations. The brainchild of Donaldson and Dunfee (1994), integrative social contracts theory combines ‘what ought to be’ and ‘what is’ with respect to social contracts. Of these two contracts, one is “...a normative and hypothetical contract among economic participants...” (p. 254), while the other “...is an existing (extant) implicit contract that can occur between members of specific communities...” (p. 254). They further posit that the sum of society’s total implicit contracts is at the core of business ethics, which helps to reach business decisions and explain the reasons behind those decisions to those publics with whom they have a social contract.

The recognition of communication with organizations’ publics in the context of the social contract provides a logical segue to the connection between the social contract and public relations/communication. When contemplating the role of communication as it relates to the

social contract, the literature positions communication as a right (Calabrese, 2004) and as having its own contract (Dresp-Langley, 2009). Scholars have also considered the implication of the social contract on organizations' various publics including employees (Therkelsen & Fiebich, 2003) as well as media, the state (Pickard, 2010) and consumers/citizens (Botan & Taylor, 2005).

An attempt to expand this discussion to encompass the MBA stops short; there is no literature regarding social contract theory and graduate business education. This represents a missed opportunity as social contracts theory ultimately impresses upon organizations' managers and leaders that they have a moral obligation to their publics, whether considering it from a public relations or business perspective. Effective communication is required with those publics in order to uphold the organization-publics social contract, whether hypothetical or implicit.

*Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics.* In contrast to the breadth of scholarly material on social contract theory, the literature on Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics is lean. Aside from his original article regarding his theory on values and rights which, as its name indicates, focuses on public relations, references to his seminal work are limited. While Pearson (1989a) laments the fact that Sullivan is not often cited as a source in major public relations textbooks, he credits him for developing philosophical theory to underpin his discussion of public relations, including why organizations have a moral obligation to their publics. "...Sullivan ... articulated genuinely philosophical statements about what public relations is fundamentally, and about what it means ethically. Sullivan's work represents some of [the] most significant basic public relations theory..." (p. 52).

The few scholars who make reference to Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics focus squarely either on his articulated values in public relations – technical, partisan and mutual

values – (Botan, 2006; Pearson, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c; Parsons, 1993) or on his focus on dialogue as a means of achieving two-way symmetrical public relations (Botan, 2006; Pearson, 1989c). Despite these contributions to the field of public relations, the correlation to corporate social responsibility and the onus on organizations to inform their publics, there is no reference to Sullivan’s ethical theory in the literature regarding graduate business education which this author views as an oversight. It is an ideal theory to highlight both the values of public relations and the public’s rights with respect to information and communication, concepts that are critical to enabling MBA students to understand their responsibility in adhering to those values and upholding those rights with their organizations’ publics.

*Phenomenology as a pedagogical framework.* The use of phenomenology as a pedagogical framework is common, particularly in the medical and educational fields, and is sometimes used in concert. Phenomenology is used in nursing to strive to better understand the experience of both nursing scholars and nursing students (Campoy, Merighi & Stefanelli, 2005; Mansour & Porter, 2008); of note for this author’s study is that Campoy, Merighi and Stefanelli’s (2005) research unearthed the value of communication and interpersonal skills both for educators and students of nursing. In education, teachers use phenomenology primarily as a self-reflective tool to consider the effect of their teaching style on students (Marlowe & Maycock, 2000; Skemp, 2010; Wiebe & Guiney Yallop, 2010).

Given that phenomenology considers otherness and understanding an organization’s publics is pivotal to public relations, it is logical to think that phenomenology would be employed to educate public relations/communication students about otherness and the importance of putting themselves in the shoes of others to consider the effect of an organization’s decisions and actions on its publics. The literature, however, is sparse save for the

contributions of scholar Stanley Deetz (1973, 1981) and his followers, many who contributed to the 1981 book, *Phenomenology in Rhetoric and Communication*, for which Deetz served as editor. His and their work, however, focussed more on language and rhetoric/speech/oral communication than on public relations and communication management. Regardless, their scholarly contributions asserted that the concepts of phenomenology can, indeed, be used in the study of communication (Craig, 1984). This represents an opportunity to employ the principles of phenomenology when suggesting a model for a public relations and communication management curriculum in the Canadian MBA. In the spirit of recognizing otherness, the recommended model must take into account the various publics affected by advancing the concept of public relations and communication management in the graduate business school curriculum in Canada.

***Social constructivism.*** There is a significant amount of literature on social constructivism, the learning process through which participants actively construct their own knowledge (Fox, 2001; Price et al., 2007; Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008). The literature on social constructivism only continues to evolve with the advancement of technology such as social media (Parsons, 2009) and e-learning (Bose, 2010). Given that social constructivism is a branch of constructivism, it is important to note that but a few scholarly articles about graduate business education are beginning to draw a connection between constructivism/social constructivism as a way of learning and enhancements in technology (Levy & Hadar, 2010; Watson, 2010). Levy and Hadar (2010) recommend a model for teaching Web 2.0 concepts in a graduate knowledge management course, thus positioning on-line information sharing in the business context. Meanwhile, Watson (2010) contemplates whether MBA students enrolled in a successful distance education program would be open to its pedagogical approach shifting from

instructivism and constructivism to a social-constructivist approach. She determines that while nationality affects students' perception of such a change, they would not discontinue their involvement in the program if a social-constructivist approach was employed; this illustrates that social constructivism may just have its place in the MBA.

In spite of the literature amassed on social constructivism, it appears to have only recently gotten its foothold in the field of public relations. In 2006, the National Communication Association's summer conference brought authors, researchers, teachers, practitioners and administrators together to collaboratively "...bring social construction approaches to the foreground of the communication discipline..." (No break during summer; NCA summer conferences shine, p. 1) and create social construction principles. Between this significant step forward and the recent consideration of social constructivism's relevance to the MBA (Levy & Hadar, 2010; Watson, 2010), this is a fitting pedagogical approach to employ in introducing public relations and communication management to the MBA curriculum in Canada. As mentioned previously, MBA students will need to be instrumental in creating their own knowledge of public relations and communication management as it relates to their future roles as managers and leaders. The ultimate goal of employing social constructivism in this study is that this participatory form of learning will enable MBA students to understand and value the public relations and communication management function and assume responsibility for it as tomorrow's managers and leaders.

This comprehensive literature review supports the following research questions and hypotheses:

**RQ1:** What is the status of public relations and communication management in the MBA in Canada today?

**RQ2:** What form does public relations and communication management instruction currently take in the MBA in Canada?

**RQ3:** What is Canadian business leaders' opinion of public relations and communication management's fit in the MBA?

**RQ4:** What content should be taught with respect to public relations and communication management in the MBA and in what pedagogical format?

**H1:** A gap exists in the Canadian MBA curriculum given the long-standing absence of public relations and communication management instruction therein.

**H2:** The recommended way to fill the void is to develop a pedagogical model for public relations and strategic communication management in the Canadian MBA which is rooted in ethical, communication and pedagogical theories.

Armed with a full understanding of the literature regarding the various facets of this study and the research questions and hypotheses that it supports, it is now time to turn to its research methodology. The following chapter will consider past research, its deficiencies and the need for a mixed methods approach; outline the study's purpose, significance, research questions and hypotheses; describe the methodology for both the quantitative and qualitative research phases; and conclude with a table outlining the various variables of the study.

### **Chapter 3: Research Methodology**

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of the research was to learn about public relations and communication management in the Canadian MBA. More specifically, a mixed methods approach in the form of a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2009) strived to achieve the following research objectives:

- determine the status of public relations and communication management in the Canadian graduate business school curriculum;
- gauge Canadian business leaders' opinions of public relations and communication management's place in the MBA curriculum; and
- ascertain the ideal content and pedagogical format of public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA.

The first objective was addressed through quantitative research to obtain a relatively broad base of information regarding the status of public relations and communication management in the MBA in Canada. The second and third objectives were tackled through qualitative research to probe business leaders' perceptions of public relations and communication management, its place in the curriculum and how its instruction can be best incorporated into the MBA. The goal of the research was to assist in suggesting a standard pedagogical model for public relations and communication management in graduate business schools and ultimately progress the concept of public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA in Canada. This will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

### **Significance of the Research**

The research was significant in that it strived to:

- highlight that Canadian graduate business schools have an opportunity to move to the forefront of the field by incorporating public relations and communication management into the MBA curriculum;
- bolster the MBA curriculum through public relations and communication management instruction at a time when society is demanding clear, honest, transparent and timely communication from organizations, particularly in the wake of the most recent recession;
- educate future managers and leaders on the strategic value of the public relations and communication function, and their role in effectively communicating with an organization's publics;
- positively affect the relationship between the public relations discipline and the business schools, and present possible partnership and/or instructor exchange opportunities; and
- progress the pedagogy and practice of public relations as well as the profession as a whole.

This author argues that it remains necessary to reach these heights as she has practiced public relations in both the private and public sectors over the last 17 years and has had to continually explain and prove the value of the public relations function to business executives, many who were MBA graduates.



## **Research Questions**

As outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the research questions addressed through this study were as follows:

**RQ1:** What is the status of public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum in Canada?

**RQ2:** What form does public relations and communication management instruction currently take in the MBA in Canada?

**RQ3:** What is Canadian business leaders' opinion of public relations and communication management's fit in the MBA?

**RQ4:** What is the ideal content and pedagogical format of a public relations and communication management course in the Canadian MBA?

## **Hypotheses**

This author's hypotheses, also outlined in Chapter 1 and 2, were as follows:

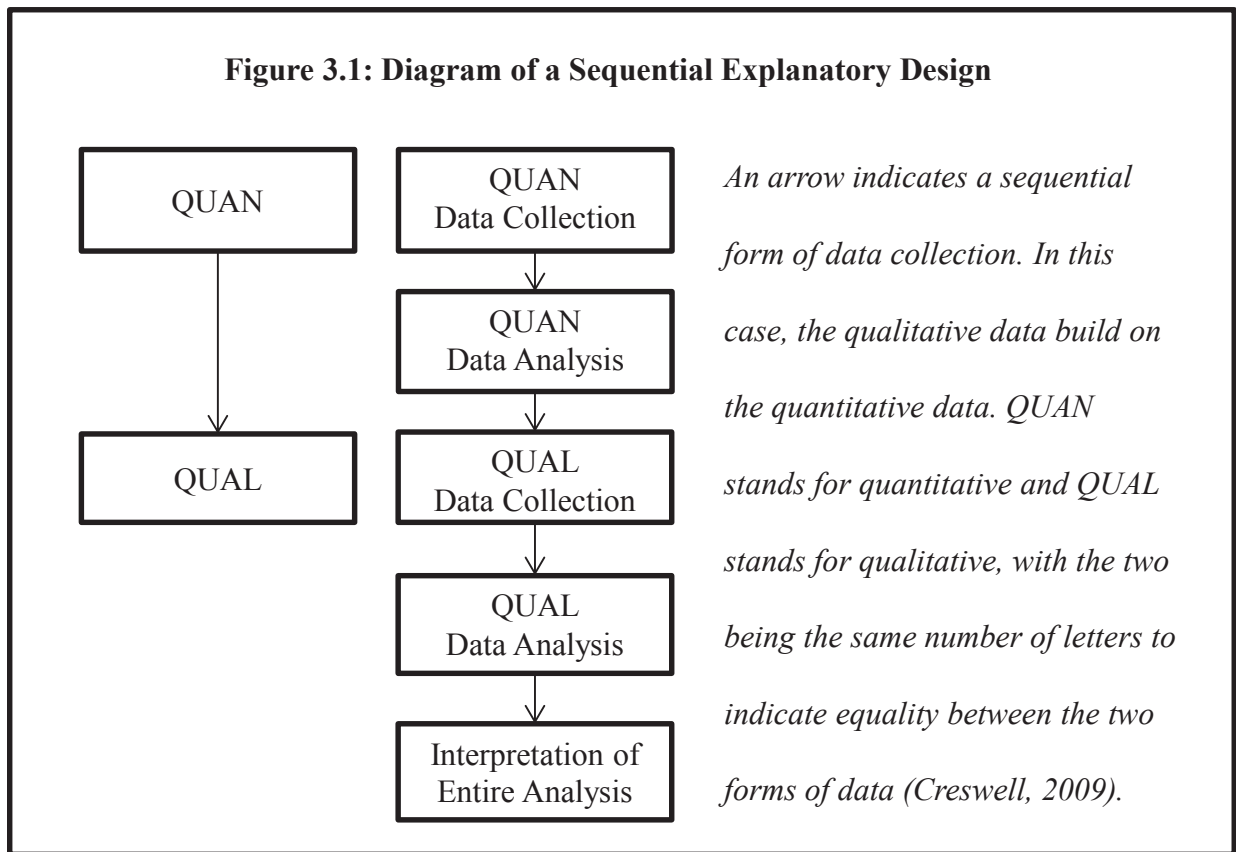
**H1:** A gap exists in the Canadian MBA curriculum given the long-standing absence of public relations and communication management instruction therein.

**H2:** The recommended way to fill the void is to develop a pedagogical model for public relations and strategic communication management in the Canadian MBA which is rooted in ethical, communication and pedagogical theories.

## **Description of Methodology**

According to Creswell (2009), mixed methods research is an approach to inquiry that blends quantitative and qualitative research. The two are used in concert, thus the strength of the study is greater than if either quantitative or qualitative research was used on its own. This study

employed a mixed methods approach to research in the form of a sequential explanatory design. This entails collecting and analyzing quantitative data in the first phase of research followed by a second phase of research which involves collecting and analyzing qualitative data, as is depicted in Figure 3.1.



As the diagram illustrates, the two phases of research are given equal priority, but the blending of data occurs when the initial quantitative results inform the honing of in-depth interview questions and the subsequent collection of this qualitative research. The main drawback of this type of research is that it is particularly time-consuming where one phase precedes the other, and particularly given that this author gave each phase of research equal priority. However, this author was willing to invest the time necessary to address the issues identified.

The one study that employed a similar approach to research on this subject was Barrett and Knight's (2005) examination of the current state and the future of communication in the MBA in the United States. They, however, first conducted a content analysis of top-ranked MBA schools' websites which was followed by interviews with selected MBA communication faculty. Their sample consisted of 34 top-ranked American business schools. They also conducted an on-line survey of entering MBA students regarding their technical communication skills, and resurveyed them upon completion of a core communication course to gauge improvement. This study is similar in that it began with a content-analysis of Canadian MBA schools and ended with qualitative interviews, but with business leaders instead of MBA faculty. This study also differed in that it did not survey students.

### **The Conceptual Content Analysis**

This author drew on a similar web-based content analysis she conducted for her Master's course work (Rath, 2010) but refined it to focus on strategic and technical communication concepts that could be interpreted as communication content in the MBA; hence, it is referred to as a conceptual content analysis. As is described below, this author referenced Neuendorf's (2002) typical process of content analysis research to guide her through its numerous steps. This approach resonated with this author given that Neuendorf (2002) also treats content analysis as a quantitative research method which "has as its goal a numerically based summary of a chosen message set" (p. 14).

**Theory and rationale.** Having already defined research questions and hypotheses based on an extensive literature review as Neuendorf (2002) suggested, this author possessed a strong sense of what content needed to be examined and why. Specifically, the Canadian MBA curriculum needed to be examined to determine if public relations and communication

management exist in the MBA and in what pedagogical format. Ultimately, the rationale behind the study was to test the hypothesis that a gap is present in the MBA as it relates to public relations and communication management. While this author did not apply an integrative model, it was integral to understand the status of public relations and communication in the MBA and its pedagogical format prior to conducting qualitative research so that she could speak knowledgeably with business leaders if they inquired about her quantitative research during the in-depth interviews; several business leaders asked such questions at the conclusion of their individual interview with this author and she was able to speak intelligently about the status of communication concepts covered in the MBA programs in her sample.

**Conceptualizations.** The conceptualization stage requires determining the study's variables and defining them conceptually (Neuendorf, 2002). This web-based study's variables included the coding date; university name; location; program name; MBA program website address; graduate academic calendar website address; website publication date; and finally, a matrix of strategic and technical communication concepts in the course titles, course descriptions and/or course objectives/learning outcomes in the MBA. This author evoked the communication matrix for each course that contained a communication concept, and also noted the course name and denoted whether the course was mandatory or an elective. The graduate business schools' websites served as the vehicle from which to garner the above-noted variables.

While some of the initial categories mirror those in the studies detailed in the literature review, none had utilized a conceptual content analysis with strategic and technical communication terms. Rather, this was a new and different construct based on this author's interests regarding concepts that could possibly be interpreted as communication content in the MBA. Table 3.1 outlines the communication concepts in the matrix and their definitions.

<b>Table 3.1: Communication Concepts Sought in the Conceptual Content Analysis</b>	
<b>Concept</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Public relations	the strategic development and management of relationships between an organization and its publics, preferably through two-way, symmetrical communication
Strategic communication	purposefully and artfully creating and executing a detailed and well thought out plan to effectively communicate with an organization's publics
Communication management	the strategic management of an organization's overall communication program with its myriad publics, including on-going creation, implementation and evaluation
Leadership communication	communication from leaders and/or managers which supports organizational goals and objectives
Marketing communication	a customer-centric marketing approach which strives to strategically manage audiences, content, distribution channels and results of brand communication endeavours (Kliatchko, 2008)
Marketing strategy	overarching processes which allow an organization to differentiate itself from its competitors by capitalizing on its unique strengths to deliver enhanced value to customers whether through product, price, promotion or place (Jain, 2000)
Relationship management	a company-wide strategy which is used to manage interactions with existing and potential customers (Hand, 2012)
Technical communication	making presentations/presenting and writing documents
Communication	written or spoken words or nonverbal clues used to inform, persuade or share ideas with others
Information/communication systems	computerized systems and technologies which enhance the distribution of and access to information, often across globalized networks (Hanna & Knight, 2000)

While it is possible that additional communication concepts could have been included in the matrix, such as social media, this author limited the terms to common strategic and technical communication terms used in the MBA which she was familiar with from the literature review discussed at length above and a previous content analysis (Rath, 2010) on the same subject.

**Operationalizations (measures).** Neuendorf (2002) recommends that your measures should match your conceptualizations. In keeping with the construct created by the communication matrix, quantitative measurement in this study was associated with each course

that contained one or more of the communication terms in the course title, course description and/or course objectives/learning outcomes. Essentially, this study counted the number of strategic and technical communication terms referred to in the MBA programs in the sample.

**Coding schemes.** According to Neuendorf (2002), it is essential to create a coding scheme for a content analysis. This author created a coding instruction sheet (Appendix A) which included the aforementioned matrix of communication concepts and the concepts' possible inclusion in the MBA course titles, course descriptions and/or course objectives/learning outcomes.

**Sampling.** While this author wished to conduct a census of the MBA programs in Canada, this was not possible due to time constraints and to be in keeping with the scope of a master's thesis. This author first referenced the website of the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans (CFBSD, n.d.) as the universe of MBA programs in Canada from which to draw the sample. Since the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans' website lists all 56 business schools (see Appendix B) which were members at the time of the study (CFBSD, n.d.), this author searched the website of each member school to determine if it offered a core MBA program devoid of specializations and executive programs. As a result, the universe was narrowed to 34 schools; 13 were eliminated due to the business school not offering a graduate business program, six were eliminated for offering specialized or executive MBA programs instead of a core MBA; two were eliminated as their websites were only available in French and this unilingual author could not interpret the content to determine if it contained the communication concepts outlined in the matrix; and one was eliminated because it was an international MBA program held in Japan but hosted by a Canadian university.

From the remaining 34 universities offering a core MBA, this author selected only half for analysis due to time constraints and also to maintain a realistic scope for a master's thesis. She first stratified the sample by general geographic areas within Canada – Western Canada (British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba), Central Canada (Ontario and Quebec) and Atlantic Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland), randomly selecting a proportionate number from each area based on the total number of universities from each geographic area in the sample. Using simple random sampling within each stratum netted MBA programs for analysis from British Columbia (Simon Fraser University, n.d.), University of Victoria, n.d) to Newfoundland (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2012) and most of the provinces in between. Of the MBA programs selected for analysis, some were top-ranked (Badenhausen, 2011; Economist, 2012; Financial Times, 2010; John Molson School of Business, 2011; Richard Ivey School of Business, 2012), one had a spiritual focus (Trinity Western University, 2010), others had a bilingual approach (HEC Montréal, 2012; Université de Moncton, 2012), many were located in major urban centres (e.g. Ryerson University, 2010; Simon Fraser University, n.d.) while some were situated in a much smaller locale (Memorial University of Newfoundland, 2012; Université de Moncton, 2012). Ultimately, this approach to sampling resulted in a cross-section of core MBA programs offered in Canada from which to analyze the curricula for communication terminology.

**Training and pilot reliability.** As Neuendorf (2002) recommends, this author held a training session with her second coder, during which the two coders worked together to identify any issues and ensured both agreed on the coding of the variables. As a result of the training and piloting reliability of the data, one term in the communication matrix on the coding instructor sheet required refinement. This change eliminated potential confusion in coding for this concept.

**Coding.** According to Neuendorf (2002), a content analysis should “use at least two coders, to establish intercoder reliability. Coding should be done independently, with at least 10% overlap for the reliability test” (p. 51). To establish intercoder reliability, this study employed two coders – this author and a second coder. Both coders took a Master’s course in research methods and employed a web-based content analysis as part of their course requirements in 2010. They used their acquired knowledge to conduct this conceptual content analysis. It required visiting each MBA program website in the sample and analyzing the curriculum, including course titles, descriptions and course objectives/learning outcomes. To ensure full reliability, the second coder analyzed all 17 MBA program websites in the sample.

**Final reliability.** Neuendorf (2002) recommends calculating a reliability figure, such as a straight percentage. The two coders each analyzed 17 MBA programs containing more than 887 courses, of which 130 contained communication terms in the communication matrix a total of 201 times. The first and second coders had differences in coding for 33 codes and the same coding for 168 (of 201) codes, for a reliability figure of 84%. Some of the differences were a result of straight human error where one of the coders simply placed the wrong code in the wrong box, whereas others were the result of one of the coders overlooking courses that contained a communication term in the matrix. Another issue that arose was that some MBA program websites’ content changed between when this author coded her research in spring 2012 and the second coder did her coding several months later in the same year. The coders reconciled these differences by revisiting the website and course(s) in question and/or referring to the first coder’s screen captures, resulting in 100% agreement in the end. This author learned much through this conceptual content analysis; in particular, she realized that many more synonyms could have been included in the communication matrix, particularly as it related to customer



relationship management. As a result, some courses, like those with terminology such as managing customer relationships, which perhaps should have been captured, were not. Further, additional communication terms are evolving and taking precedence in the world of communication, such as social media, and could have been included. While this author does not recall social media as having been a prevalent concept in the courses she analyzed, it is one that has gained momentum during the last decade and is starting to be recognized as an important stream of study (Meredith, 2012) in the realm of public relations and communication. This author recommends that it be included in future studies on the same subject.

**Tabulation and reporting.** In the final stage of content analysis, Neuendorf (2002) recommends tabulation and reporting. This analysis will be left to Chapter 4 where this author will outline the data collection results. Further, Chapter 5 will include cross-tabulation of several variables in the study in a number of ways, specifically the terms in the matrix and whether they were strategic or technical and whether they were referenced in mandatory or elective courses.

### **The In-Depth Telephone Interviews**

**The population.** The intent of the in-depth telephone interviews was to seek opinions regarding public relations and communication management's fit and possible content in the MBA from business leaders, preferably top executives, within Canada's Top 100 Employers 2012 list (Eluta.ca, 2012). This ranking is an annual national competition which companies must enter and are rated on eight criteria pertaining to working conditions and benefits (Eluta.ca, 2012). This author opted to use this ranking from which to garner her sample based on the assumption that the companies included as part of Canada's Top 100 Employers (Eluta.ca, 2012) are led by progressive and forward-thinking leaders, drawing the inference that organizations

which value and communicate with their employees and offer exceptional working conditions and benefits have strong leadership. Of note in this ranking is that one criterion is employee communication. This standard drew the interest of this author as it can be inferred that a company which values communication with one of its internal publics may also value communication with its other publics and put stock in the public relations and communication management function overall.

By considering only this particular ranking, this author delimited the study in that many other successful companies with strong leadership were missed, particularly given that Top 100 Employers in Canada is a national competition to which companies must apply. However, this was but one avenue to reach Canadian business leaders who are part of organizations that are purported to be exceptional employers. It also allowed for a cross-section of diverse Canadian organizations. For example, some are private while others are public, some are large while others are small, and some are multinational while others are local or regional. It is important to note that the names of the organizations and their representatives in the sample will not be disclosed as all personal and qualifying data about participants in the in-depth interviews is considered anonymous and will be held in the strictest confidence, all of which was outlined in this author's ethics application which led to ethics clearance (see Appendix C) to conduct this study.

**The sample.** Using a random numbers table (Peatman & Schafer, 1942), this author first randomly selected slightly more than half of Canada's Top 100 Employers (Eluta.ca, 2012) and then researched each of these 55 companies on-line. She was able to email the Chief Executive Officer, General Inquiries or public relations department of some organizations, depending on what information could be gleaned from the website, with a detailed request for an in-depth interview with a high-ranking executive on the subject of the MBA in Canada and public

relations and communication management's possible fit therein (see Appendix D). Other organizations first required a phone call to determine where she could direct her email request. Nearly three quarters of these requests, whether by phone or email, went unanswered. Several organizations immediately declined participation. Three high-ranking public relations professionals with whom this author had no previous relationship contacted her and agreed to participate in an in-depth interview. As a result of such a low initial participation rate, this author resorted to using a purposive sample within the random sample, reaching out to business leaders and public relations professionals at organizations within the random sample with whom she had formed a relationship through her academic and/or professional pursuits. Creswell (2009) argues that purposefully selecting participants is the idea behind qualitative research so it was fitting that it worked this way for this study. As a result of the purposive sampling approach, seven additional individuals – six executives and one public relations professional – each agreed to grant an in-depth interview. This author conducted each interview only after receiving the signed ethical consent form (see Appendix E) from the respective interviewee which was accompanied by their consent to audio record the discussion (see Appendix F).

**The in-depth interview questions.** While this author created the script and questions (see Appendix G), also known as the interview protocol (Creswell, 2009), for the in-depth interviews for her ethics application prior to conducting any research, she confirmed that they were appropriate after analyzing her quantitative research as Creswell suggests (2009). The in-depth interview consisted of nine questions, four of which requested business leaders' opinions on public relations and communication management and its possible fit in the MBA in Canada, another four of which requested an explanation of how they arrived at their opinions and the last of which invited them to contribute anything to the discussion which they felt may have been

missed. This author arrived at her questions by researching similar studies on the topic and subsequently sought and obtained permission from Dr. Donald K. Wright (personal communication, November 22, 2010) to utilize questions from his research, with any necessary modifications, on the same subject in 1982 and also from Dr. Tina McCorkindale (formerly Carroll) (personal communication, December 2, 2010) who authored her master's thesis on public relations in American business schools in 2000. While this author did not end up using these scholars' specific questions, their previous research served as a guide from which to devise her in-depth interview questions.

After conducting the first interview, this author realized that the participants needed to be reminded of the purpose of the research as the first interviewee initially mistakenly believed the intent of the interview was to discuss the benefits of public relations professionals embarking on an MBA and the potential related content, and this author had to redirect the discussion as a result. As a result, this author began each subsequent interview with a description of the intent of the research which she drew directly from the email she had originally sent to each interviewee (see Appendix D). Additionally, this author determined that the first two questions were evoking such similar responses from interviewees that it required morphing them into one.

**The details and demographics.** This author began researching the randomly-selected organizations in late June 2012 and was originally able to schedule the 10 interviews between late August and the third week in September. Several of the participants, however, requested rescheduling of their in-depth interview appointment time, some more than once, and this author willingly obliged. As a result, this author did not conclude the in-depth interviews until mid-

October 2012. The interviews took an average of 17 minutes, with the shortest being just over 12 minutes and the longest taking just over half an hour.

Of the 10 interviews, four were with public relations professionals who led the public relations and communications function in their organization, two were ‘top dogs’ in charge of their organization and four were business executives quite high up in the organizational food chain. With respect to gender, four were men (two of whom were the ‘top dogs’) and six were women (four of whom were the public relations professionals). The organizations they represented consisted of private companies, public companies, an academic institution, a federal government department and a provincial government agency, and spanned such sectors as transportation, health and wellness, education, finance and entertainment. The in-depth interview participants were located as far away as Vancouver Island on the west coast of Canada and as close as several kilometers’ from this author’s home and office on the east coast, with representation from five of Canada’s 10 provinces – British Columbia, Alberta, Manitoba, Ontario and Nova Scotia. Regardless of the interviewees’ locations, this author conducted all in-depth interviews by phone so as to ensure consistency in the approach and not to read body language in interviews conducted locally where she would not have been able to do the same for those conducted with participants located elsewhere in the country.

**Analysis.** Several approaches exist for qualitative data collection (Creswell, 2009). This author conducted telephone interviews, used a digital recorder to capture the discussion, and subsequently transcribed the recordings. With her raw data before her in the form of 10 transcripts, this author subscribed to Creswell’s (2009) linear, hierarchical approach to data analysis in qualitative research.

***Organizing and preparing data for analysis.*** As a first step, Creswell (2009) recommends organizing and preparing the data for analysis, including transcribing the interviews and visually scanning the material. This author served as her own transcriptionist to get to know her data intimately from the outset and save both time and money. In doing so, she first transcribed the interviews and then verified that the data were captured fully and correctly by listening to the recording a final time while reading along with the transcript word by word. She also sent the interviewees a copy of their respective transcript if requested, offered them an opportunity to provide commentary and reiterated their ability to withdraw from the study if they wished.

***Reading through all data.*** Next, Creswell (2009) recommends reading through all of the data to gain a general sense of the content and consider its overarching connotation. This author viewed this as an opportunity to read through all of the data presented in each transcript several times, moving each time from the first interview to the tenth. Using printed versions of the transcripts, she also began making notes in the margins with her initial comments about the content, including potential categories.

***Coding the data, and determining and interrelating themes.*** The coding process is the next step, whereby the researcher segments the data into categories and denotes the categories with a term (Creswell, 2009), from which themes are eventually borne and subsequently interrelated. This author's analysis adhered to the ideology of grounded theory, "...progressing from a very detailed, empirical reading to greater generality" (Mantere, Schildt & Sillince, 2012, p. 178).

Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss created grounded theory in the 1960s as an inductive means to generate theory from qualitative inquiry (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). By discovering,

creating and verifying the theory throughout the iterative practice of data collection and analysis, the means of unearthing theory from qualitative research occurs almost methodically (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory's key tenets are the constant comparison, theoretical coding, theoretical sampling, theoretical saturation and theoretical sensitivity (O'Reilly, Paper & Marx, 2012), each of which is described below.

Constant comparison entails the simultaneous coding and analysis of data, whereby all new data are compared to previously collected data in order to continually adjust the arising theoretical categories (Glaser & Strauss, 1967); theoretical coding involves systematically categorizing and amassing similar information within the data (O'Reilly et al., 2012); theoretical sampling refers to the on-going, logical data-gathering process which is based on previously garnered data and the researcher's analysis to that specific point and guides future research on the topic (O'Reilly et al., 2012); theoretical saturation occurs when new data fail to produce new information as it relates to the developing categories and the interrelationships between those categories (Goulding, 2002); and theoretical sensitivity requires the researcher to suspend her preconceived notions to bring meaning to the data while recognizing information that is relevant versus that which is immaterial to the research (O'Reilly et al., 2012). This author strived at every turn to incorporate these tenets into her qualitative research gathering and analysis. Of note was that she reached theoretical saturation at her seventh interview, however, she already had reached out to three other business leaders and did not want to turn them away given their willingness to participate in the research.

Applying the tenets of grounded theory, this author first embarked on the process of open coding which "fractures the data and allows one to identify some categories..." (Strauss &

Corbin, 1990). Two overarching categories emerged from the overall data, both of which will be highlighted in Chapter 4. Further, this author discovered a natural segmentation of responses to particular questions as they often garnered similar reactions from executives during the qualitative interviews and thus became enveloped by the same category. After considerable coding and comparing, this author identified a large set of empirical codes which she eventually synthesized and pared down to a manageable number of first-order categories.

Progressing from open coding to axial coding as grounded theory does, this author began to put the data back together in new ways by drawing connections between categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). As a result of the identified interrelationships within the data, second-order themes evolved from the first-order categories and aggregate dimensions were then borne out of the second-order themes. One aggregate dimension grew out of each of the two overarching categories. Using Mantere, Schildt and Sillince's (2012) coding schema as well as that of O'Reilly, Paper and Marx (2012) as guides, this author developed a similar data structure figure to explain her first-order categories, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions. This figure will be highlighted in Chapter 4 and interpreted in Chapter 5.

***Interpretation.*** Creswell (2009) suggests that the final step of data analysis involves interpreting the data or making meaning out of the data. In essence, it strives to answer what lessons were learned from the data. This interpretation, including the full analysis of the quantitative and qualitative research in concert and the resulting meaning making, will be left to Chapter 5. There, the results from both the quantitative phase and qualitative phase of research will be interpreted in their entirety, with overall findings and recommendations resulting from the collective whole. It is at this time that the benefit of the mixed methods approach to research



will be obvious, obtaining a more complete picture of the situation than either quantitative research or qualitative research could have produced alone.

**Variables of the Study**

As a means of follow-up to the above description of each phase of research, Table 3.2 describes the variables in the study, the corresponding research question(s) and/or hypothesis, the research type and tool.

<b>Table 3.2: Variables of the Study</b>		
<b>Variable Name</b>	<b>Research Questions and/or Hypotheses</b>	<b>Research Type &amp; Tool</b>
Curricular Status	<p><b>RQ1:</b> What is the status of public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum in Canada?</p> <p><b>H1:</b> A gap exists in the Canadian MBA curriculum given the long-standing absence of public relations and communication management instruction therein.</p>	Quantitative research: Content analysis of Canadian core MBA program websites
Current Pedagogical Format	<b>RQ2:</b> What form does public relations and communication management currently take in the MBA in Canada?	Quantitative research: Content analysis of Canadian core MBA program websites
Knowledge of public relations	<b>RQ3:</b> What is Canadian business leaders’ opinion of public relations and communication management’s fit in the MBA in Canada?	Qualitative research: In-depth interviews with business leaders
Perceptions/ value of public relations	<b>RQ3:</b> What is Canadian business leaders’ opinion of public relations and communication management’s fit in the MBA in Canada?	Qualitative research: In-depth interviews with business leaders,
Ideal Curriculum in terms of both content and pedagogical format	<p><b>RQ4:</b> What is the ideal content and pedagogical format for public relations and communication management in the Canadian MBA?</p> <p><b>H2:</b> The recommended way to fill the void is to develop a pedagogical model for public relations and strategic communication management in the Canadian MBA which is rooted in ethical, communication and pedagogical theories.</p>	Qualitative research: In-depth interviews with business leaders

This chapter outlined the research methodology employed in this study, including the need for a mixed methods approach, its purpose and significance. It also provided a detailed description of the methodology for both the conceptual content analysis and the in-depth telephone interviews with business leaders, and culminated with a table of variables as a means of tying the various facets of the study together in one place. The study findings logically flow out of the research methodology, thus they will be described in the following chapter.

## **Chapter 4: Research Findings**

Using Creswell's (2009) sequential explanatory design as a model, this chapter presents the data stemming from the two phases of research. It first considers the results of the quantitative data from the initial phase of research and then moves to the results of the qualitative data gathered in the second phase. The ensuing discussion and recommendations evolving from these results, whether considered separately or collectively, will be left to Chapter 5.

### **Results of the Conceptual Content Analysis of Select MBA Program Websites**

As part of her research, this author conducted a web-based conceptual content analysis of the Canadian MBA curriculum to determine if public relations and communication management exists therein and in what pedagogical format. The quantitative portion of the research strived to answer the following two research questions:

***RQ1:*** What is the status of public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum in Canada?

***RQ2:*** What form does public relations and communication management currently take in the MBA in Canada?

Using a stratified sample, this author randomly selected a cross-section of 17 MBA programs for analysis from 34 universities in the universe of Canadian MBA programs. While the conceptual content analysis had a number of variables such as university name, location, program name and website, its focus was, as its name implies, on the concepts contained in the matrix of terms that could possibly be interpreted as communication in the MBA curriculum. The conceptual content analysis unearthed 201 references to the communication terms in the

matrix. Table 4.1 provides a breakdown of the number of references to communication terms which this author defines as strategic in nature.

<b>Table 4.1: References to Strategic Communication Terms in the MBA</b>				
<b>Strategic Communication Term</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Course Description</b>	<b>Course Objectives/ Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Total</b>
Public Relations	1	6	0	7 ( <i>all in elective courses</i> )
Strategic Communication	0	0	0	0
Communication Management	0	0	1	1 ( <i>in an elective course</i> )
Leadership Communication	0	0	0	0
Marketing Communication	5	5	0	10 ( <i>1 in a mandatory course and 9 in elective courses</i> )
Marketing Strategy	25	23	1	49 ( <i>22 in mandatory courses and 27 in elective courses</i> )
Relationship Management	1	6	3	10 ( <i>two in mandatory courses and 8 in elective courses</i> )
Grand Total	32	40	5	77 ( <i>25 in mandatory courses and 52 in elective courses</i> )

In a similar vein, Table 4.2 provides a breakdown of the number of references to communication terms which this author defines as technical in nature.

<b>Table 4.2: References to Technical Communication Terms in the MBA</b>				
<b>Strategic Communication Term</b>	<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Course Description</b>	<b>Course Objectives/ Learning Outcomes</b>	<b>Total</b>
Technical Communication	2	26	2	30 ( <i>9 in mandatory courses and 21 in elective courses</i> )
Communication	5	44	4	53 ( <i>20 in mandatory courses and 33 in elective courses</i> )
Information/ Communication Systems	14	23	4	41 ( <i>21 in mandatory courses and 20 in elective courses</i> )
Grand Total	21	93	10	124 ( <i>50 in mandatory courses and 74 in elective courses</i> )

These data bear the following answers to the research questions outlined above:

***Answer to RQ1:*** Public relations and communication management instruction exists in the MBA curriculum in Canada, however, its presence is scant when compared to other communication terms which are technical in nature or fall under the purview of marketing.

*Answer to RQ2:* Public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA takes place in the form of elective courses rather than mandatory courses.

A comprehensive analysis of the overall results, including a comparison between courses containing strategic and technical communication terms and whether those courses are mandatory or elective, will be discussed and illustrated in Chapter 5.

### **Results of the In-depth Telephone Interviews with Business Leaders**

In the second phase of her research, this author conducted in-depth qualitative interviews with six business executives and four public relations professionals who had direct responsibility for the public relations and communication function in their organization. This phase of research sought to determine their understanding of public relations and communication management, the value they place on it and if they saw a fit for the function within the MBA curriculum in Canada. As a result, it strived to answer the following two research questions:

*RQ3:* What is Canadian business leaders' opinion of public relations and communication management's fit in the MBA?

*RQ4:* What is the ideal content and pedagogical format of a public relations and communication management course in the Canadian MBA?

As a result of the application of grounded theory and its related coding schema outlined in Chapter 3, this author first noted two overarching categories, later arrived at first-order categories and second-order themes by deconstructing the data, and eventually determined aggregate dimensions (Mantere et al., 2012; O'Reilly et al., 2012) when reconstructing it in the end. The two overarching categories were business leaders' recommendations as they relate to

public relations and communication management and its potential fit in the MBA, and their rationale for those recommendations. They evolved organically from the questions given that about half the questions sought the business leaders' position on public relations and communication management and its possible fit in the MBA and were interspersed with the other half of the questions which pursued their opinion on how they arrived at their position.

The first-order categories with respect to business leaders' recommendations regarding public relations and communication management were its essentiality as a function, its fit in the MBA and strategic content, while the first-order categories falling under their rationale were perspectives on its essentiality, fit and strategic content. The business leaders' experience was also noted as a first-order theme in both overarching categories given that their rich professional backgrounds lend themselves well to both their recommendations regarding the subject and their supporting rationale. Deriving from the first-order categories were the second-order categories of high value/critical importance of public relations and communication management and its link to organizational success; need for public relations and communication management in the MBA; high value/critical importance of strategic content in the MBA as it relates to public relations and communication management; business leaders' experience in, knowledge of and respect for public relations and communication management; and various iterations of lessons learned through the business leaders' professional experiences which helped them to realize the value of public relations and communication management, whether it was through witnessing effective or ineffective examples in the workplace. The coding culminated in two aggregate dimensions of 'value of and respect for public relations and communication management underscores the need for its strategic content in the MBA' and 'business leaders' lived experience has demonstrated public relations and communication management's value and hence its need in the MBA.'

The most effective way to capture and explain the overarching themes, first-order categories, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions from the qualitative data is to view it in a flow chart. This author has borrowed liberally from the coding approaches of Mantere et al. (2012) as well as O'Reilly et al. (2012); the key difference is that this author has chosen to convey the flow chart over two pages instead of one to distinguish between the two overarching categories in her study. However, similarities across the two pages are abundantly evident in the first-order categories, second-order themes and aggregate dimensions. Figure 4.1 captures the two flow charts.

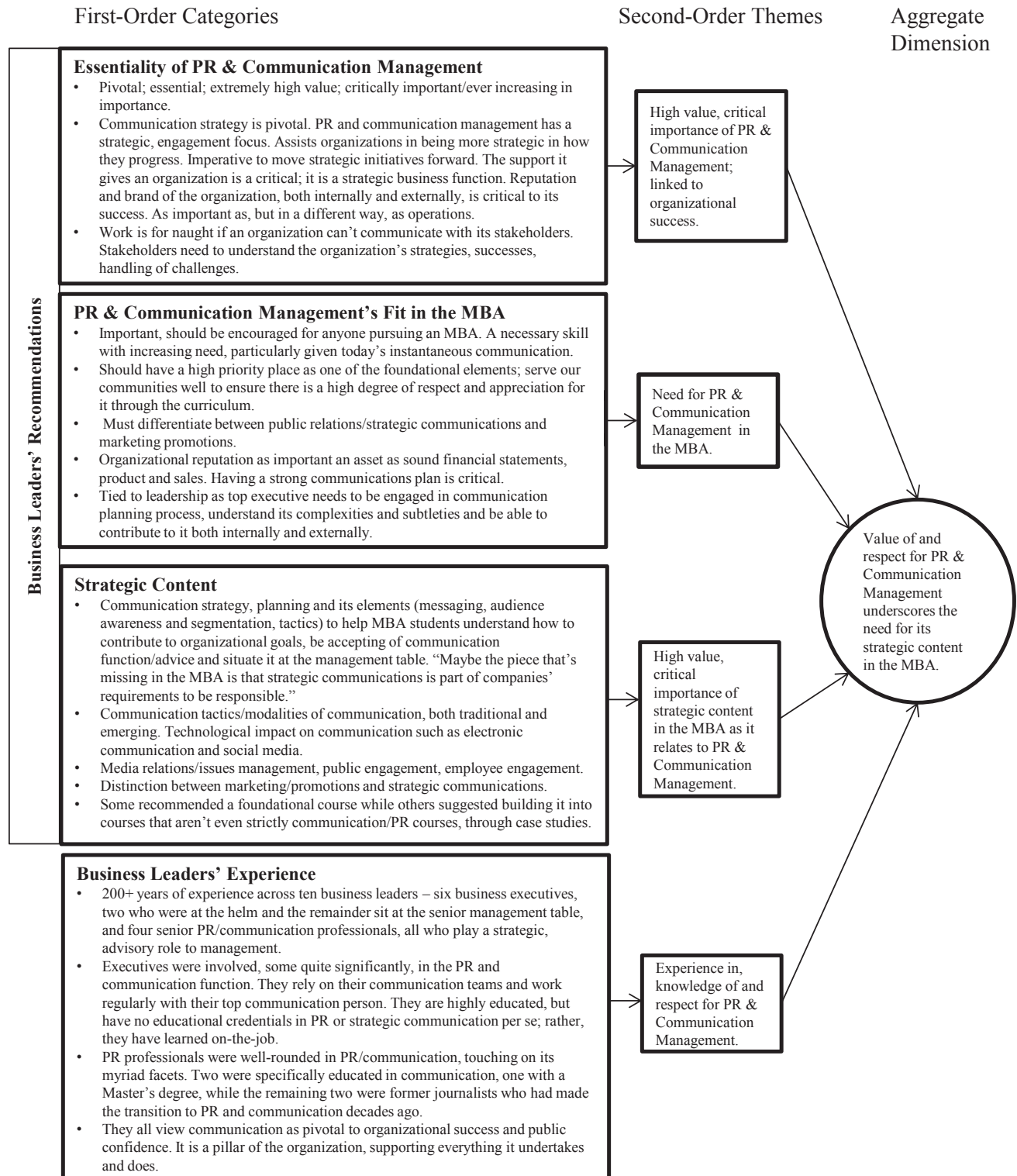
These flow charts bear the following answers to the research questions outlined above:

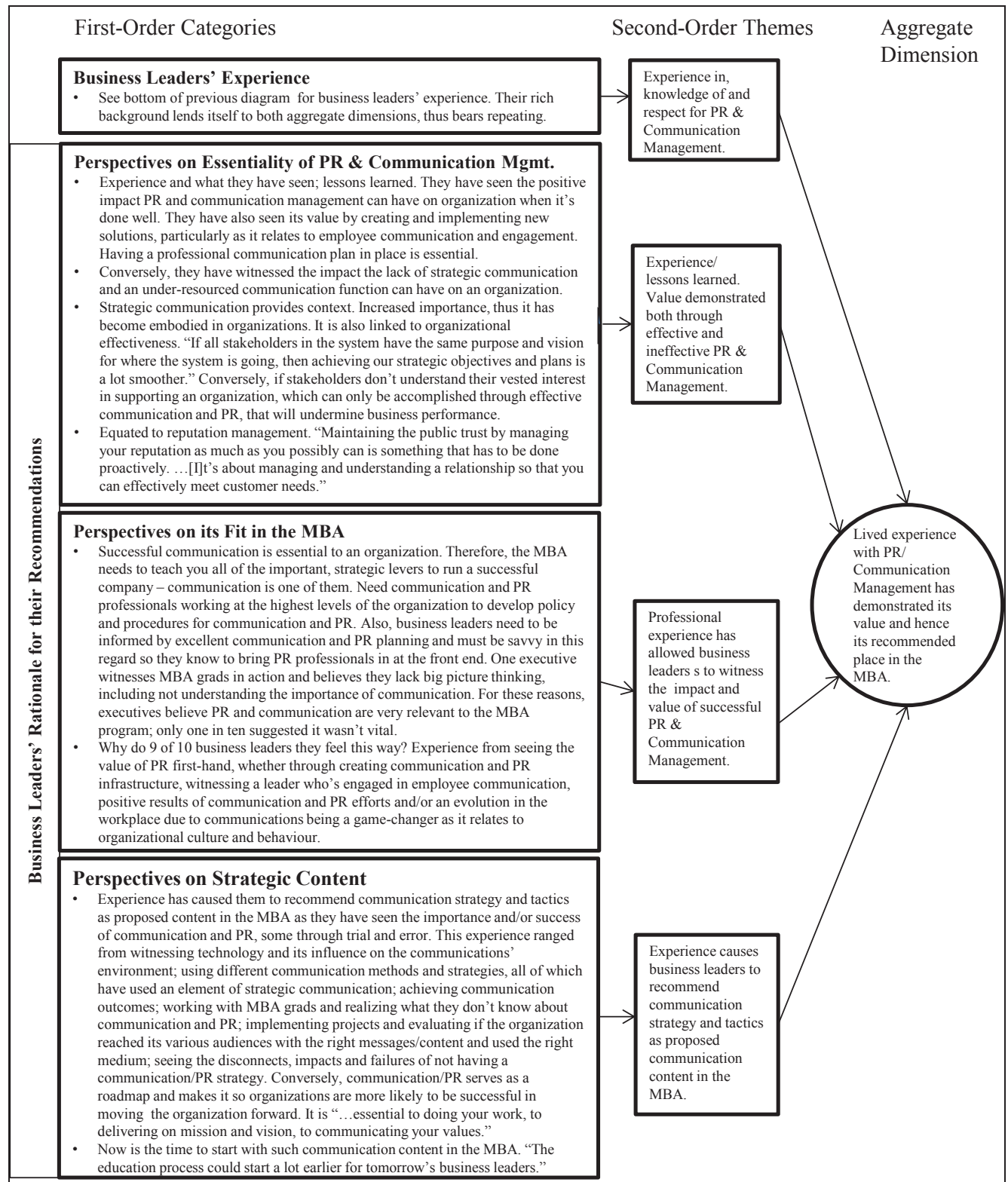
*Answer to RQ3:* Based on their professional experience, Canadian business leaders unequivocally stated there is a fit for public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA curriculum in Canada, so much so that they overwhelmingly called for it to have a priority place as one of the foundational elements of the MBA.

*Answer to RQ4:* Based on their professional experience, Canadian business leaders stated that the content of public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum in Canada needs to be strategic in nature, encompassing instruction in communication strategy and communication planning and the related elements, as well as training in media relations/issues management, engaging an organization's myriad publics, and distinguishing between public relations/communication management and marketing/promotions. Regarding pedagogical format, they recommended a foundation course in public relations and communication management and/or an integrated approach, whereby the subject is interwoven into other courses in the MBA curriculum.



**Figure 4.1: Final Data Structure after Open & Axial Coding**





Adapted from Mantere et al. (2012) and O'Reilly et al. (2012).

As is evidenced from the quantitative and qualitative research findings outlined above, each phase of the research addressed two research questions and provided much information to consider, particularly as it relates to this author's hypotheses. Thus, the findings provide rich opportunity for interpretation, both individually and collectively, and give rise to recommendations. This discussion and the resulting recommendations will be explored fully in the following and final chapter of this study.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion & Recommendations**

The research findings outlined in the previous chapter expose a need for both discussion and recommendations. This final chapter will first interpret the quantitative and qualitative research findings both individually and collectively. Together, the overall data then help to inform a pedagogical model with respect to public relations and communication management instruction within the MBA curriculum in Canada, including a pedagogical approach, the priority it should garner, the related content and the challenges these lofty recommendations pose. This chapter will also link the recommendations within the pedagogical model back to their theoretical underpinnings and offer a diagram to support the pedagogical model. Finally, it will consider next steps as well as future study and opportunities related to public relations and communication management in the graduate business school curriculum and beyond.

### **Discussion Regarding the Conceptual Content Analysis**

As part of the conceptual content analysis, this author and a second coder analyzed more than 887 graduate-level courses within 17 core MBA programs. This quantitative research netted 201 references to communication terms, with 77 being strategic and 124 being technical. This author asserts that much can be gleaned from this data whether considered individually or as a whole.

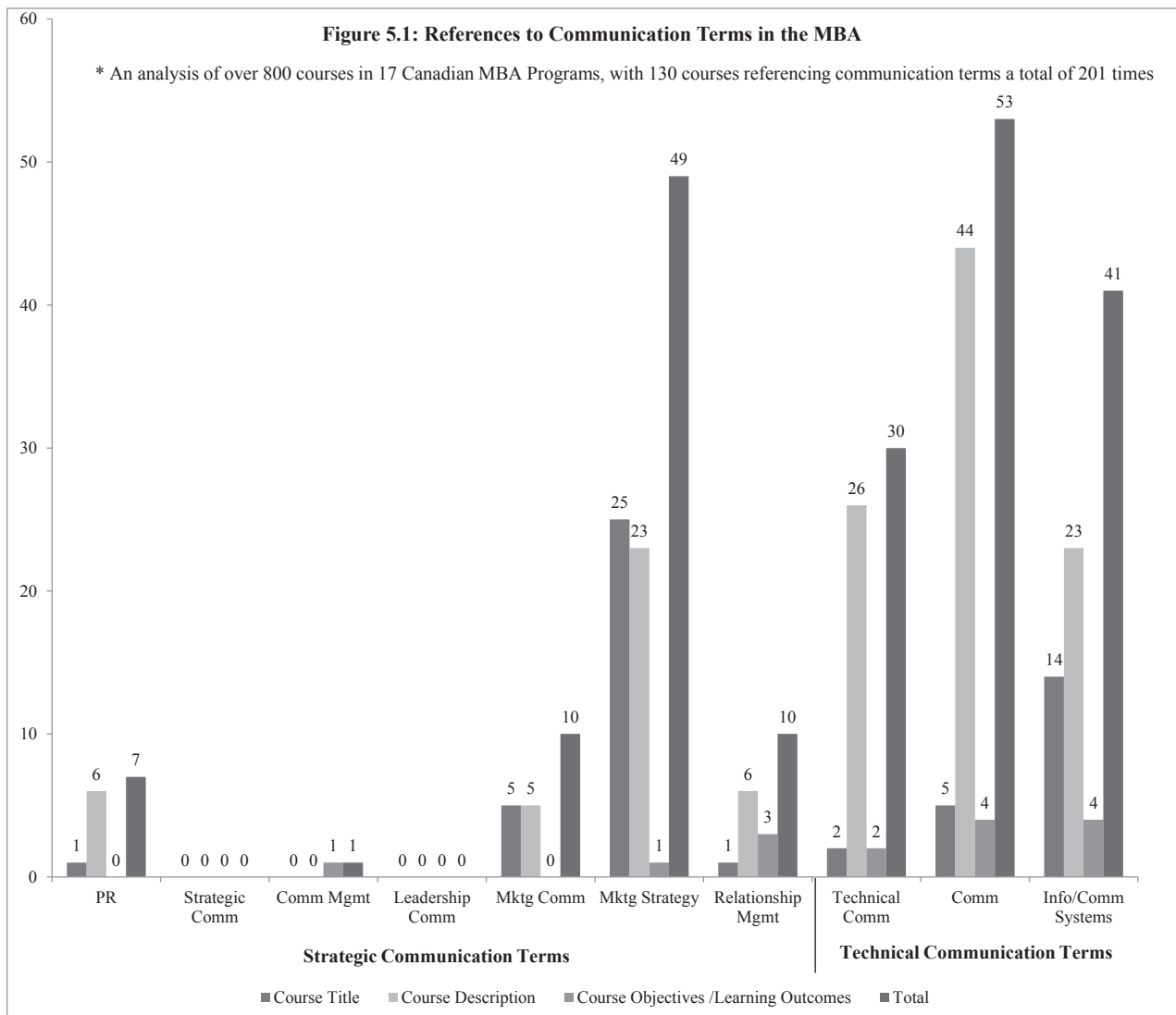
**Analyzing the references to strategic communication terminology.** Table 4.1 in the previous chapter outlined the 77 references to strategic communication terminology in the MBA curricula in the sample. When considering that public relations and communication management figure centrally within this study, what is notable about the findings is the scant number of references to either term. Further, the eight mere references to these terms all fell within elective courses. This alone illustrates that public relations and communication management is

undervalued in both quantity and priority within the Canadian MBA curricula. In a similar vein, other strategic terms such as strategic communication and leadership communication netted zero findings in the study. Of note, the majority of strategic communication terminology in the sample was marketing-related. While it is laudable that many of these terms were within the purview of marketing strategy, this very much places communication in the MBA in a commercial context focused largely on product, price, promotion and/or place. Such an approach is very different from public relations and communication management, which is the strategic development and management of relationships between an organization and its publics coupled with the strategic management of an organization's communication program with those publics.

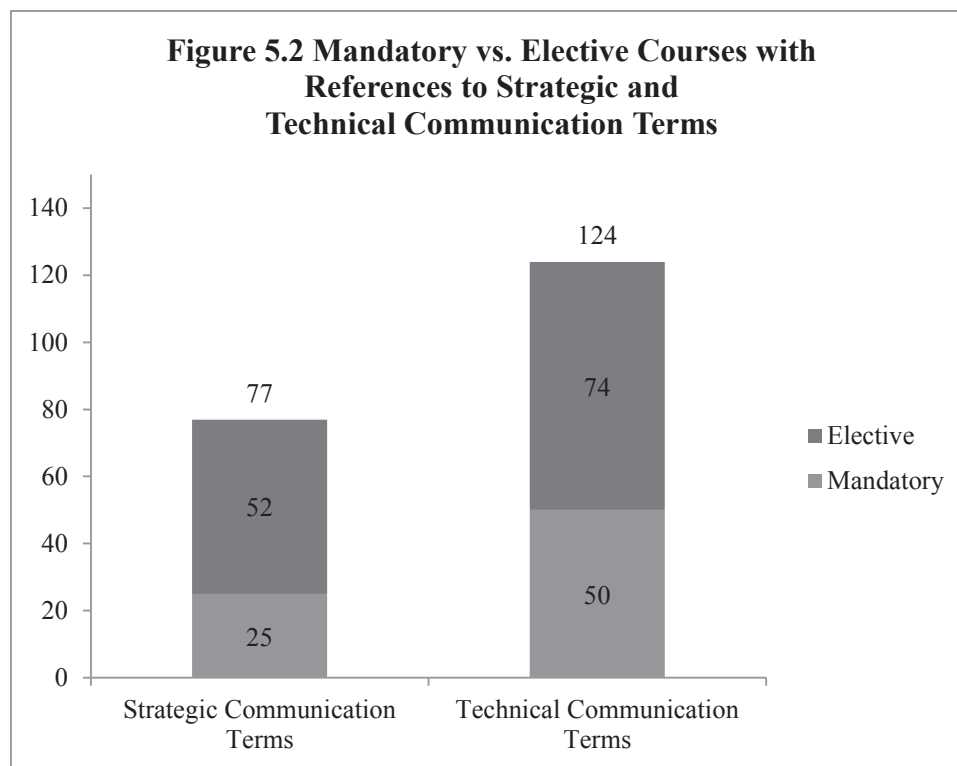
**Analyzing the references to technical communication terminology.** Table 4.2 in the previous chapter presented the 124 references to technical communication terminology in the sample. It is obvious from the data that much emphasis is placed on writing and speaking in the MBA curriculum, whether in the form of technical communication which entails making presentations and writing documents or general communication which encompasses written or spoken words or nonverbal cues which are used to inform, persuade or share ideas with others. Similarly, the curricula analyzed did not shy away from focusing on the distribution of information through communication systems and/or networks. From all of the data, this author infers that the concept of communication is far from overlooked in the MBA curriculum, but asserts that it is certainly not being given its due in the strategic sense. Surely, our MBA students deserve more than learning how to write and speak in a graduate business program, particularly given that they stand to be our future leaders and could find themselves with profound responsibility for communication in its strategic glory, perhaps through employee communications during the height of a labour disruption or while liaising with key publics

during their organization’s handling of a crisis. These two highly plausible examples illustrate that writing and speaking skills alone will simply not position our future leaders to effectively manage public relations and communication management.

**Analyzing references to communication terminology as a whole.** When considering the references to communication terminology in the MBA curricula in the sample as a whole, it is abundantly evident that the number of references to technical communication terms far outweighs the number of references to strategic communication terms. Figure 5.1 depicts this imbalance.



Of the 201 references to communication in the sample, 77 (38%) were strategic communication terms, many falling within the purview of marketing, whereas 124 (62%) were technical communication terms. Of the 77 courses making reference to strategic communication terms, only 25 (32%) were mandatory whereas 52 (68%) were elective courses. Of the 124 courses containing references to technical communication terms, 50 (40%) are mandatory and 74 (60%) are elective courses. Figure 5.2 illustrates the emphasis on technical communication in the MBA and that courses with references to communication, whether strategic or technical in nature, are more likely to be elective than mandatory courses in the graduate business school curriculum.



In summary, the data collectively illustrate that the focus on communication in the MBA in Canada is more technical in its approach than strategic. When it is strategic, it largely focuses on marketing which fails to place it in the context of public relations and communication

management with an organization's myriad publics. Further, the priority communication is given in the MBA is lacking in that there are more elective courses which reference communication than mandatory courses, giving MBA students the option of taking courses which reference communication which fails to help them understand and/or value the strategic function of public relations and communication management in an organization. It is also important to note that the joint concept of public relations and communication management is given short shrift in the MBA curriculum, illustrating that it has not reached its proper height or weight in the curriculum and thus substantiates this author's hypothesis that there is, in fact, a gap in the MBA as it relates to public relations and communication management.

### **Discussion Regarding the In-Depth Telephone Interviews**

Just as it was important to discuss the data from the quantitative portion of the study, it is also important to interpret the findings from the in-depth telephone interviews with business leaders. The flow charts in Figure 4.1 in the previous chapter capture these findings. With respect to essentiality of public relations and communication management, the business leaders view the function as being pivotal and essential, of high value and having ever increasing importance. Further, it must be strategic in nature to advance the organization and successfully reach its stakeholders. They arrived at this perspective through their experience and lessons learned. In particular, the value of the function has been demonstrated to them through both effective and ineffective approaches to public relations and communication management. When considering public relations and communication management's fit in the MBA, the coding illustrated that it needs a priority place now so that future business leaders understand their role in supporting public relations and communication management in their organization as well as their associated responsibilities. The executives made this recommendation based on their professional



experience which has allowed them to witness the impact and value of successful public relations and communication management efforts.

When considering the public relations and communication content that should be contained within the MBA, the coding illuminated the need for strategic content focussed on communication strategy and planning and the many tactics that can be used to achieve such efforts. It also illustrated that public relations and communication management must be differentiated from marketing as business leaders felt marketing in the MBA does not place communication in the proper context for future leaders. The preferred pedagogical approach is a foundational course and/or an integrated approach whereby case studies are interwoven into existing business courses. They arrived at this recommended content and pedagogical format based on their professional experiences and the content they rely on most often in their role as business leaders. All of the data perfectly poise public relations and communication management as much needed in the MBA as soon as possible based on business leaders lived experiences in professional capacities. Lived experience is often associated with phenomenology (Buber, 2007), one of the theoretical underpinnings of this study. The theoretical basis of this study will be discussed later in this chapter.

When considering the qualitative data, this author wishes to acknowledge that she entered into this portion of her research with trepidation as she was concerned the business executives would neither understand nor value public relations and communication management and, therefore, would not see a fit for it in the MBA and would thereby denounce this study's hypotheses. This concern was not unfounded as this author has worked in public relations for more than sixteen years and many executives with whom she has worked have not understood or valued the function, whether in a corporate or government setting. However, the results from the

qualitative interviews were both refreshing and insightful. From the coding, it became clear that business leaders in the sample understand public relations and communication management based on being in the trenches during their careers. They both respect and value the function and correlate organizational success with the success of their public relations and communication management efforts. Again, they have arrived at this position on public relations and communication management through their professional experience. As a result of their experience in, understanding of and respect for public relations and communication management, they see a fit for it, in its strategic finery, in the MBA.

Further, this author believes it is important to point out that the qualitative data could be perceived as having been skewed by the four public relations professionals who were a part of the sample. These individuals clearly have a vested interest in the public relations and communication management functions, undoubtedly place great value on them and thus would likely recommend they have a place in the MBA curriculum. However, when coding the entire data, which encompassed six business executives' and four public relations professionals' positions on the subject, it became evident that there was not a distinction between the two groups. Regardless of their position or background, the interviewees collectively value public relations and communication management and largely recommend that that the joint concept has a priority place in the MBA curriculum in Canada.

Several of the interviewees made the assumption that public relations and communication management would have been or should already be firmly entrenched in the MBA while others recognized from possessing their own master's degree in business and/or working with MBA graduates in recent years that the business school curriculum is sorely lacking in this area. While the author did not engage in discussion with the business leaders until the end of the interview so

as not to bias their responses, several asked if they were making the correct assumption. This author used the end of the interview as an opportunity to discuss her findings from the quantitative portion of her research and the interviewees were aghast at the focus on technical communication terms and also on marketing strategy and marketing communication when considering strategic communication terms. This supports their view that the need for education surrounding public relations and communication management in the MBA in Canada is pressing.

It is also important to note several anomalies in the qualitative data. One executive who is positioned at the helm of a health care institution places value on the public relations and communication management function only in a public setting; he does not believe MBA students destined for the corporate world would benefit from education in public relations and communication management. In essence, he only sees its value for organizations which he believes are accountable to stakeholders because they are publicly-funded. As a result, he views public relations and communication management as something that would be nice to have in the MBA, but not necessary. This author asserts that his position on public relations and communication management only serving public bodies is based on his professional experience, all of which has been in publicly-funded health care institutions or government agencies. His position stands in stark contrast to his understanding of public relations and communication management and the value he places on it. Another anomaly was a public relations professional's recommendation that the focus on content in the MBA should be largely centred on technical communication in the form of speaking and presenting to a variety of stakeholders to bolster executives' leadership skills. She also placed much emphasis on personality testing for effective leadership. This commentary stood out like a blinding light when compared to the interviewee's understanding of public relations and communication management as a strategic function and

also when this author sought to situate it within the other business leaders' recommendations. It was also surprising when another public relations professional, who clearly values and strategically practices public relations and communication management, stated that she viewed public relations as solely external in nature and completely separate from internal communication; this differs sharply from this author's understanding and practice of public relations which she views as encompassing both internal and external publics.

The most outstanding comment disinterred from the in-depth interviews was one from a 'top dog' in the transportation industry. During the discussion, he paused and then gave what this author views as a deeply insightful response, "Maybe the piece that's missing in the MBA is that strategic communication is part of companies' requirements to be responsible." He then said he needed to think about this further but acknowledged that this is where the probing questions had left him. While he originally did not request a copy of his transcript, he later changed his mind as he felt the discussion was thought-provoking for him as a leader and wanted to further reflect on it. What this author finds remarkable is that this executive innately understands social contract theory and Albert J. Sullivan's theory of public relations ethics without labelling it as such.

Another nugget the qualitative interview mined was that business leaders can grow to appreciate the public relations and communication management function on-the-job if they were not privileged to study it in their educational pursuits; however, they acknowledge that education is preferable to trial by fire in professional contexts. While there were several examples of this in the data, one stands out from the pack. Specifically, the executive with an MBA degree who germinated this thesis concept within this author about 15 years ago has grown from self-admittedly not understanding or appreciating public relations and communication management to valuing and embracing it and incorporating it at the outset of any corporate initiative he

undertakes. He acknowledges he did not learn about public relations and communication management in his graduate business degree and that it took professional communicators to help him realize its value. This supports the immediate need for instruction in public relations and communication management in the MBA and also highlights a training opportunity for business leaders which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Considering all of the above commentary on the qualitative research, this author arrives at several important conclusions. First, these data serve as a barometer from which to gauge the knowledge of, respect for and value placed on public relations and communication management at the executive level; high-ranking executives and public relations professionals alike understand, value, respect and embrace the function and recognize its pivotal importance in an organization. It also serves as a way in which to situate public relations and communication management in the MBA and propose a related pedagogical format which will be discussed later in this chapter. Fundamentally, the qualitative data illustrate that the need for public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA exists now and is directly linked to organizational success which is dependent on two-way communication with publics. This links back to the author's assertion that the need for public relations and communication management instruction exists now based on the correlation between effective communication and effective leadership and management, and is grounded in the theoretical suppositions that an organization possesses a moral responsibility to communicate with those whom it affects and those publics have a right to know and a right to participate in organizational decisions which affect them.

### **Discussion Regarding the Qualitative & Quantitative Research in Concert**

It is important in a sequential explanatory design (Creswell, 2009) to consider the totality of the research data and the findings they collectively put forth. Ultimately, the quantitative data from the conceptual content analysis together with the qualitative data from the in-depth interviews illustrate a gap in the MBA curriculum in Canada as it relates to public relations and communication management and present business leaders' recommendation to fill that void. Based on the rationale that the function brings value to an organization, they suggest closing the gap with strategic content in a pedagogical format of a foundational course and/or case studies interwoven into business courses. Without the quantitative portion of the research, the gap in the MBA related to public relations and communication management could not have been substantiated. Without the qualitative portion of the research, the pedagogical model to be outlined later in this chapter could not have evolved unless this author was basing it merely on suppositions that were not corroborated with business leaders who have come to value public relations and communication management through their experience and, thus, recommend it has a priority place in the MBA. Together, the data work in concert to answer the study's many research questions and support its hypotheses, and ultimately inform the recommended pedagogical format for public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA moving forward. Apart, the data would fail to provide an accurate picture of the situation involving public relations and communication management's current and future places in the Canadian graduate business school curriculum.

### **The Recommended Pedagogical Model**

This study set out to establish that a void exists in the MBA curriculum in Canada as it pertains to public relations and communication management, determine Canadian business leaders' opinions regarding the need for such content in the graduate business school curriculum, and recommend a way in which to fill the gap should it exist. Having illustrated the gap in the Canadian MBA and garnered business leaders' recommendations regarding the imminent need for public relations and communication management instruction therein, it is time to turn to the ensuing pedagogical model and its various facets.

**The pedagogical approach.** Drawing from the findings of the in-depth interviews with business executives and public relations professionals, it is important to note that some recommended a foundation course in public relations and communication management for graduate business students while others believed such content should be enveloped in business courses across the MBA curriculum. As a result, this author is recommending a hybrid of the two. It is first important to provide graduate business school students with an introduction to public relations and communication management and strategic context within the business world, particularly its link to overall organizational success and the need to incorporate it into various initiatives and programs for those programs to be successful and their champions to be viewed as effective managers/leaders. As a result, this author suggests a foundation course in public relations and communication management in the first term of the first year of the MBA program, which is fitting given the coding revealed that the in-depth interview participants believed public relations and communication management should hold a priority place as one of the foundational elements of the MBA. This recommendation harkens back to Wright's (1982) recommended model over three decades ago when he and King (1982), despite having different approaches,

pioneered the concept of public relations being contained within the MBA curriculum in American business schools. Wright (1982) leaned heavily toward a packaged stand-alone public relations course. This author's recommended pedagogical model also draws from Knight's (1999) and Barrett and Knight's (2005) research which depicted stand-alone communication courses as the dominant model of instruction in the MBA.

In the remainder of the Canadian graduate business school curriculum, this author recommends that public relations and communication management be interwoven into all case studies presented in various courses, such as finance, management, marketing strategy, to name just a few, as well as incorporated into any major end-of-degree project(s) and/or thesis. In essence, the guiding ideology is that a case study, major project or thesis created within the Canadian MBA program would not be considered complete without a communication plan incorporated therein to outline the way in which the organization would communicate with its various publics about the concept, product or issue at hand. While this integrated model is not prevalent in the American literature, it has been explored and is not infeasible (Kelly & Sokovitz, 1996; Luse, Jauch, Rettenmayer, McConkey, Parker & Roshto, 1999; Shelby & Reinsch, 1996; Wolff, 1996). This portion of this author's recommended approach is most similar to Luse et al.'s (1999) model which focussed on experiential learning, primarily through case studies, to foster communication skills, among others. Their model, however, concentrated largely on technical skills in an integrative business seminar. This author recommends a strategic communication focus, as will be discussed below, across the case studies, projects and/or thesis required of students in the graduate business school curriculum.

This two-pronged pedagogical model will allow for enhanced understanding of public relations and communication management and skill development related to its various facets



through the foundation course. It will also enable MBA students to construct their own knowledge of public relations and communication management, à la social constructivism (Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008), through the communication planning required in the myriad case studies, projects and/or thesis across the remainder of the graduate business school curriculum. Additional ways the pedagogical model links back to this study's theoretical bedrocks will be discussed later in this chapter.

**The priority place public relations and communication management should hold in the MBA.** Again, based on the data gathered in the in-depth interviews with business leaders, this author asserts that public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA should be mandatory to convey the importance of the subject and the weighty responsibility that management and leadership roles possess for this strategic function. Specifically, the overall recommendation discovered through the coding process of the in-depth interview data was that public relations and communication management is a necessary skill, one with ever-increasing need. Today, instruction in the concepts of public relations and communication management appears to be scant in the Canadian MBA, let alone being mandatory, which was illustrated through the data gathered in the conceptual content analysis of this study. Making such instruction mandatory will undoubtedly enhance future managers' and leaders' appreciation of the function and their responsibility for it as well as evolve the pedagogy of public relations and communication management. This, too, has been suggested in previous literature on the subject; specifically, Grunig and Grunig's (2002) research called for a required public relations and communication management course or component in the MBA.

**The content.** Though the public relations professionals interviewed as part of the in-depth interviews in the qualitative portion of this study's research have direct responsibility for

public relations and communication management and the executives interviewed play an indirect but critical role of understanding and supporting the function and ensuring it links to the corporate direction, both groups lobbied for communication strategy and planning as the pivotal content to be covered in the MBA curriculum. However, they also suggested that instruction in communication strategy must envelop its key elements, including awareness of publics and segmentation, messaging, and both the traditional and emerging tactics/modalities of communication. When probing deeper, the recommended tactics focussed on skill development regarding how organizations can manage effective communication with various publics, including media relations/issues management, public engagement and employee engagement. They interviewees also strongly advocated for a distinction between marketing/promotions and strategic communication as they felt communication is placed in the wrong context when considered only from the marketing standpoint and were adamant it needs to be viewed through a public relations and communication management lens. This author avows it is necessary to commend the interview participants, whether executives or public relations professionals, for their knowledge of, respect for and experience in public relations and communication management. Their insight into this strategic organizational function is truly laudable, particularly given that it aligns with scholarly literature on the subject; Grunig et al. (2002) assert content should be strategic as it relates to public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum, and Barrett (2008) advocates for communication strategy and communication with an organization's various publics to be central to public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA.

The wish list the interview participants presented is lengthy, however, much of it is logical and essential when considering public relations and communication management and can

be introduced in the mandatory foundation course in the first term of the first year in the MBA curriculum. While the aforementioned tactics and skills will not necessarily be explored in-depth, the foundation course will introduce the topics of communication strategy and its numerous components, and set future managers and leaders along an academic path that includes consideration for public relations and communication management, the accompanying strategy and its myriad facets. It is this author's position that communication and ethical theory must also be introduced in the foundation course to underscore the importance of public relations and communication management. This should include topics such as symmetrical communication, the participatory premise and social contract theory, all of which have been discussed previously in this study. The overall content, whether practical or theoretical, will ideally lay the groundwork for a similar approach in students' professional pursuits. Further, the case studies, projects and/or thesis in the following years of the graduate business school curriculum will serve to reinforce the content from the foundational course, and allow students to construct their own knowledge of public relations and communication management throughout the duration of their MBA degree. If approached in the true, strategic spirit of public relations and communication management, the recommended content will undoubtedly position public relations and communication management in the appropriate context and differentiate it markedly from both marketing strategy and marketing communication.

**The challenges.** The author's recommendations are largely aligned with the results of the qualitative research data borne out of this study, lending credence, particularly from a phenomenological standpoint, to the executives' and public relations professionals' decades of lived experience in professional contexts. The recommendations also draw on information gleaned through the extensive literature outlined in Chapter 2. However, the recommendations

are both ambitious and grandiose and, therefore, will not be without their challenges. It is important to acknowledge these challenges and the ways they might be overcome.

*Resistance from business schools.* It is anticipated that the business schools will resist the recommendation that public relations and communication management should be an integral part of the graduate business school curriculum in Canada. While somewhat pessimistic in nature, this notion is not unfounded if you consider the American literature on the subject. American scholars studying the concept of public relations in the MBA over the years have discovered that some business professors and/or administrators do not want it to be a part of the curriculum (Wright & VanSlyke Turk, 1990), perhaps out of ignorance (Wright, 1982), while others declare it is not needed (Pincus et al., 1994). It is wise to be prepared to meet this resistance and opposition through, not coincidentally, communication. It is recommended that the public relations and business schools in Canada open the lines of communication to discuss this concept. In particular, this author suggests that she, on behalf of Mount Saint Vincent University which is a leader in communication studies in Canada, present this study, its findings and recommendations to business and public relations scholars and administrators alike at conferences in 2013. Further, she recommends reaching out to the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans and related associations with respect to the study's findings to raise its members' awareness of the issue and ensure it becomes an agenda item in the event discussions are taking place, as they should be, regarding the evolution of the MBA curriculum.

Additionally, this author recommends advancing this concept through the Canadian Public Relations Society (CPRS), perhaps through the National Council on Education and its future iterations of the Pathways to the Profession policy paper (National Council on Education, 2011). This author has a long-term goal of working in concert with CPRS to mimic in Canada

the Public Relations Society of America's (PRSA) pilot program whereby five American business schools are attempting to integrate public relations into their MBA curricula in the 2012-13 academic year ("Public Relations," 2011). Such an effort requires outreach with PRSA to determine how they garnered the support of the involved business schools as well as the passage of time so that CPRS can learn from PRSA's current efforts, the results of which will not be available, presumably, until later in 2013. This is a learning opportunity to seize and make relevant for the Canadian graduate business school curriculum.

Overall, this author recommends that she creates a comprehensive communication plan as a follow-up to this study to determine the innumerable opportunities to advance with myriad publics the idea of public relations and communication management having an integral role in the Canadian MBA curriculum going forward.

***Accommodating public relations and communication management in the curriculum.***

It is also predicted that the business schools will argue there is little to no room in the curriculum for public relations and communication management, particularly as a foundational course in the first term of the first year of the program. In his study regarding public relations' possible fit in the American graduate business school program, Wright (1982) discovered that business scholars believed the curriculum was already overstrained with mandatory courses and could not justify forfeiting a more or equally important course to accommodate public relations and communication. Several options exist to address this concern should it arise in Canada all these years later. First, this author recommends augmenting the number of mandatory courses by half a credit to include public relations and communication management in the curriculum. This is a tall order that may require much discussion and negotiation with the Canadian graduate business schools and will not occur overnight. Given that this recommendation may be met with

resistance altogether, it is possible to require of students a mandatory, non-credit-bearing public relations and communication module prior to commencement of the first year of study in the MBA. While this author has misgivings that a non-credit-bearing public relations and communication management module in the MBA could serve to diminish its importance in the curriculum, it is one feasible, although less than preferable, way to ensure this subject is somewhat given its due. However, it is important to note that an intensive module on public relations and communication management would not truly allow for effective instruction on the subject. One school that requires non-credit bearing study in advance of students formally beginning the MBA, albeit for a different subject, is the University of Victoria (n.d). This institution could serve as a resource from which to advance the non-credit-bearing public relations and communication module should this be the only viable option, even as a starting point.

***Instructorship.*** Another anticipated issue is that of instructorship. It is vital the instructors of public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum possess in-depth knowledge of the subject and value their importance as strategic business functions. Instruction cannot be left to business professors who know little of public relations and communication management if this subject is to be positioned strategically in the graduate business school curriculum (P. Parsons, personal communication, September 7, 2010). It is this author's view that an opportunity exists for communication/public relations departments within Canadian universities to partner with graduate business schools across the country to offer the recommended foundational course in public relations in an on-line format in the first term of the first year of the MBA. Further, the same faculty could serve as advisors for the communications component of the case studies, major project and/or thesis across the remainder of the graduate

business school curriculum, providing counsel to students and critiquing the required communication plans.

Other challenges will undoubtedly present themselves as the pursuit to find public relations and communication management a home within the Canadian MBA curriculum continues. Resistance from business schools, accommodating the subject in the curriculum and instructorship, all of which are outlined above, are the most pressing issues. As can be evidenced from American scholars' efforts in this regard over the last thirty years, this will require perseverance from public relations scholars and practitioners alike on what can only be viewed as a steep and steady climb. This author, however, maintains it will be worth the effort if it eventually reaps public relations and communication management a strategic place within the graduate business school curriculum in Canada.

**The recommendations' theoretical underpinnings.** This author's recommendations are deeply rooted in the theoretical concepts previously discussed in this study, including public relations and communication, ethical and pedagogical theories. Before even considering her recommendations, this author felt strongly that she must uphold the phenomenological ideal of casting aside preconceived notions (Buber, 2007) and this study's hypotheses in both the quantitative and qualitative research phases of her study to ensure the findings were not biased by her personal and professional experiences. While difficult to do, particularly during the in-depth interviews with business leaders which begged for a dialogic exchange, this author upheld this phenomenological principle throughout her study. Similarly, when armed with her qualitative research findings, this author used business leaders' opinions and their supporting rationale to largely inform the resulting pedagogical model outlined above. This is rooted in the

communication theory of phenomenology as the recommendations are borne out of others' experiences (Craig & Muller, 2007) as opposed to those of this author.

When considering the pedagogical approach and related content, public relations/communication, ethical and pedagogical theories all come into play. This author's approach to public relations and communication management across the MBA curriculum, with its mandatory foundational course and subsequent communication requirement in case studies, projects and/or thesis, serves to inculcate in MBA students the requirement to foster two-way symmetrical communication with an organization's many publics which falls under the umbrella of public relations theory; consider others' experiences which is encompassed within the communication theory of phenomenology; understand an organization's obligation to communicate with those publics whom it affects and those publics' rights to information, both of which this author views as ethical theory. By learning about all of this, whether through class discussions and group work in the foundation course or through the communication planning requirement in the case studies, projects and/or thesis in the remainder of the MBA curriculum, students will learn to construct their own knowledge and understanding of public relations and communication management and the related value of this strategic function to an organization. This type of learning falls squarely within the pedagogical theory of social constructivism.

Each of the above-noted theories will now be elaborated on within the context of this author's recommended pedagogical model for public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA in Canada. It is first important to note that while much of the pedagogical model and its content was formed on the business leaders' recommendations from the qualitative interviews, this author added theory to the content so as to provide rich context in the foundation



course for public relations and communication management so that graduate business students realize *why* they must communicate with an organization's publics.

***Public relations theory.*** This author contends that the history of public relations must be touched upon in the public relations and communication management foundation course in the first term of the first year of the MBA. This will undoubtedly lead to an overview of public relations and its various models of press agency, public information, two-way asymmetrical and two-way symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984), the latter of which is this author's preferred model of public relations and the one which she believes should be emphasized in the graduate business school curriculum. In placing emphasis on a model which illustrates the importance of an organization engaging in dialogic communication with its publics, graduate business students will grow to understand that public relations is not just about pushing information out to stakeholders but rather that it is about relationship management with its publics which can only be achieved through effective communication.

***Communication theory.*** Another theory which this author asserts needs to be covered in the foundation course in the first term of the first year of the MBA is the communication theory of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the dialogue or experience of others (Craig & Muller, 2007), which requires turning to one another to build community according to Buber (2007), has its basis in openness in Gadamer's (2007) view, and, in Chang's (2007) opinion, is bounded by a contract whereby we communicate based on reciprocity. All of these principles are very similar to two-way symmetrical communication and will help MBA students to consider the experience of others in two specific ways. First, in the learning environment, they will turn to their classmates and learn to consider others' views and opinions which will enrich the learning experience. Secondly, they must turn to and consider the experience of their publics in relation to

the organization they are representing whether in a case study, major project or thesis. Once again, such learning will place them on a path to understanding and valuing public relations and communication management.

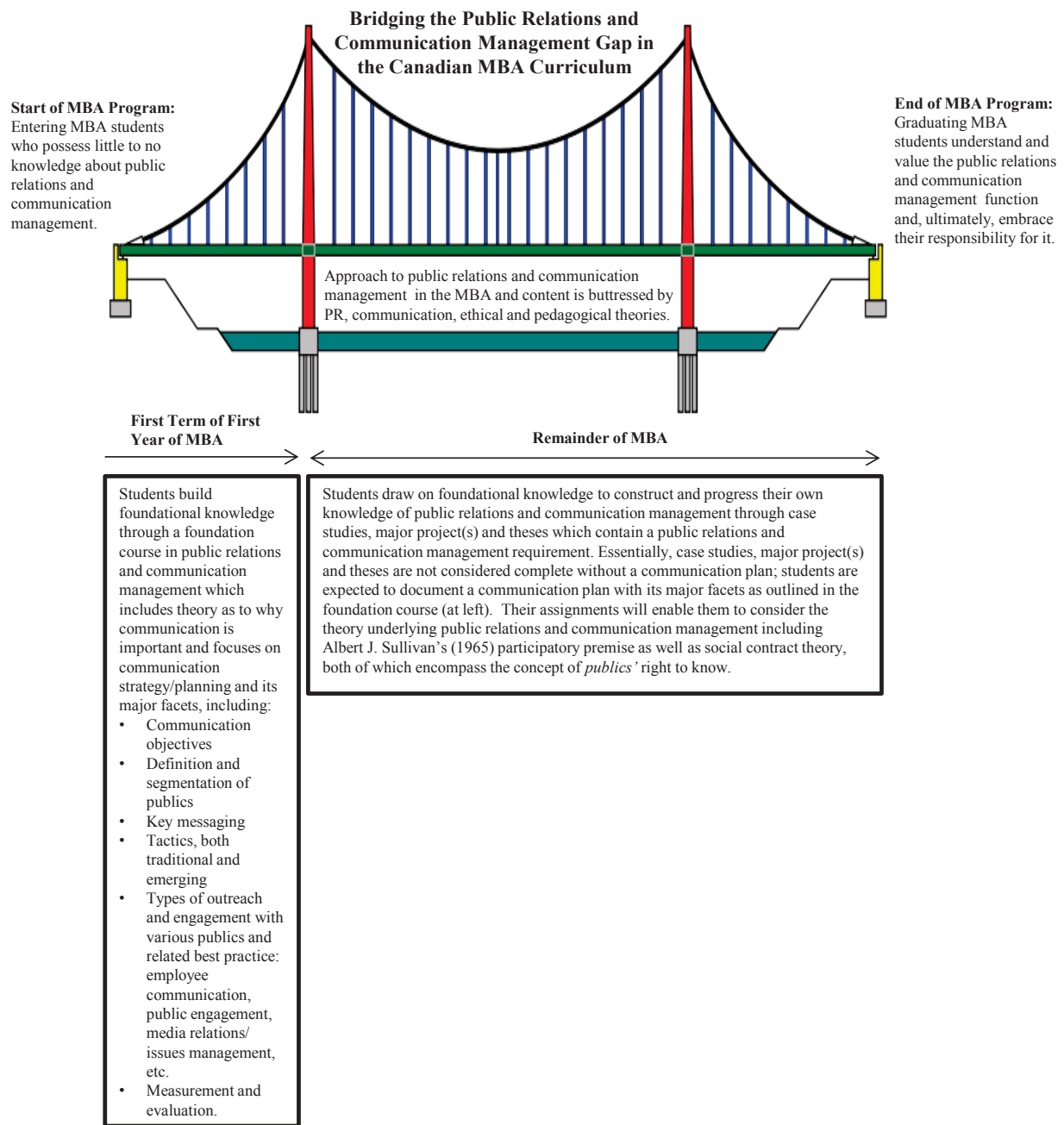
***Ethical theory.*** One final theoretical concept that must be covered in the public relations and communication management foundation course is ethical theory, both in the context of organizations' moral obligation and publics' rights. Regarding the former, the social contract morally binds an organization to its publics, which includes effective communication with those publics to achieve cooperation and commitment. With respect to the latter, Albert J. Sullivan's (1965) participatory premise regards publics as having the right to true information and the right to participate in decisions which affect them. This, too, mimics two-way symmetrical communication and should serve to illustrate to MBA students their obligation as future managers and leaders to uphold the social contract and the participatory premise if their organization is to do right by its publics.

***Pedagogical theory.*** It is hoped that by learning about the PR/communication and ethical theories described above, MBA students will have a strong sense of why public relations and communication management with an organization's publics is essential. They can then apply that knowledge to the communication requirement contained within the case studies, major projects and/or thesis contained across the MBA curriculum, some of which will require group work. This problem-based and learner-centred approach, known as social constructivism, will urge them to construct their own knowledge, think independently yet work collaboratively to solve problems, and value otherness (Magolda, 1992; Schweitzer & Stephenson, 2008). In doing so, they will invoke PR/communication and ethical theories to create effective communication plans as part of their course requirements across the MBA curriculum. Ultimately, this will position

them in future to be excellent managers and leaders who put stock in the communication function and realize and take responsibility for strategic communication with their organizations' publics.

**Diagram to support the pedagogical model.** Diagrams often serve to bolster and summarize a detailed concept. Figure 5.3 provides a diagram to both support and synthesize this author's ideal pedagogical model with respect to public relations and communication management being an integral and necessary part of the MBA curriculum in Canada. A bridge was used to literally and figuratively bridge the gap that exists in the MBA as it relates to public relations and communication management. The diagram is to be viewed from left to right with the left-hand side denoting the start of the MBA program where entering students possess little to no knowledge of public relations and communication management and the right-hand side representing the end of the MBA program where graduate students ideally understand and value the public relations and communication function and embrace their responsibility for it. The span of the bridge is buttressed by communication, ethical and pedagogical theories to strengthen the way in which this model bridges the gap in the MBA curriculum. The pedagogical content for the foundational course and case studies, major projects and/or thesis in the remainder of the MBA program is outlined below the bridge. Ultimately, by embarking on a learning journey of the MBA, students traverse the bridge and, in doing so, gain much knowledge, insight and wisdom with respect to public relations and communication management and their role as future managers and leaders in supporting this strategic business function.

**Figure 5.3: The Ideal Pedagogical Model**



Bridge concept adapted from Crittenton Women's Union (2012).

### **Next Steps and Future Study & Opportunities**

As has been discussed above, this author asserts it is time to open up the lines of communication between public relations schools and business schools. The most appropriate way to introduce and advance the concept of public relations and communication management in the MBA curriculum is to place it on the agenda at conferences, preferably one involving members of the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans so as to reach graduate business school administrators across the country. This discussion will not be without its challenges which were highlighted above. Regardless of the challenges, both the anticipated and the unforeseen, this discussion needs to take place and it should not wait.

Some business scholars may demand additional study on this subject, particularly where the literature on public relations and communication management in the MBA in Canada is lean. It is this author's desire to embark on a doctoral dissertation which would strive to advance the scholarly research on this subject, including the development and testing of a full-fledged public relations and communication management curriculum for the MBA. As was discussed previously, this author views the Canadian Public Relations Society as critical to future study and maintains its National Council on Education could help this author to introduce the pilot study of a public relations and communication management curriculum to select graduate business schools, much like the Public Relations Society of America has done with five business schools which are in the throes of attempting to integrate public relations into their MBA curricula ("Public Relations," 2011).

From embarking on discussions with Canadian graduate business schools about public relations and communication management finding its place in the MBA and conducting

additional study on the subject, this author affirms that additional opportunities will present themselves, including potential partnerships between public relations schools and (1) graduate business schools, and (2) executive development programs at both Canadian universities and corporations. Opportunities abound to advance the scholarly body of knowledge, pedagogy and practice of public relations and communication management on the Canadian stage as it relates its fit in the MBA curriculum. In essence, this study is only the beginning of a lengthy pursuit that holds much prospect.

## **Conclusion**

Effective communication is inextricably interconnected with effective management and leadership. This study strived to show this interplay on the basis that tomorrow's managers and leaders must put into action the ideology that organizations' have a moral obligation to communicate with their publics and those publics have a right to know and a right to participate in organizational decisions which impact them, thus making those individuals effective managers and leaders. This premise underscored this study, which strived to unearth a gap in the MBA as it pertains to public relations and communication management and ascertain its possible fit in the graduate business school curriculum through its mixed methods approach to research.

It succeeded on both counts. The conceptual content analysis of select MBA websites denotes a hole with respect to strategic communication concepts, save for marketing which is not the same as public relations and communication management. The findings of the qualitative in-depth telephone interviews with Canadian business leaders demonstrate overwhelming acceptance of public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA and highlight its imminent need. This author immediately applied this information, creating a recommended pedagogical model for public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA which bridges the current gap and allows students to gain theoretical and practical knowledge which will enable them to grow to understand, value and embrace the public relations and communication function and their responsibility for it as our country's future managers and leaders.

Given that the concept has been studied and advanced by public relations scholars over the last three decades, the pedagogical model draws on the abundance of literature as outlined in

Chapter 2. In the true spirit of this study's phenomenological roots, it also leans heavily on the business leaders' recommendations from the in-depth telephone interviews. Further, it is steeped in theory, including public relations and communication theory, ethical theory and pedagogical theory. As such, this recommended approach to public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA strategically positions our future managers and leaders to understand an organization's moral obligation to communicate with its publics and those publics' right to know true information, particularly information which impacts them. This knowledge will empower them to do right by their publics by communicating with them using a two-way symmetrical model which considers otherness and upholds the organization's ethical responsibilities regarding communication.

This study recognizes that not everyone will embrace its findings or agree that public relations and communication management instruction is needed now, if at all, in the MBA. As a result, it suggests ways to overcome the anticipated resistance. It also understands that this study is just the beginning of what may be a long road. More studies could, indeed, be undertaken to further advance the concept of public relations and communication management instruction in the MBA in Canada, including creating and testing a full-fledged curriculum. The study at-hand, however, serves as a springboard from which to garner support for the concept. If successful, this study will bolster the MBA curriculum, and change the future business landscape by infiltrating it with managers and leaders who understand and value public relations and communication management. It also possesses the potential to advance both the practice and pedagogy of public relations by illustrating its sheer necessity to organizations and their publics.



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**Appendix A: Conceptual Content Analysis Coding Instruction Sheet**

VARIABLES

Coding Date:

University:

Place:

Program Name:

University's MBA Program Website:

Website Publication Date:

Communication Matrix: to be used for each course that mentions one or more of the following concepts in either the course title, course description and/or course objectives/learning outcomes:

<b>Concepts</b>	<b>Synonyms</b>	<b>Course Title (Code 1)</b>	<b>Course Description (Code 2)</b>	<b>Course Objectives/ Learning Outcomes (Code 3)</b>
Public relations (Code a)	public relations management or public relations strategy			
Strategic communication(s) (Code b)	Communication(s) strategy			
Communication(s) Management (Code c)	Strategic communication(s) management			
Leadership Communication(s) (Code d)	Management Communication(s) or Corporate Communication(s)			
Marketing Communication(s) (Code i)	Integrated Marketing Communication(s) or Strategic Marketing Communication(s)			

Marketing Strategy/Strategies (Code j)	Marketing Management or Strategic Marketing			
Relationship Management (Code k)	Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or Relationship Marketing or Consumer Communication(s)			
Technical Communication(s) (Code x)	Making presentations/ presenting and writing documents			
Communication(s) (Code y)	Communication(s) styles, modes of communication(s), communicate/how to communicate/ communicating, communication(s) skills			
Information Technology/ Communication(s) Systems (Code z)	Information & Communication(s) Technologies, electronic Communication(s)			

Course Name:

Course Priority:

**CODING INSTRUCTIONS**

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Coding Instructions</b>
Coding Date	Date the individual coded the data. Code as YYYYMMDD (ie. 2012MAY01)
University Name	Name of University
Place	Name of city or town in which the university resides as indicated on their website
Program Name	Name of the MBA program as indicated on their website
University's MBA Program Website	MBA homepage of the Canadian university offering the MBA program. If the university offers more than one MBA program, examine the core MBA program offered (ie. MBA, general MBA, traditional MBA, etc.).
Website Publication Date	Date website was last updated; code as YYYY (ie. 2012); if unavailable, use No Date and code as ND
Program Title	Official name of the MBA program according to the program website
Communication Matrix	<p>-Using the selected university's core MBA program website and/or graduate academic calendar, analyze each course for communication concept(s) in its title, description and/or objectives/learning outcomes, if available. Code the information in the matrix accordingly. For example, if public relations is mentioned in the course title, code as 1a. Use a different matrix for each course that mentions communication concept(s) in its title, description and/or objectives/learning outcomes.</p> <p>-Code as not present (NP) if the term is not mentioned in the course title, description, objectives, learning outcomes and/or elsewhere in the course outline/syllabus.</p> <p>-Code as unavailable (U) if the course title, description, objectives, learning outcomes and/or outline/syllabus is not provided on the MBA program website.</p>
Course Title	Title of each course containing a communication concept either in its title, description, objectives, learning outcomes or elsewhere in the course outline or syllabus
Course Priority	Mandatory – M Elective – E Not Available – NA

**Appendix B: Universe of Business Schools in Canada from the Canadian Federation of Business School Deans (CFBSD, n.d.) from which the Stratified Sample was Chosen**

<b>University</b>	<b>MBA</b>	<b>Keep in sample or Eliminate from Sample</b>	<b>Available for Selection</b>	<b>Selected for Analysis</b>
Acadia	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Athabasca	Yes, On-line Executive MBA	Eliminate based on it being an Executive MBA		
Bishop's	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Brandon	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Brock	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
CBU	MBA in Community Economic Development	Eliminate based on it being a specialized program with no core MBA		
Carleton	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
Concordia*	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
First Nations University	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Dalhousie	MBA Corporate Residency	Keep	From Atlantic Canada	Selected
HEC*	<p>HEC Montréal MBA - One-Year Program (full-time, required courses in English and French)</p> <p>HEC Montréal's MBA in Action (three years, part-time, required courses in French only)</p> <p>Different formats use same curriculum</p>	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected



Kwantlen	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Lakehead	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
Laurentian	General MBA & Thesis Stream MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
McGill*	Full-time MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
McMaster	Traditional MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
MUN	MBA	Keep	From Atlantic Canada	Selected
Mount A	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Mount Royal	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Nipissing	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Queen's	Full-time MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
Royal Roads	Various MBA specializations but no core MBA	Eliminate based on it being a specialized program with no core MBA		
Ryerson	MBA Global	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
SMU	Full-time MBA	Keep	From Atlantic Canada	Selected
SFU	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	Selected
St. FX	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Thompson Rivers	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
Trent	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Trinity Western	MBA (spiritual-based)	Keep	From Western Canada	Selected
U de M	MBA	Keep	From Atlantic Canada	Selected
Sherbrooke	MBA a temps partiel et MBA cooperatif	Eliminate, website is available only in French.		

UQAM	Executive MBA General	Eliminate, Executive MBA. Also website is only available in French.		
Laval	Classic MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
U of A	Full-time MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
UBC*	Full-time MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
U of C*	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
Guelph	MBA in Food and Agribusiness Management or Hospitality and Tourism Management	Eliminate based on it being a specialized program with no core MBA		
Lethbridge	MBA Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University, Beppu, Japan	Eliminate, not Canadian		
Manitoba	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
UNB Fredericton	General MBA	Keep	From Atlantic Canada	
UNBSJ	MBA with three streams – International Business, Innovation and Technology Management and General Management	Eliminate based on it being a specialized program with no core MBA		
UNBC	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
UOIT	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
U of Ottawa	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
UPEI	EMBA	Eliminate based on it being an Executive MBA		
Regina	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	
Saskatchewan	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	Selected

Fraser Valley	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
U of T*	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
UVIC	MBA	Keep	From Western Canada	Selected
Waterloo	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Western*	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	Selected
Windsor	Integrated MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
Winnipeg	No	Eliminate, no MBA program		
Laurier	Full-time MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	
York*	MBA	Keep	From Central Canada	

An asterisk (\*) denotes a top-ranked business school in 2011 according to the Economist (2012) and/or Financial Times (2010) [sic] and/or Forbes Magazine Ltd.'s (Badenhausen, 2011) respective business school rankings.

**Appendix C: Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance**



University Research Ethics Board

**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD**

**Certificate of Research Ethics Clearance**

Title of project: *Public Relations & Communication Management: In Search of a Pedagogical Model for the MBA Curriculum in Canada*

Researcher(s): **Theresa Rath**  
Supervisor (if applicable): **Patricia Parsons**  
Co-Investigators: **n/a**

File #: 2011-074

The University Research Ethics Board (UREB) has reviewed the above named proposal and confirms that it respects the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* as outlined in the *MSVU Policies and Procedures: Ethics Review of Research Involving Humans* regarding the ethics of research involving human participants.

This certificate of ethics clearance is valid one year from the date of issue. Renewals are available for up to four years in addition to the initial year and are contingent upon an annual submission to the UREB of a written request for renewal accompanied by a satisfactory annual ethics report thirty days prior to the expiry date as listed below. A final report is required within 30 days of expiry. Researchers are reminded that any changes to approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the UREB prior to their implementation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Michelle Estrutt, Chair  
University Research Ethics Board (UREB)

**May 24, 2012**  
Effective Date

*[Expires: May 23, 2013]*

## **Appendix D: Email Invitation to Business Leaders for Qualitative Interviews**

Summer 2012

Dear Business Leader:

As a high-ranking business leader of one of Canada's Top 100 Employers in 2012, I'm inviting you to participate in an in-depth telephone interview regarding your opinion on public relations and communication management.

This interview, which will take no more than 45 minutes of your time, is part of my thesis for my Master of Arts (Communication) at Mount Saint University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The goal of my thesis is two-fold:

- (1) It will examine the current state of public relations (PR) and communication management in the Master of Business Administration (MBA) curriculum in Canada.
- (2) It will gauge the perceptions of high-ranking Canadian business leaders, such as yourself, regarding PR and the possible acceptance of it in the MBA curriculum in order to ascertain the ideal content and pedagogical format of PR and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA.

An executive summary of the results of this study will be shared with the participants via email in the latter part of 2012. Additionally, research results may be published as a peer-referred paper, conference presentation and/or submitted to academic journals on a non-profit basis in the interest of furthering knowledge related to establishing a pedagogical format for PR and communication management in the Master of Business Administration.

This study, the completed thesis and any resulting academic material will maintain the confidentiality of the participating individuals and institutions. As such, you have received this email as a blind copy. If you're interested in participating, please contact me at [theresa.rath@msvu.ca](mailto:theresa.rath@msvu.ca), (902) [REDACTED] (work) or [REDACTED] and I'll arrange a mutually convenient time for the phone interview.

Thank you for your consideration and investment of time in this study. Your participation will provide an opportunity to reflect upon your sentiments and perceptions of public relations in a business context; help identify related problems, issues and opportunities that can be addressed; open debate on this subject; and contribute to the field of public relations and communication management by speaking about your experiences. More specifically, your participation will contribute to the national and international scholarly body of knowledge and business literature surrounding PR and communication management's possible fit in the Master of Business Administration curriculum.

If you have questions about my study, you may contact me at the above-noted contact information. You may also contact my thesis supervisor, Professor Patricia Parsons, at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED], or the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board

(UREB) c/o Mount Saint Vincent University Research Office at 457-6350 or via e-mail at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

Kind regards,

Theresa Rath  
Master of Arts (Communication) Candidate, Fall 2012  
Mount Saint Vincent University  
Halifax, Nova Scotia

Adapted from Carroll (2000).

### **Appendix E: Informed Consent Form**

Title of Research Project: Public Relations & Communication Management: In Search of a Pedagogical Model for the MBA Curriculum in Canada

Researcher's Name: Theresa Rath, [theresa.rath@msvu.ca](mailto:theresa.rath@msvu.ca), (902) [REDACTED]

Supervisor's Name: Professor Patricia Parsons, [REDACTED],  
(902) 457-6481 or [REDACTED]

#### **Invitation to Participate:**

I invite you to participate in this research project which will explore Canadian business leaders' perceptions of public relations and their possible acceptance of it as part of the MBA curriculum. The ultimate goal of the study is to ascertain the ideal content and pedagogical format of public relations and communication management instruction in the Canadian MBA. It will probe such questions as: What value do you place on public relations and strategic communication management? What causes you to place this value on it? What place, if any, do you see public relations and strategic communication management having in the MBA curriculum? What causes you feel this way about public relations and strategic communication management in the MBA curriculum?

The lead researcher and author of the study is Theresa Rath, a Masters of Arts in Communication student at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia. You will be asked a series of questions through an informal telephone interview that will last approximately 45 minutes. Participants in this study include business leaders of organizations named in Canada's Top 100 employers 2012 and its similar regional rankings who have self-identified to be interviewed.

#### **Potential Benefits and Risks:**

The potential benefits of participation include the opportunity to reflect upon your sentiments and perceptions of public relations in a business context; help to identify related problems, issues and opportunities that can be addressed; open debate on this subject; and contribute to the field of public relations and communication management by speaking about your experiences. More specifically, your participation will contribute to the national and international scholarly body of knowledge and business literature surrounding public relations and communication management's possible fit in the Master of Business Administration curriculum. There is minimal anticipated risk associated with participation in this study.

#### **Confidentiality:**

All information obtained through this study will be held in the strictest confidence by the researcher. Only the researcher, her thesis supervisor, and possibly a transcriptionist will have access to the information provided by participants. Your name and/or identifying information will not be released through any portion of this study.

The telephone interviews will be audio-taped to enable the researcher to reference them, summarize the perspectives of the participants involved in the research and determine recurring

themes across the interviews. Your name and/or personal identifying characteristics will not be recorded on tape. After the data are compiled and the thesis is completed and successfully defended, the audio files will be destroyed, and transcripts (text or electronic records of interviews) as well as the researcher's field notes will be kept in a secured location at Mount Saint Vincent University, accessed only by the researcher and/or her thesis supervisor for a period of five years, after which they will also be destroyed.

### **Participation:**

Participation in this project is voluntary. The interviews will be conducted on an informal and conversational basis, and are anticipated to take approximately 45 minutes. These interviews will be audio-taped with your consent. If you wish, you may decline to answer questions or participate in any component of the project. If you decide not to answer a particular question or set of questions, you can still complete the remainder of the interview, if you choose to do so. If you initially agree and later change your mind, you may indicate your wishes at any time. If you elect to withdraw from the study at any time, any data related to you will immediately be destroyed through the deletion of the specific audio file and immediately stricken from the researcher's related documentation (electronic and/or hard copy versions). Your right to withdraw from participation will be respected at all times.

### **Publication**

You will be provided with a summary report of the final research project report. Research results may be published as a peer-referred paper, conference presentation and/or submitted to academic journals on a non-profit basis in the interest of furthering knowledge related to establishing a pedagogical format for public relations and communication management in the Master of Business Administration. Any academic material ensuing from this research will maintain the confidentiality of the participating institutions and individuals, thus the identity of the institutions and participants will not be revealed at any level of publication.

If you have any questions about the project or require further information, please contact me, Theresa Rath, using the contact information provided above. This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance.

### **Consent:**

- I have read the Informed Consent form, and the nature and purpose of the research project has been explained to me. I understand and agree to take part.
- I understand the purpose of the research project and my involvement in it, including potential harms and benefits.
- I understand that I may withdraw from the research project at any stage and that this will not affect my status now or in the future.
- I understand that while information gained during the study may be published and/or presented, I will not be identified and my personal results will remain confidential. Further, my employer will not be identified.
- I understand that I will be audio-taped during the interview as outlined in the Audio Recording Consent form and that the data will be collected, stored and then destroyed as outlined above.



- I understand that I may contact the researcher or supervisor if I require further information about the research, and that I may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o Mount Saint Vincent University Research Office at 457-6350 or [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca) if I have questions about how this study is being conducted.

Your signature below will indicate that you have agreed to volunteer as a participant in this research study; that your questions have been answered satisfactorily; and that you understand the information provided above. A copy of this form will be provided to you. Your signature below means you provide your free and informed consent as the condition for agreeing to participate in this research project.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Participant                      Signature                      Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name of Researcher                      Signature                      Date

Copy of Transcript Requested:                      Yes                      No

If requested, indicate e-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send your signed Informed Consent form to Theresa Rath, the researcher, by email at [theresa.rath@msvu.ca](mailto:theresa.rath@msvu.ca) or by fax to (902) [REDACTED] She will then sign it and send a final copy to you for your records.

To be filled out by Researcher:

Transcript Identifier: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix F: Consent to Audio Recording & Transcription

Public Relations & Communication Management:  
In Search of a Pedagogical Model for the MBA Curriculum in Canada

*Theresa Rath, Researcher  
Master of Arts (Communication) Candidate  
Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax, Nova Scotia*

This study involves the audio recording of your interview with the researcher. Neither your name nor any other identifying information will be associated with the audio recording or the transcript. Only the researcher and a transcriptionist will be able to listen to the recordings.

The audio files will be transcribed by a transcriptionist and erased once the transcriptions are checked for accuracy. Transcripts of your interview may be reproduced in whole or in part for use in presentations or written products that result from this study. Neither your name nor any other identifying information (such as your voice or company name) will be used in presentations or in written products resulting from the study.

By signing this form, I am allowing the researcher to audio tape me as part of this research. I also understand that this consent for recording is effective until May 31, 2014. On or before that date, the tapes will be destroyed.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date

Please send your signed Informed Consent form to Theresa Rath, the researcher, by email at [theresa.rath@msvu.ca](mailto:theresa.rath@msvu.ca) or by fax to (902) [REDACTED]. She will then sign it and send a final copy to you for your records.

Adapted from Mass Bay Community College (2010).

### **Appendix G: Interview Process & Questions**

The researcher will first acknowledge to the in-depth interview participant that, “I have in my possession your signed Informed Consent and Audio Recording Consent forms. Thank you for sending the signed forms back to me by \_\_\_\_\_ (email or fax). I will sign them and email a final copy of the documents back to you for your records.”

The researcher will then remind the in-depth interview participant of the details surrounding informed consent: “Before we get started with the interview, I’d like to remind you that you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time. You may also decline to answer questions or participate in any component of the project. If you decide not to answer a particular question or set of questions, you can still complete the remainder of the interview, if you choose to do so. If you initially agree and later change your mind, you may indicate your wishes at any time and the data related to you will immediately be destroyed and stricken from my study. Your right to withdraw from participation will be respected at all times. Do you have any questions about informed consent?”

“As you know, my intent is to audio-record the interview.

The researcher will then acknowledge that, “Audio-recording is beginning now.”

The researcher will then proceed to ask the following questions:

- Q1: What exposure have you had to public relations and strategic communication management?
- Q2: What professional experience do you have with public relations and strategic communication management?
- Q3: What value do you place on public relations and strategic communication management?
- Q4: What causes you to place this value on it?
- Q5: What place, if any, do you see public relations and strategic communication management having in the MBA curriculum?
- Q6: What causes you to feel this way about public relations and strategic communication management in the MBA curriculum?
- Q7: What content regarding public relations and strategic communication management, if any, should be taught in the MBA curriculum?
- Q8: What has led you to feel this way regarding such content?
- Q9: Is there anything else you would like to add?

“I’ve just stopped audio-recording but I do have one demographics-related question that I don’t want captured on audio or in the ensuing transcript. For the purposes of the study, I would like to capture your generic position title, such as chief executive officer, president, vice-president, senior director, director, etc. In my study and related documentation, this generic title will not be connected to you, your employer, your profession or to your specific job function.

Q1: What is your generic position title?

The researcher will then conclude the interview: “Thank you very much for your time and input towards my thesis research. I am confident that your insight will help to advance the discussion and knowledge around public relations’ possible fit in the Master of Business Administration curriculum in Canada.”

-End-