

roles. Simply put, these roles were *communication manager*, who is involved in policy making and planning, and *technician*, who is involved in implementing programmes. Since this early work, there has been considerable writing on public relations roles,⁴ but suffice to say that the model put forward in this chapter will generate a number of roles for the practitioner, which the authors believe encapsulate and extend previous work.

One final point to make about roles which again will serve to clarify some confusion. Roles can be constructed in two ways. First, there is the role the whole public relations department fulfils and that will be determined by the expectations that the organisation has of the function as a whole. Second, the department itself will comprise individuals with different knowledge, skills and expertise sets and who themselves fulfil different roles both within the team and within the organisation. Hence the role of the most senior public relations professional will be quite different from that of the most junior: our focus here is on the role of the most senior practitioner.

The four-by-four model

There is a huge amount on the contribution public relations makes to organisational effectiveness in the academic literature. Our view is that Steyn's study, using a strategic-management perspective, mapping the contribution of communication at various levels of business operation (enterprise, corporate, business unit, functional and operational), is a useful starting point. However, Steyn's work focuses exclusively on the private sector where the minority of practitioners work. Nevertheless, it has the potential to be further contextualised and adapted for practice.

Having worked extensively with both the private, public and not-for-profit sectors, the authors have devised an alternative model for the contribution of public relations. It is called the four-by-four model and consists of the elements shown in Figure 5.1: the four elements in the pyramid represent the organisation, split into the different levels at which it operates. The outer ring represents the various stakeholder communities on which it depends, but this should be regarded as a constantly dynamic network permeating and embracing the four organisational elements, rather than as a separate variable. Stakeholders are shown as a network because organisations have several, are ultimately dependent on them and are held in a web of relationships with and by them, whether they be internal or external to the organisation. As Starck and Kruckeberg have said, 'Corporations ultimately operate by consent of society, which remains in fact the ultimate stakeholder'.⁶ They are also shown as a network because the reality is that organisations are pulled towards different stakeholders at different times and with different intensity. For example, in the aftermath of the global financial crisis banks were pulled closer to regulatory and governmental stakeholders as those bodies sought to exert greater power in response to the crisis in the banking sector. Furthermore, the network is of course interconnected itself. The

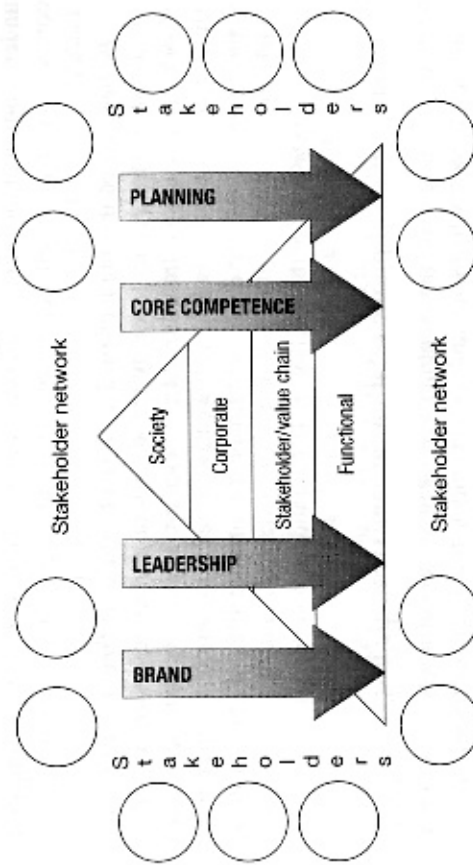


Figure 5.1 The four-by-four model of strategic public relations

stakeholder network has a tension, rather like a spider's web, with the organisation seeking equilibrium between the competing demands of a range of stakeholders.

Organisations are complex and the stakeholder environment in which they operate is dynamic. Many metaphors can be used to describe the stakeholder environment. One favoured by us takes the sea as its inspiration and highlights the importance of meteorological and navigation skills for the public relations leader, that is, an ability to analyse and predict external conditions, as well as the ability to guide an organisation past both visible and 'hidden' dangers. It also highlights the importance of insight which allows the organisation to work with the prevailing conditions for maximum effect. Indeed, the stakeholder environment can be with the organisation and it can glide along with the tide, while at other times forces can combine to create a treacherous environment that can threaten its very existence.

The model attempts to make sense of this context by examining the organisation at different strategic levels: societal, corporate, value chain and functional. The model recognises that an organisation is a nexus of connections between stakeholders who not only fall into one or more of the organisational stakeholder categories identified in the four levels, but also that the levels and therefore stakeholders are interconnected. The stakeholders ultimately determine and define the nature of an organisation, providing its licence to operate and without whose cooperation it will cease to exist. The framing of the model in this way also recognises that a stakeholder may have multiple relationships with the organisation and will interact differently depending on that context.

Our research for this model also identified four distinct attributes, which we describe as DNA strands. These strands characterise leading public relations at whatever level it is being undertaken. They are: an excellent