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By

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this dissertation is to explore how the status and standards of public relations as a profession are perceived by the three main groups involved in public relations: academics, practitioners, and business leaders. This study approaches the issues from several perspectives including the sociology of the profession, strategic management, and multiculturalism in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Low recognition of the profession, a shortage of qualified practitioners, a lack of regulation, and a lack of credibility among practitioners are major issues in the Malaysian public relations industry.

In order to administer this study, several research methods were employed: a quantitative postal questionnaire, qualitative in-depth interviews and a review of policy documents. In each case, the focus was on following four dimensions of public relations professionalism: the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations; PR education: the establishment of its exclusive training schools; the importance of a code of ethics; and accreditation and licensing. The postal survey produces a quantitative empirical description of the profession. Importantly, the in-depth interviews and a review of policy documents offer a qualitative, empirical and analytical exploration of the educational and professional standards of public relations management.

The results of this study revealed that although the Malaysian public relations industry has grown due to the substantial influences of Western PR knowledge, the public relations profession has not yet matured in terms of achieving professional status in the eyes of society as a whole.

In a new global economy, business leaders really value the importance of public relations in improving their organisational strategy development but they were not impressed with the quality and competencies of PR practitioners. Therefore, most of them stressed the importance of accreditation (registration) to improve practitioners' competencies but some of them noted that it is too early to implement legislation. They believe that the main focus should be on the quality and precision of PR practice as current practitioners' tactical and managerial tasks are neither complex nor sophisticated. Thus, there are four key areas of expertise identified which are considered to be the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations: stakeholder relations, reputation management (corporate branding), corporate social responsibility, and consultative and corporate advisory services at the top management level.

The majority of business leaders, practitioners and academics considered that the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia did not play a pivotal role in improving the standards of PR professionalism. The institute is expected to focus its main functions on several key tasks: developing a strategic plan, strengthening Continuous Professional Development (CPD) schemes, achieving state recognition – in the form of a Royal Charter and providing membership benefits. Importantly, all of these elements must be aligned with universal and global benchmarking standards.

Additionally, although many corporations have adopted their own code of ethics, many respondents did not realise that practising standardised, universally accepted

code of ethics in public relations can enhance the dignity and safeguard ethical behaviour and morality among PR practitioners.

Indeed, there is a perceptual distance between PR academics and practitioners regarding what kind of professional practice is best for competent PR professionals. PR academics claimed that there are many non-qualified PR practitioners practising public relations, whilst PR practitioners questioned the quality of local PR education by arguing that academics deliver only basic theoretical knowledge of public relations rather than teach students how best it can be practised in the real world. Evidence from the questionnaire survey and interviews, showed that apart from mastering journalistic skills, PR practitioners are aware of the importance of holistic knowledge of business acumen and environmental scanning.

The study also revealed that understanding cultural sensitivity is seen as a universal value that falls under PR practitioners' responsibility. Managing cultural diversity can reduce any complexities that affect business performance. Thus, there is a need for PR practitioners to develop a cultural diversity policy in improving relationships with external stakeholders in an external business environment.

It is concluded that public relations can be a 'true' profession if all parties involved are united and committed to developing standardised, universal forms of public relations practice. The most critical factor that diminishes the value of public relations is the quality and precision of PR practice. Public relations must be seen as a 'terminal' occupation that maintains its exclusivity to balance its dual role as advancing stakeholders/clients importance and protecting the public interest.

Keywords: public relations, professionalisation, strategic management, and cultural diversity.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.0 Introduction**

Profession is seen as an occupational term that describes a domain of expertise. This term has developed over hundreds of years to refer to a rigorous occupational system in our society. It is important to distinguish between craft, technician and professional in any division of labour. Thus, different levels of practice require different levels of competence. Job designations and responsibilities, status and prestige, professional autonomy and financial rewards are all key factors in building a professional development system. In sociological analysis, professions such as accountancy, medicine, law, and engineering have been vigorously debated by a number of distinguished scholars such as McDonald (1995), Freidson (1994), Larson (1977), Moore (1970), Halmos (1973), and Johnson (1972). However, none of them have said that public relations (PR) is a profession. The sociological analysis of profession will be thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3.

Although many public relations scholars acknowledge the importance of professionalism in public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Ehling, in Grunig 1992; Sallot et al., 1997 & 1998; Cameron et al., 1996; Stacks et al., 1999; Nef et al., 1999; Cornelissen, 2000; Parkinson, 2001; L'Etang & Pieczka, 1996, L'Etang, 1999, 2002

& 2004; White & Mazur, 1995), public relations is still seen as a common occupation for a number of reasons.

First, there is no clear *distinct domain of expertise* for public relations or communication management (Cornelissen, 2004). Johnson (1972) and L'Etang (2002) emphasised the importance of exclusive jurisdiction in establishing unique professional standards. Public relations is seen as media relations only, in which the main tasks are managing press conferences and writing press releases. Some see public relations as a persuasive tool to serve marketing (Kotler & Mindak, 1978; Kitchen, 1997a) by which organisations use PR as a promotional mix or publicity to achieve marketing goals. Others consider public relations to be managing reputations or image building (Hutton, 1999; Hutton et al., 2001).

Second, there is no *universal standard of accreditation and licensing* practised by PR professional bodies throughout the world. Different PR associations practise different forms of accreditation and codes of ethics. For example, although many PR associations have adopted the Code of Athens, some PR bodies such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, UK (CIPR) have adopted their own code of ethics.

Third, public relations is not seen as a *'terminal' occupation* (full-time occupation), one of the key criteria of professionalism (see Abbot, 1988). Due to its poor image in the corporate world, there are only a small number of qualified PR personnel practising public relations (White & Mazur, 1995). Additionally, there are people who join PR by default or who regard PR as a second choice in their career development.

It is also common to see that a number of PR practitioners start their career in public relations, but then change their career to other challenging management fields such as human resources or marketing.

Fourth, there is a need to develop a rigorous body of PR knowledge, which requires *the establishment of exclusive training schools* (see Johnson, 1972). Newsom et al. (2000) argued that public relations could not yet be viewed as a profession because it lacks a tradition of continuing education. In connection with this, there is a critical debate about the location of courses of public relations - whether in media/mass communication or business schools (see Cornelissen, 2004; L'Etang, 1999: 282; L'Etang & Pieczka, 2006: 440; Grunig & Grunig, 2002). Although Grunig and Grunig (2002) agreed that public relations should be a part of MBA programmes, especially in subject areas such as strategic management, public affairs and corporate social responsibility, they argued that PR practitioners must be educated in schools of mass communication. Some argued that PR curricula should be housed in business schools (Cornelissen, 2004; Kitchen, 1997a), as these are appropriate educational training institutes to nurture in business leaders the importance of public relations to their organisations.

There is still a debate whether public relations should be a profession like medicine, law or accountancy. As compared to other professions, there is a clear-cut difference between medical and law schools (Larson, 1977). Additionally, accountancy is considered an established profession (McDonald, 1995), though most accounting curricula are housed in business schools. Furthermore, there are a number of well-established professional institutes, such as the UK's Chartered Institute of Personnel



Development (CIPD) for human resources and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) for marketing (Murray, 2002: 13). In fact, the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) was awarded a Royal Charter in February 2005 due to their significant and robust contribution to the UK's political, economic and social development. They have stated a preference for public relations to be housed in business schools to give the best training and development, especially about business strategy for PR practitioners, yet it might be asked whether these are the best institutions for the development of a 'universal professional project' to achieve professional status for public relations globally.

In the global marketplace, many global corporations such as Microsoft, Shell, Motorola, and IKEA that eagerly formulate their own business strategy vigorously broaden their business to reach a global society. Thus, understanding the complexity of cultural diversity (White & Mazur, 1995), which is a part of building such a professional project, is essential for global public relations practitioners. Sriramesh and Vercic (2003), who published a book on 'The Global Public Relations Handbook', argued that all PR practitioners are living and working in a global village where there are different aspects and patterns of multicultural societies in regions such as Asia, the Middle East, America, and Europe. Thus, a global perspective of public relations might save public relations from its poor image in the corporate world.

The brief history of public relations which follows examines how public relations evolved by highlighting its craft or technical activities, and how it is moving gradually towards real strategic management and diversity management.

## **1.1 Public Relations Development**

As will be seen in Chapter 2, from the early 1900s, PR was used by the presidents of the USA Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson as part of a strong political campaign to influence public behaviours. Public relations tools, such as press agency and publicity, were strategically planned to realise the vision of central government (Cutlip et al., 2000). In the thriving twenties era (1920-1929), efforts were increasingly made to orientate the functions of public relations as a means of political reform. Edward L. Bernays, the father of public relations, published the first book on the subject entitled *Crystallising Public Opinion*, which coined the term public relations counsel with regard to the legal profession (Harrison, 1995; Ewen, 1996; Matera & Artigue, 2000: 12). With the influence of mass psychology, Bernays also emphasised the importance of image building in grasping and influencing public opinion (Ewen, 1996; Cutlip, 1994). Bernays argued that public relations must become a 'true' profession by developing a universal accreditation and licensing system. Chapter 2 follows this development to the present day, but it is important to note the call for a 'true' profession even from its very early days.

## **1.2 Becoming a 'Management Science' Discipline**

Many scholars agree that public relations is now seen as *a complex and distinctive management discipline* that practises in key areas such as reputation management, corporate communications, public affairs, corporate image and identity, media relations, and marketing communications (White & Mazur, 1995; White & Vercic, 2001; Cornelissen, 2004; Grunig & Grunig, 2003; L'Etang, 2004; Argenti, 1998).

With the awakening of the notion of PR management in the new millennium, this growing profession has not only been widely practised in the developed countries of America and Europe, especially in the United Kingdom, but also in developing countries, particularly Asian countries (including Malaysia). Although in some countries public relations practitioners have been negatively perceived, and described by terms such as 'spin doctor', 'devil's advocate', 'Cinderella icon', 'PR bunny', manipulator and suchlike, today's public relations sees a need to focus on a new way of thinking, with an emphasis on real strategic management and corporate governance.

In addition, although public relations personnel practise journalistic skills such as writing press releases and arranging press conferences, effective public relations today can be argued to be more a management function that involves a strategic top management role (Bahl, 1995). L'Etang (2004) also asserted that possessing journalistic skills alone is not enough to practise excellent public relations: it is important to differentiate between a public relations officer and a press officer (L'Etang, 2004). A press officer only deals with media relations such as organising press conferences and writing press releases, whilst a PR officer, apart from his/her media relations function, is required to be part of strategic counsel and is also involved in crisis management at top management levels. A lack of clear understanding of public relations' roles may affect the level of professionalism in public relations.

In recent decades, the field of public relations has become increasingly important in shaping the current economic domain in Asia. Walter (2001: 5) pointed out that 'Asia is the world's third-largest PR market and arguably the one offering the greatest potential for global corporations'. For example, in searching for potential pharmaceutical markets in China and India, public relations is strategically used to reach more audiences by implementing strategic planning within PR programmes (Durand, 2004). In addition, arising from the Edelman's Annual Trust Barometer, managing trust for corporations in Asia, especially in China, has become one of the key elements for best practice in public relations (Edelman, 2005), largely due to the heightened awareness of large corporations such as Microsoft, Hewlett-Packard, Dell, Shell, ESSO, and many more, as to the importance of public relations in positioning a company's brand and in enhancing their corporate reputation.

As a result of this growth of the PR industry, the profession of public relations is now seen as a highly demanding field. PR practitioners work in one of two environments: either they work for in-house public relations or communication departments in the public or private sectors, with, for example, electronics companies, banking institutions, telecommunication companies, universities, and hospitals, or they work for PR firms which serve many large corporations as their clients. Regardless of whom they work for, PR practitioners must play strategic managerial roles in maintaining and increasing the professionalism of public relations in the eyes of the world.

Besides discussing the role of corporations and PR firms, there are a number of PR or communication professional associations, such as the Institute of Public Relations

Malaysia (IPRM), the Public Relations Consultants' Association of Malaysia (PRCAM), and the International Association for Business Communicators (IABC), operating in Malaysia to improve the PR industry. It has been claimed that the IPRM plays a vital role in shaping the development of the PR industry in Malaysia (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 222). In many Asian countries, such professional associations have been established to develop the professionalism of this arena. These associations might also play important roles in maintaining the directions and prospects of this field. The question is how effective are these PR associations in working on a universal professional project in order to achieve professional status for public relations?

With the growth of the PR industry, these associations may seek to obtain proper recognition of professional status for both academics and practitioners. However, in Malaysia, there are a number of critical issues in determining this professional status, especially with regard to educational and professional implications, which may diminish the growth of the emerging PR industry.

### **1.3 Industry Issues and Problems**

In recent years, generally, the public relations industry in Malaysia has grown tremendously in both the public and private sectors. In addition, small and medium companies have realised the importance of PR practice as a strategic component in promoting the company brand (Ahmad, 2000). However, many PR practitioners have not fully grasped the original standard of the public relations motto: 'Think global, act local' (Matera & Artigue, 2000: vi). It has been said that focusing on globalisation by

considering organisational cultures is more important for rapidly developing countries such as Malaysia. In fact, the PR industry in Malaysia is now facing the problem of how to propagate their local products/services globally. Ahmad (2000: 22) has argued that 'the development of the public relations industry in Malaysia has been hindered by a lack of understanding as to how it can support communication objectives' in a highly competitive business environment. One of the reasons for this has been that 'public relations people were mainly ex-journalists and event managers' (Ahmad, 2000: 22).

Additionally, according to Danker (2003), Allan (2003), and Lim (2002), although many aspects of the PR industry in Malaysia have developed vigorously, the quality of its 'professionals' and experience amongst PR practitioners is still lacking. Furthermore, many PR practitioners not only suffer from a lack of credibility in managing PR issues but may also fail to project communication strategies effectively (Danker, 2003). Ahmad (2000) and Bakar (2002) have also supported these arguments by raising the issue of the shortage of qualified and competent staff for today's PR industry resulting from the number of university PR graduates who have failed to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, especially with regard to a lack of English proficiency. This has been seen as a threat to the future development of the PR industry in producing 'global' PR practitioners<sup>1</sup>.

Besides discussing the professional status of PR practitioners, Danker (2003) argued further that the PR industry is also currently facing a lack of the kind of regulation

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<sup>1</sup> PR practitioners who are able to work in or for multinational companies and with other personnel from other cultures around the world – and thus to international standards.

which would enhance PR's professional status. Thus, the regulation issue is one of the biggest challenges in determining future developments in the PR industry. Relating to this, Black (2000: 1) argued that 'there is a vital debate about different forms of regulation, including the importance of self-regulation in an age of media convergence'.

Indeed, an important aspect of both the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) and the Public Relations Consultants' Association of Malaysia (PRCAM) has been to develop and determine the standards of professionalism in the PR industry in order to address industry issues relating to quality in the profession, as well as appraisal and training (Ahmad, 2000; Lim, 2002). Nevertheless, arising from the research for this work, according to one international PR firm's managing director, the roles and functions of these associations are completely ineffective because there is too much internal politicking and apathy amongst members of the associations.

Complicating this, according to Ahmad (2000: 23), with the rapidly increasing number of Internet subscribers in Malaysia, PR executives in Asia must not view all information they produce as one-way communication to target audiences. Instead, they must be able to build interactive relationships with their clients.

It is concluded that all of these issues are crucial in determining not only the status and standards of public relations but also the prospects for, and emerging directions of, the PR industry in Malaysia. Further to the educational and practical issues concerning the PR industry in Malaysia, in Chapter 3, this study discusses the vital notions of the professionalism of public relations developed by various leading

Western and Asian PR scholars. Indeed, the purpose and significance of this study is to draw attention to and understand these problems and issues.

The recent PR issues and problems in Malaysia are taken into account and lead to the development of the theoretical framework of this study. Public relations here is regarded as a complex and distinctive management discipline which plays a vital role in influencing management decision-making and is set as strategic counsel to the corporate and managerial functions of the dominant coalition (top management team). In an organisation, it must be able to explicitly show its major contribution to corporate governance and the corporate advisory service. It is hypothesised that public relations must become a 'true' profession like accountancy, medicine or law. It is therefore my intention here to outline the kind of professional project required for the professionalisation of public relations. The purposes and objectives of this study are presented below:

#### **1.4 Purposes of this Study**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the status and the standards of professionalism of public relations from multiple perspectives - the sociology of the profession, strategic management, and multiculturalism - in Malaysia. Four objectives are developed to achieve the purposes of this research:

##### **Objective 1:**

This study will determine the profile of PR practitioners and the core functions of public relations in major Malaysian corporations.



Research question 1 – two sub-questions:

- a) What is the current profile of PR practitioners?
- b) What is the current practice of their core PR functions?

**Objective 2:**

This study will focus on the extent to which (1) chief executive officers/senior directors, (2) PR practitioners, and (3) PR academics have a clear sense of the standards needed for the professionalism of public relations management in Malaysia.

This approach will answer the general question of the thesis: Is public relations a profession? Four dimensions of PR professionalism are developed as the theoretical framework of this study: (1) knowledge base and personal competencies, (2) research and education, (3) a code of ethics, and (4) accreditation and licensing.

Research question 2 – three sub-questions:

- a) What is the extent of knowledge and skills in determining the standards of professionalism in public relations?
- b) How important are specialised knowledge and skills, and personal competencies to PR practice?
- c) Are corporate governance and the corporate advisory service necessarily distinct domains of their expertise?

Research question 3 – two sub-questions:

- a) What is the extent of research and education (and the establishment of exclusive training schools) in improving the standards of professionalism in PR?
- b) How important is research and education to PR practice? Should distinctive PR schools be developed?

Research question 4 – two sub-questions:

- a) To what extent is a code of ethics central to improving the standards of professionalism in public relations?
- b) How important is a code of ethics to PR practice?

Research question 5 – two sub-questions:

- a) What is the role of accreditation and licensing in setting the standards of professionalism in public relations?
- b) How important is accreditation and licensing to PR practice?

**Objective 3:**

This study will examine the role of the Malaysian public relations professional association, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, in improving the standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia.

Research question 6:

How effective is the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia in developing the standards of professionalism in public relations?

#### **Objective 4:**

The arrival of multinational corporations, with their needs and demands, has changed public relations practice, which presents a major challenge for global PR practitioners to practice public relations in a diverse and complex business environment. This study will investigate how multinational corporations could adapt their PR business strategy in the multicultural environment in Malaysia.

#### **Research question 7 – two sub-questions:**

- a) To what extent are public relations services adapted to multicultural issues (e.g. taboos, languages, races and religion sensitivity) in formulating and practising PR business strategies?
- b) How do Malaysian organisations manage global public relations?

#### **1.5 Significance of the Study**

Upon completion of this study, the findings of this study could be used to improve the standards of professionalism within public relations management in Malaysia. This study seeks to be a further contribution to the existing body of PR knowledge: it is among the first attempts to integrate essential theories of public relations, sociological analysis of professions and models of strategic management in a global perspective in order to create better dimensions of professionalism within PR management beyond traditional PR theories. With this development of the dimensions within the PR discipline, the PR industry should be able to develop a profound mission in improving

the standards of PR professionalism with the support of universities, PR organisations and related professional associations.

Specifically, upon completion of this study, the findings of this study could be used to define an exclusive jurisdiction for public relations that is difficult for other occupations to imitate. Thus, this would add value to PR education and strengthen the content of professional courses in Continuous Professional Development (CPD) offered by a PR professional association. Indeed, universities should be able to vigorously determine the best PR curricula in the light of the production of future chartered and global PR practitioners. Having a validated PR degree, PR practitioners should be able to improve their professional abilities in their practice. Importantly, a professional organisation, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, seen as the underlying guardian of the Malaysian PR industry, should be able to offer sources of information and a one-stop centre specifically for PR practitioners and PR educators, as well as for PR students. In addition, the IPRM should be able to join an international PR body, the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management, in order to contribute to the body of global PR knowledge and to strengthen the universal standards of PR professionalism.

Indeed, the public relations profession should be recognised by the general public (not only by the PR fraternity) as a new entity within the spectrum of management disciplines. Therefore, this study seeks to offer a rigorous contribution towards determining the status not only of the professionalism of the Malaysian PR industry but also of the global PR industry in general.

## **1.6 Organisation of the Thesis**

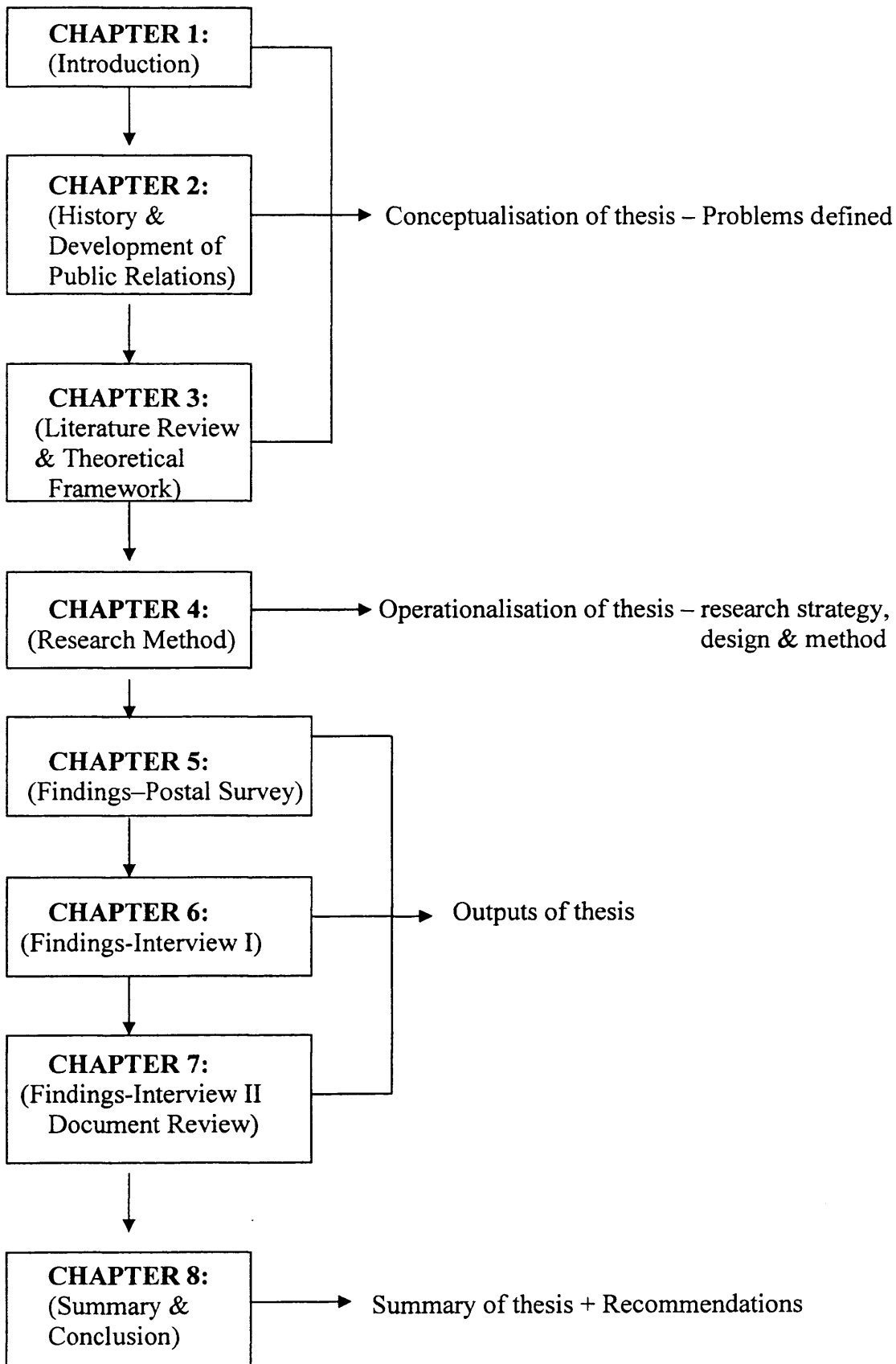
As illustrated in Figure 1.1, this thesis comprises eight chapters, including the introductory chapter, the literature review, the research methodology, the findings and the conclusion of this study.

Chapter 1 consists of the background of this study, briefly describing the history of public relations and its current development in Malaysia. Following this, the purposes of this study are clarified as they emerge from the issues and problems faced by the Malaysian PR industry, which needs to attain the highest standards of PR professionalism in three main sectors: the public and private sectors as well as PR firms. Importantly, this study attempts to re-conceptualise the notion of PR professionalism based on the literature review of public relations generally, and particularly with regard to the Malaysian environment.

Chapter 2 documents the evolution and maturation of public relations in America, Europe and Malaysia. It offers an overview of the political, economic and social contexts which provide the background to the Malaysian industry. The Malaysian background can readily be seen to affect both directly and indirectly the development of the Malaysian PR industry.

Chapter 3 is the literature review, which discusses the debates about the educational and professional standards within public relations in three regions: America, Europe and Asia. This chapter also describes the conceptualisation of this study by explaining

**Figure 1.1 (Overview of Thesis)**



the key concepts used in this project. Following this, the theoretical framework used to determine the dimensions of PR professionalism is outlined.

Chapter 4 describes the triangulated research methodology used in this study. First, using quantitative survey research, a postal questionnaire is used as an instrument for this study. Second, using an exploratory study, qualitative in-depth interviews and a review of policy documents are used to unlock the research problems of this study. Step-by-step procedures are explained to support the reliability and validity of this study.

Chapter 5 reports the statistical results of the profile of PR practitioners in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The program SPSS is used to analyse the raw data and provide the descriptive data of this study. In addition, predictive arguments are articulated to support the results of this study.

Chapter 6 discusses the detailed analysis of the qualitative data gathered through interviewing PR practitioners and academics with regard to the standards of PR professionalism. From a broader view, this data provides comprehensive findings regarding educational and professional standards within the public relations field in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Chapter 7 documents the detailed analysis of qualitative data drawn from a series of interviews with business leaders of large corporations involved in domestic and global business. The findings of the study are broader and more balanced as business leaders were asked to discuss their expectations, opinions and insights regarding the standards

of PR professionalism. Additionally, a review of policy documents is also presented to acquire more data about PR professionalism.

Chapter 8 offers an in-depth discussion of the findings described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7. This chapter also suggests some theoretical and empirical implications with regard to PR professionalism. After this, a summary and the conclusions of this study are given. Some recommendations are also suggested to encourage future research on PR professionalism.

## **1.7 Summary**

This chapter sought to provide and outline an introductory description of this study in the light of the standards of PR professionalism from multiple perspectives – the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism - in the rapidly developing and multicultural country of Malaysia. Prior to noting the purpose and the background of this study, the industry issues and problems were discussed. Other theoretical approaches and debates on this topic are more thoroughly discussed in Chapter 3, which contains the literature review and the theoretical framework of this study. Prior to that, it is necessary to offer an overview of Malaysia from the perspectives of its political, economic and social contexts. It is hoped that this introductory chapter will lead the following chapters to provide a strong and genuine contribution to the body of PR knowledge globally.



## **CHAPTER 2**

### **HISTORY AND DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS**

#### **2.0 Introduction**

This chapter consists of three main sections: the history and development of public relations in the United States of America, Britain, and Malaysia. The roots of public relations are essential in understanding how the field has evolved from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the new millennium, and from developed countries to rapidly developing countries such as Malaysia. Importantly, corporate practice is also described to see how public relations is used for the benefit of multinational corporations and global PR firms. The implications of the evolution and maturation of public relations in the three different countries are thoroughly discussed, and, in particular, how Western PR theories may shape the future directions of the Malaysian PR industry in an era of globalisation.

#### **2.1 History and Development of Public Relations in America**

The roots of public relations were laid in the United States of America in the early 1900s when Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson were consecutive presidents of the USA. They both used public relations tools, such as press agency or publicity, to influence public behaviour in their political reforms between 1900 and 1917. In order to implement their reforms, the Publicity Bureau - the first publicity firm, led by

George V. S. Michaelis, Herbert Small and Thomas O. Marvin - was established in 1900 in Boston (Cutlip et al., 2000: 113).

During the period towards the end of and just after World War I (1917-1919), under the presidency of Woodrow Wilson, the Committee on Public Information (CPI), better known as the 'Creel Committee', was headed by George Creel and Carl Byoir to mobilise public opinion. The function of this organisation was important in supporting the war effort through fund-raising and food conservation. As a result of its wartime experiences, this organisation became one of the largest public relations firms in America (Cutlip et al., 2000).

Between 1920 and 1929, public relations was used by politicians as political propaganda to influence public opinion in society. There was also a growing interest in practising public relations to improve business and economic development in the process of modernisation in the United States.

Edward L. Bernays, who worked with the Creel Committee, was committed to the practice of public relations (press agentry). He published the first book on public relations, *Crystallizing Public Opinion*, in 1923. He initiated the idea of *Engineering Public Consent* describing how to influence the values and attitudes of the public in the interest of meeting his clients' objectives (Cutlip et al., 2000: 124; Harrison, 1995: 19). Bernays, who also coined the term 'public relations counsel', also managed to engender a favourable image of top companies and government agencies (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 14). A nephew of Sigmund Freud, Bernays was known as the Father of Public Relations, and with his multidisciplinary vision – anthropology, sociology and

psychology - made exceptional achievements in, and contributions to, this profession (Cutlip et al., 2000: 124; Harrison, 1995; Matera & Artigue, 2000: 13). He and his wife, Doris E. Fleischman, ran their own public relations firm and also published the first public relations newsletter to improve practitioners' knowledge of public relations. Indeed, public relations is seen as an 'ethical, professional and socially responsible' profession (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 3). Nowadays, public relations is seen as an ability to practise consultative services and strategic planning to achieve a client's goals (Cutlip et al., 2000; Matera & Artigue, 2000: 13).

Other revered public relations advocates were John W. Hill and Don Knowlton, who developed Hill & Knowlton, Inc. in 1933. They advised major tobacco companies to develop The Tobacco Industry Research Committee (TIRC) to improve and maintain the image of the industry. As a result of their contribution to the PR field, Hill & Knowlton has now become one of the major public relations firms in the world. However, Cutlip et al. (2000) argue that the involvement of this firm in improving the cigarette industry has jeopardised the image of the public relations profession.

Arthur W. Page, another great public relations pioneer, became the first corporate vice president of the American Telephone and Telegraph Co. In addition, he edited the renowned *World Work Magazine*, emphasising the importance of mutual understanding between corporations and publics (Cutlip et al., 2000: 127). Using Page as its inspiration, the Arthur W. Page Society was founded in 1983, and it has now become a professional organisation for corporate public relations leaders (Arthur W. Page Society, 2003).

During the period of World War II (1930 to 1945), America has learnt from 'wartime lesson' and has faced drastic changes under the rule of Franklin D. Roosevelt. Roosevelt and his counsellor, Louis McHenry Howe, practised advanced public relations in proposing and implementing the New Deal, which developed radical reforms to boost the nation's economy. Specifically, a major public relations tool, advertising, played a vital role in supporting the New Deal. Then, during the post-war era (1945-1965), in the wake of the wartime developments, the field of public relations grew tremendously in line with the rapid development of the business and economic environments (Cutlip et al., 2000: 129 & 132).

With the rapid growth of the nation's economy, a number of professional associations, such as the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) and the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), were set up to increase the professionalism of public relations (Cutlip et al., 2000). The PRSA is now the world's largest professional organisation for PR practitioners. Founded in 1948, it has almost 20,000 members, who represent large and medium corporations, professional services firms, government, and non-profit organisations (Cutlip et al., 2000: 159; PRSA, 2003).

There are 200,000 PR practitioners who work in the United States to improve the PR industry and excellent public relations research has been established by Grunig and his research team over the last two decades (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003: 323). Most US PR practitioners have a college degree and work in the private and corporate sectors. From a perspective of strategic management, Larissa A. Grunig, James E. Grunig and David M. Dozier (2002) studied the perceptions of senior PR practitioners and CEOs on the value of public relations by focusing on four models of public

relations<sup>1</sup>: symmetrical and asymmetrical communication, dominant coalition (being in alliance and working with senior board members), and the effect of 'excellent' public relations, especially with regard to job satisfaction and return on investment. The study stressed that relationship management was the best solution to practice 'excellent' public relations. As a result of this study, it is claimed that a rigorous body of PR knowledge has been developed (Grunig et al., 2002). However, it is arguable that the symmetrical model is too idealistic, which is implicitly admitted in their study. Their 'excellent' public relations research shows a lack of understanding about real strategic management focusing on corporate governance and corporate advisory roles; specifically, how public relations may contribute to the process of corporate governance and corporate social responsibility, not merely becoming a member of a dominant coalition and reporting directly to CEOs or senior directors.

Although the rapid development of public relations in terms of the increasing profile of PR practitioners in the United States reflects its bright future, there is still a noticeable distance between US practitioners and scholars with regard to the identity of this profession. According to Sriramesh and Vercic (2003: 336), US scholars believe that current public relations practice needs to be improved at the strategic and managerial levels in organisations because US practitioners have employed an asymmetrical model of public relations that is inherently based on persuasion or manipulation rather than a symmetrical model focusing on relationship management. US practitioners are more concerned with projecting their image by giving their profession new titles such as 'reputation management', 'corporate communications',

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<sup>1</sup> Grunig and Hunt (1984) initiated four models of public relations: press agency, public information, asymmetrical communication and symmetrical communication.

‘marketing communications’, or ‘corporate affairs’ (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003: 343).

It is arguable that focusing on corporate communications, and especially reputation management, which is more explicit, opens a new paradigm for public relations beyond the four models of public relations. This focus could expand the strategic role of public relations and, importantly, provides a major contribution to organisational strategy development.

It seems that the history and development of US public relations, in practice, was impeded through propaganda activities like supporting war, improving the image of the tobacco industry, and encouraging political spin for the sake of the elite community per se. It can readily be argued that since the early development of US public relations, it has done nothing more than attain power, privilege and profit for an individualistic society. Cutlip et al. (2000) argue that John W. Hill, a PR leader who established the major PR firm, Hill & Knowlton, ruined his reputation by supporting the development of the tobacco industry in the 1960s. Cutlip et al. (2000) also question Hill’s moral role in improving public relations counselling for the tobacco industry:

Though John Hill had long since passed from such earthly battles, the fact remains that he was the guiding force in the formation of the Tobacco Industry Research Committee and later the Tobacco Institute. Thus, Hill must bear responsibility for that ‘brilliantly conceived and executed plan’ that served the selfish interests of the tobacco industry at the expense of millions of Americans’ good health (Cutlip et al., 2000: 126).

If such criticisms continue to exist, public relations will never achieve proper recognition from society at large. Public relations must become a ‘true’ profession. Professional monopoly is important to control and regulate the market. For example, the standardisation of PR professionalism might minimise corporate sins if only

qualified practitioners who uphold highly professional ethics could practise public relations. Thus, it is important to educate business leaders about managing their corporate governance and corporate responsibility to reach their strategic constituencies. Additionally, this approach also needs to be aligned with cultural sensitivity to reach a more global society. Therefore, this study focuses on the increased professionalism of public relations in a pluralistic society, and supports the universal slogan ‘one profession and one voice’ coined by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (Vallin, 2005).

The next section of this chapter describes the history and development of public relations in Britain, and illustrates how public relations in the UK might affect the development of public relations in Malaysia.

## **2.2 History and Development of Public Relations in Britain**

The history of Britain’s public relations can be traced by focusing on the roles of central and local government in informing and persuading their publics (L’Etang, 2004). For instance, in 1912, Lloyd George, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, developed an academic management team which implemented the first old age pension scheme. In addition, concerning the importance of public services, the government also played a vital role in educating Britain’s people about health and housing schemes in the 1920s by using public relations functions (Harrison, 1995; Jefkins, 1994: 4).

During World War I, public relations played an important role in creating British propaganda by persuading the public to support the war effort. Importantly, using propaganda and persuasion, the British government gained support from the US president, Woodrow Wilson, who headed the US Creel Committee during the war. In 1924, Sir Stephen Tallents, who led the Empire Marketing Board, developed the Government Public Relations Department to promote the products and services. Tallents became the first President of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) because of his exceptional achievements in, and contribution to, the PR industry (Harrison, 1995; L'Etang, 2004: 35; Jefkins, 1994: 4).

Public relations was not only practised by the government to promote public services to the public. A few corporate companies also ran their businesses by using public relations techniques before the 1950s. However, not many PR departments were set up in such commercial organisations. Frank Jefkins, an experienced author and lecturer, wrote the first press release for a London store in 1938. He was later awarded the Sir Stephen Tallent Medal by the Institute of Public Relations in recognition of his clear contributions to the PR industry in the 1990s (Harrison, 1995; Jefkins, 1994).

During the post-war period, the rapid development of public relations in Britain was initially marshalled by a number of former government information officers who then developed their own businesses in the advertising and the public relations field. In addition, the Central Office of Information, formerly known as the Ministry of Information, developed the Government Information Service, which provided government recruitment services specifically for prospective information and press officers. Following the government's efforts in improving their communication



services, many public relations in-house units and firms were set up to improve and seek to inculcate mutual understanding between the various organisations and their publics (Harrison, 1995: 20). Given this, it is perhaps not surprising that public relations is still largely seen as media relations or press relations.

Besides discussing the historical development of public relations, it is worth noting the importance of the establishment of UK PR associations such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in shaping professional development as well as increasing the profile of PR practitioners in Britain.

The beginning of public relations as a profession in Britain was marked by the foundation of the Institute of Public Relations (IPR) in 1948 (L'Etang, 2004). It has now become Europe's largest public relations professional organisation, with over 8000 members (CIPR, 2005a). The foundation of professional bodies such as the CIPR carried with it responsibility for defining the highest standards of professionalism with regard to continuous professional development and regulation for both the public and private sectors. This association has substantially contributed to the emergence of the PR industry, and the body has been officially recognised by the British government: in February 2005, the association was awarded chartered status by the Privy Council, and is thus now called the Chartered Institute of Public Relations. This government recognition marked a highly important milestone in the development of public relations in the United Kingdom (CIPR, 2005a; PR Week, 2005).

At present, public relations plays a vital role in formulating strategy at top management level in public and private organisations. For instance, PR professionals are involved in making the highest management decisions when executive directors formulate organisational policies that need to be delivered to their strategic publics (Harrison, 1995).

Indeed, it has been said that the British PR profession is the largest in Europe, second only to the US. The Centre for Economic and Business Research Ltd, London (August, 2005), disclosed that there are about 47,800 PR professionals (in-house public, in-house private and in-house specialist) working in public relations. Most of them are in-house specialists (consultants and freelance). The PR profession has contributed to economic activity, generating an annual turnover of £6.5 billion (CIPR, 2005b: 14).

The rise of public relations management has been improved by a group of UK PR scholars<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, a substantial body of research has been established and published in the major journals of public relations and communication management, such as the *Journal of Communication Management*, *Journal of Public Affairs*, *Corporate Communications: An International Journal* and *Corporate Reputation Review*.

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<sup>2</sup> Phillip J. Kitchen (1993, 1997a, 1997b, [with Schultz] 2001, and [with Daly] Feb. 2002); Danny Moss (1990, [with Green] 2001, [with DeSanto] 2002, and [with Vercic & Warnaby] 2003); Jon White ([with Dozier] 1992, [with Mazur] 1995, [with Vercic] 2001,2002 and [with Murray] 2004); Anne Gregory (1996, 2000, 2002 and August 2003); Gary Warnaby ([with Moss] 1997, [with Medway] 2002 and co-author-2003); Jacque L'Etang ([with Pieczka] 1996, 1999,2002, 2003 and 2004); Kevin Moloney (1997 and January 1999); Richard Varey (1997, [with White] 2000 and 2001); Joep Cornelissen (2000, 2001, 2003, and 2004); Shirley Harrison (1995); Sandra Oliver ([with Riley] 1996, and 2001); Dolphin R.R. (February 2002, August 2003, and co-author-January 2004); Gillian Hogg ([with Doolan] 1999); and Carmen Lages ([with Simkin] 2003 & [with Lages] 2005).

Generally, the development process of public relations in many countries has been improved, stretching from propaganda activities to strategic management, and from a public-be-damned era in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with emphasis on press agency and publicity to a period when the emphasis has been on producing a knowledgeable and informed society for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond (Cutlip et al., 2000).

Although the purpose of the establishment of the PRSA in the US and the CIPR in Britain was to attain professional status and thus ensure that public relations is seen as a profession, it seems that the UK's approach differs slightly from US public relations. UK public relations scholars and practitioners are seemingly quick learners compared to those in the US milieu. Public relations became a serious and respected profession when the UK government's Privy Council officially recognised it with a Royal Charter. As a result, UK public relations education has been rigorously established and PR has become acknowledged as a profession. Importantly, one underlying reason why the CIPR was accorded this status is that in the UK, public relations is recognised as a serious management discipline (see Warnaby and Moss, in Kitchen 1997: 7), whilst in many developed countries (including the US) and most developing countries, PR is still seen as a sub-discipline of mass communication.

Additionally, public relations curricula<sup>3</sup> in the United Kingdom are predominantly housed in business schools<sup>4</sup> whilst in America, public relations curricula are still

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<sup>3</sup> Public relations here is seen as a complex management discipline which includes corporate communications, reputation management, public affairs, corporate identity and corporate image.

<sup>4</sup> For example, City University Business School, London, Leeds Business School, Manchester Metropolitan University, Aberdeen Business School and Strathclyde University.

housed in schools of mass communication or journalism<sup>5</sup>. However, there are several schools of thought that vigorously disagree about what constitutes public relations. The dominant notion of public relations described by well-known US PR professor James Grunig is symmetrical communication (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Grunig, 1992 & 2000; Grunig et al., 2002; Grunig & Grunig, 2003), which can be seen as too idealistic. Although Grunig and his research associates agree that public relations is a management discipline, most of their research is still restricted to the spectrum of media studies, especially the four models of public relations. Another school of thought claims public relations to be 'marketing public relations', with an emphasis on the relationships between public relations and marketing (Kotler & Mindak, 1978; Kitchen, 1997a; Kitchen & Schultz, 2001). L'Etang (2004) argues that public relations is seen as a promotional mix if public relations is a part of marketing.<sup>6</sup> However, this viewpoint makes it more complicated for public relations to identify an exclusive jurisdiction.

Indeed, it is argued that public relations is a complex strategic management discipline which has separate functions from marketing in the organisational structure. Thus, public relations ought to be housed in an exclusive school in order to expand the body of PR knowledge and so fully understand real strategic management, and also to educate business leaders on how important public relations is to their organisation within a dominant coalition. At the corporate practice level, public relations is placed at the top of the organisational structure. Supporting this placement, there are a

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<sup>5</sup> For example, University of Maryland, University of Georgia, University of Florida and San Diego University.

<sup>6</sup> Originally, the idea of marketing public relations was coined by Kotler in 1978.

number of organisations that have created the posts of ‘vice president’ and ‘general manager’ for public relations.<sup>7</sup>

Nowadays, there are a few US business schools, such as the Tuck School of Business at Dartmouth College (Cornelissen, 2004) and the Darden Graduate School of Business Administration at the University of Virginia (Alsop 2004), which have come to offer public relations or corporate communications with an emphasis on corporate image and corporate identity. It is worth noting that this transition of public relations from journalism to business schools has been caused by a number of factors. One of the possible factors is that the changing business scenario within today’s corporations requires PR practitioners to act as more than just press relations officers. Cornelissen (2004), who emphasises the importance of public relations or corporate communications as a serious management discipline, argues that:

In 1996, the Education and Training Committee of the Institute of Public Relations in the UK struck a similar chord when it suggested that on the whole it preferred to see corporate communications (public relations) located in business and management curricula rather than in schools of communications and journalism, from the perspective that the standing of corporate communications needs to be protected and promoted as a strategic and vigorous management discipline (Cornelissen, 2004: 20).

In addition, the findings from rigorous research on public relations practice by PR scholars and practitioners suggest new functions for public relations education which are closer to a business model. Predictably, focusing on cross-disciplinary research from the various bodies of literature, such as in the field of mass communication, social psychology, business management, sociology, philosophy and other social science disciplines, may yield new thinking in the public relations discipline.

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<sup>7</sup> Normally, corporations see public relations as corporate affairs, corporate communications, public affairs, and communications.

However, in Asian countries, public relations is still housed in schools of media and communication and consequently most Asian PR academics have focused their studies within the spectrum of mass communication alone (see Adnan, 1987; Kaur, 1993; Khattab, 2000; Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004).

The future enhancement of public relations arguably depends on the development of new theories of public relations and communications management and how these theories make sense and reflect what has been practised in the real world. Notably, professional associations like the Chartered Institute of Public Relations in the United Kingdom may well play pivotal roles in improving the PR industry and making significant contributions to the body of global PR knowledge.

The history and development of public relations in Britain has also been influenced by US PR knowledge and this trend has occurred in most developed and developing countries in this world. However, this pattern has been vigorously debated by many PR scholars. Importantly, a number of European PR scholars such as L'Etang (2002; 2003) and van Ruler (2000) have attempted to propose new PR theories that are more relevant to PR practice and its possible future developments. This study thus investigates the different elements of PR professionalism which are perceived as central to the extension of PR knowledge in Malaysia. The Malaysian PR industry should learn from the past as its own indigenous theories of public relations develop.

In order to develop different perspectives on public relations, it is fruitful to trace the history and development (and consider future directions) of public relations in Malaysia. Understanding the Malaysian political, economic and social contexts is

important if we are to understand the centrality of the underlying concept of multiculturalism to the development of relevant public relations theory and practice in that country.

### **2.3 History and Development of Public Relations in Malaysia**

In line with the history and development of public relations in the USA and Britain, a similar pattern has evolved in Malaysia, perhaps principally due to the adoption of Western theories and philosophies into the Malaysian PR curriculum that is being developed in public universities. Almost certainly due to previous British colonisation, Malaysian education continues largely to emulate the UK education system (Theaker, 1997). Similarly, as in the USA and Britain, public relations is tactically used by the Ministry of Information to propagate political campaigns to influence public opinion in order to achieve political goals (Adnan, 1987).

Besides its role of promoting government policies, public relations has also contributed to the success of the organisational performance of corporations in improving their image and influencing their customers. Generally, public relations has had profound effects in convincing central government leaders and key corporate leaders to promote the political, economic and social development of this country (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004). However, according to Yeap (1994) and Abbas (1989), the image of this profession has been jeopardised, as PR practitioners are viewed as 'karaoke singers and social escorts' (cited in Idid, 2004: 207).

Prior to further discussing the development of public relations, it might be useful to discuss the background of Malaysia, geographically and historically, to better aid a fundamental understanding of public relations in Malaysia.

### **2.3.1 Background of Malaysia**

Geographically, Malaysia is the world's oldest rainforest country, covering a total area of 329,750 square kilometres in South-eastern Asia, situated between the South China Sea and Indonesia (The World Factbook, 2002; Anuar, 2000: 183). Specifically, Malaysia is divided into two large areas: Peninsular Malaysia, or West Malaysia, and East Malaysia, comprising a federation of 13 states. West Malaysia covers Johor, Kedah, Kelantan, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, Perak, Perlis, Terengganu, Malacca, and Penang, whilst East Malaysia covers Sabah and Sarawak. There are two federal territories: Kuala Lumpur, the capital of the country, and Labuan.

Politically, Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy ruled by a head of state, the Yang diPertuan Agong, who acts in accordance with government advice, all within the practice of a parliamentary democracy. The Cabinet rules a federation of 13 states, headed by the Prime Minister, who is responsible to the Parliament (Singh, 2001).

The population is approximately 25.99 million. Selangor, the country's centre of political, economic and social development, has the highest population growth at 6.1% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2005). According to the 2000 Census, Malaysia is multi-ethnic and multi-religious, with three main ethnic groups:



*Bumiputera*, including Malays and other indigenous people (65.1%), Chinese (about 26%) and Indian (7.7%). The four main religions are Islam (60.4%), Buddhism (19.2%), Christianity (9.1%) and Hinduism (6.3%); Confucianism/Taoism/other traditional Chinese religions constitute 2.6% (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2003).

Islam, the official religion of the country, is widely embraced and practised by the *Bumiputera* (Malays and other indigenous communities). Additionally, there are also a small number of Indian-Muslim and Chinese-Muslim communities living in Malaysia. Christianity is widely practised by some Chinese and Indians, especially in urban areas, and there is also a small number of Malay-Christians among indigenous groups living in Sabah and Sarawak, North Borneo (Netto, 2002a: 179). Importantly, the Federal Constitution specifically allows for freedom of religious belief, and the government has allocated funds to provide for places of religious worship such as mosques, churches, Chinese temples, and Indian temples (Malaysian Ministry Of Culture, Arts and Tourism, 2005).

Another important factor is that the Malay language, widely used for government affairs, is the prime national and official language of the country. However, English is widely used in the private sector, including in private schools and the higher learning institutions, as well as in corporations with dealings in international affairs and in multi-ethnic communities, particularly in urban areas. Prior to discussing multiculturalism in Malaysia, it might be useful to describe Malaysia's economic background.

### **2.3.2 Business and Economic Backgrounds of Malaysia**

From 1990 to 1997, Malaysia had strong economic growth, with the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growing by 8.7% annually (Icon Group International, 2000: 127). During the 1990s, the primary investment was in the manufacturing industry. Low inflation rates, steady increments in per capita income and low poverty rates were key factors that contributed to the socio-economic growth. However, owing to the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998, Malaysia's GDP in 1997 fell to only about 6% (Icon Group International, 2000: 128). There were then sharp increases in unemployment and currency depreciation, and a slow GDP growth during the economic recession. In July 1998, the government launched the National Economic Recovery Policy in an effort to improve and strengthen the Malaysian economy. This policy was introduced with a stringent regulatory system, intended to control Malaysian currency by imposing a fixed exchange rate between the Malaysian Ringgit and the US dollar (RM3.8/US\$1) in September 1998 (EIA, 2005; International Labour Organisation, 2005). The Malaysian economic recovery was also driven by a number of significant factors such as an increase in sales and marketing in corporate sectors, a growth in consumer credit and mortgage approvals, and a sharp increase in the indexes of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. There was a major restructuring of the financial and banking sectors in 2000 to boost the Malaysian economy. Furthermore, in 2001, the government encouraged more spending in its budget, causing a reduction in the government budget deficit from 2003 to 2004 (EIA, 2005; International Labour Organisation, 2005).

With a significant effort, Malaysia ultimately achieved strong economic growth and a sharp increase in GDP of 7.1% in 2004 compared to 5.3% in 2003. Currently, Malaysia is experiencing steady economic growth with a rapid expansion in exports and robust competition in corporate sectors such as consumer products, telecommunications, banking, manufacturing, health, and suchlike (EIA, 2005; International Labour Organisation, 2005). This economic growth could both directly and indirectly affect the development of the public relations industry.

### **2.3.3 Cultural Diversity and Multiculturalism in Malaysia**

Malaysia's socio-economic background is crucial to an understanding of the country's rich multiculturalism, for cultural diversity is an essential element in discussing how Malaysians - who are multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious - live in peace and harmony. Indeed, Malaysia is 'one of the most culturally and economically diverse regions of the world' (Fisher, 1996: 1). The mastering of the dominant languages such as English and Malay as mediums of communication is also central to this diversity and is crucial in today's competitive business environment.

As indicated, Malaysia is proclaimed as an Islamic country (Netto, 2002a), but is unique in terms of certain characteristics when compared to other countries in the world owing to its vigorous and diverse political, economic and social development (Bhuiyan, 1997; Chen et al., 2004). However, it is not sufficient to identify the importance of cultural diversity without relating it to religion, race and language. According to the Department of Statistics, Malaysia, (2003) there is a high correlation between religion and ethnicity.

### 2.3.4 Multicultural Public Relations

In a multicultural country like Malaysia, PR practitioners are clearly aware of the importance of 'diversity', 'cultural values', and 'nationality' repertoires in their daily practice. Generally, in a PR department, there are three main races - Malays, Chinese and Indians - working together to fulfil their multicultural audiences' needs (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 230). Syed Arabi Idid (in Sriramesh, 2004: 230) also notes that most of their activities are aligned with their local norms, especially religious traditions such as '*Eid al Fitr*', '*Eid al Adha*', 'Chinese New Year', '*Chap Gog Mei*', '*Diwali*', '*Thaipusam*', and Christmas. However, Synnott (2001, cited in Sriramesh, 2004: 229) observes that there are significant differences between these three main races in practising public relations in the context of their cultural values, for different races have distinct cultures (Moses, 2002). Indeed, it is common to hear that employers provide a religious room, such as the 'surau', in their workplace where Muslim employees can pray. Also reflecting this accommodation, vegetarian food is often served for those from the Indian community. In Malaysia, business and religion are impossible to separate. For example, activities such as the sale of alcohol, gambling, and the sale of 'non-Halal'<sup>8</sup> foods are illegal for the Muslim community, but non-Muslims may freely practise these activities since they may have different rules in their own cultures. Generally, though, all main races understand their cultural differences in their workplace (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 230).

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<sup>8</sup> *Halal* is an Arabic word which means permitted and lawful (Hawkins, 1997). *Halal* means that the food must be free from pork and alcohol. Meat must be slaughtered in the manner prescribed by the *shari'a* (Irfan, 2002).

Mastering multiple languages is one of the most important issues in nurturing Malaysian public relations practitioners. English is seen as the language of global commerce in Malaysia, while Bahasa Malaysia is the nation's official and national language. Kameda (2005: 168) stresses the importance of English as the agent of globalisation for Japanese corporations facing international business communication. Thus, practising global (international) public relations requires public relations practitioners to master multiple languages, especially English, in order to widen their knowledge about global issues.

Although Malay is the national language, English proficiency for university graduates is also considered essential. An enormous number of local graduates have failed to perform to employers' expectations, particularly in the private sector. Almost all organisations in the private sector use English as their principal language of administration (as discussed above), so to enable more Malaysians to become more proficient in English, the government has imposed new educational policies. For instance, the government announced a new policy requiring that two core subjects, mathematics and science, need to be taught in English rather than in the Malay language at secondary school level in order to improve students' performance (Mohamed, 2003: 1; The Star, 2003). It is hoped this will mean that students will perform better when they further their studies at higher learning institutions. In addition, the National Cultural Policy has proposed English as the medium of communication at public schools with the aim of integrating civil society and preparing students to face the challenges of globalisation (Khattab, 2004: 176). This policy also reflects the heightened awareness of the government in relation to national

aspirations and *Wawasan 2020*<sup>9</sup> - Vision 2020 - (see Chen et al., 2004), particularly in the wake of the information technology era. *Wawasan 2020* is the ultimate goal of Malaysia to be a fully developed country. This goal can also be achieved by developing the planning and implementation of national information communication technology policies. In all these contexts, Malaysians are strongly encouraged to be bilingual or multilingual, rather than monolingual, in order to enhance national development and cultural diversity in this country.

Keeping cultural diversity and multiculturalism in mind, managing the role of the media is one of the core functions of public relations and, to this day, media relations remain a central concern among PR practitioners to achieve organisational objectives and goals. Thus, it is worth providing an overview here of the media in Asia and a profile of the Malaysian media in particular in order to better understand how PR practitioners deal with the function of media relations in reaching their target audiences. Sriramesh (2003: 17) has argued that there is a significant relationship between public relations and journalism in disseminating information through the mass media to the society at large (also see Cutlip et al., 2000).

### **2.3.5 Media in Asia**

The role of the media is very important in shaping the lives of people in urban and rural areas. Chia (1994) argues that, by the early 1990s, there were several crucial

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<sup>9</sup> 'Malaysia should not be developed only in the economic sense. It must be a nation that is fully developed along all the dimensions: economically, politically, socially, spiritually, psychologically and culturally. We must be fully developed in terms of national unity and social cohesion, in terms of our economy, in terms of social justice, political stability, system of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values, national pride and confidence' (A speech of a former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, at Malaysian Business Council) (Mohamad, 2005).

social issues such as poverty, limited access to telephones, and a lack of knowledge of the 'global' language, English. This situation has hampered most Asians, particularly people in rural areas: those who live in rural areas prefer local media programmes, whilst urban people enjoy imported products. Indeed, media content must be considered the cultural, economic and political values of Asian countries. Furthermore, the media is an essential tool for organisations in that it can offer much useful information instantly and accurately (Chia, 1994). Therefore, the media is often seen as the key to educating and entertaining Asian societies; however, this is not unproblematic, since many (particularly in Malaysia and Indonesia with their predominant Islamic populations) are very sensitive about several issues concerning aspects of cultural diversity, notably racial and religious divisions. These factors become important when there are substantial differences in content between Western and Eastern media programmes.

Today, the role of the mass media has become prominent not only in disseminating public and private organisations' information but also in increasing the degree of literacy among Asian people. The role of the media helps us to understand how public relations may support organisations to build economic transition in developing countries because it is a powerful tool to shape public opinion (Sriramesh, 2003). This development is largely dependent on the magnitude of mass media infrastructure acquired by particular countries.

Furthermore, the mass media of printing, broadcasting and multimedia services in Malaysia have undergone tremendous growth and concomitantly have increasingly become the centralised means of communication and sources of information. Indeed,

using these media helps Malaysian society to be kept informed by watching foreign and local education and entertainment programmes (Badarudin, 1998: 20).

### **2.3.6 Profile of the Malaysian Media**

Like many European countries, the Malaysian media can be divided into two sections: print and broadcast. Both play significant roles in shaping public interest as well as national development in this country.

#### **Print Media**

There are four major publishers that produce and print newspapers and magazines in the Malay language and English: the News Straits Times Group, the Utusan Melayu Group, Star Publications and the Karangkraft Group. In practice, all print media follow strict guidelines set by the Ministry of Information (Kaur, 1993).

The Utusan Melayu Group publishes the two dailies *Utusan Malaysia* and *Utusan Melayu*. *Mingguan Malaysia* is published as the Sunday edition. This group, the oldest publisher, also publishes magazines such as *Utusan Kiblat*, *Utusan Pelajar*, *Mastika* and *Wanita*, a women's magazine (Kaur, 1993: 82). All publications are produced in the Malay language.

The New Straits Times Group publishes two types of publications: newspapers and magazines. The daily newspapers include *The New Straits Times*, *The Malay Mail*, *Berita Harian* (in Malay), *Business Times*, and *Shin Min Daily News* (in Chinese) and



three Sunday papers - *The New Sunday Times*, *Sunday Mail* and *Berita Minggu* (in Malay). This media organisation also publishes magazines such as *Her World*, *The Malaysian Business*, *Malaysian Digest*, *Her World Cook Book*, *Her World Annual*, *Home Scene*, *Information Malaysia* and *Jelita* (in Malay) (ibid). Most of them, as suggested by their titles, are produced in English.

The Star Publications Group publishes *The Star* (a daily), the *Sunday Star*, and the magazines *Shanghai* (in Chinese) and *Kuntum* (in Malay) (Kaur, 1993).

Another publisher is the Karangkraft Group, which publishes the following magazines: *Bintang Kecil*, *Arena*, *Bolasepak*, *Fokus SPM*, *Geli Hati*, *Remaja*, *Media Hiburan Ria*, *Stadium* and *Telatah Olok-Olok*, and a bi-weekly newspaper, *Watan* (Kaur, 1993). All publications are in Malay.

## **Broadcast Media**

The implementation of a privatisation policy has had a significant impact on broadcast media in Malaysia, which has encouraged stiff competition among public and private broadcast stations to improve the media and broadcasting industry (Kaur, 1998: 199). There are four major television stations operating in the country: TV1, TV2, TV3 and NTV7. Of these, TV1 and TV2, which are directly controlled by the Ministry of Information, play a vital role in influencing public opinion for national development (Badarudin, 1998). TV3, a private and commercial television station, is aimed at propagating the government agenda for the purpose of unity among multi-ethnic and multi-religious groupings in this country. Another private and commercial television

station is NTV7, which exclusively operates in major urban areas, particularly in the Klang Valley, the largest urbanised area in Malaysia (ibid).

The audio broadcast media, which are fully owned and controlled by the Ministry of Information, operate 24 hours a day. The national network is broadcast in the Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil languages. Adding to the booming broadcasting industry, All Asia Networks plc (ASTRO), a pay-TV and Malaysia's first digital broadcast service, offers 22 TV and radio services. Satellite TV is run by Measat Broadcast Network Systems Sdn Bhd (Badarudin, 1998) and has reached about one million subscribers (ASTRO, 2004).

### **Digital Media**

Under the Communication and Multimedia Act 1998, the Ministry of Energy, Communication and Multimedia became responsible for regulating the multimedia and broadcasting industry (International Law Book 1999). The growing awareness of the importance of new communication and multimedia technologies, under the leadership of Mahathir Mohamed, the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, has led to the building of a Multimedia Super Corridor, which was claimed to be one of the most sophisticated communication and multimedia projects in the world, to promote and marshal the national policy towards the era of digitalisation (Ariff & Chuan, 2000). Thus, under policies of privatisation, liberalisation and deregulation, and coupled with the effects of digitalisation, Malaysia has now become one of the top developing countries in the world in the era of globalisation (Badarudin, 1998).

In preparing for the challenges of globalisation, the Malaysian media have eagerly promoted digital media to reach their audiences interactively. Telekom Malaysia is responsible for providing Internet infrastructure, for instance Internet and multimedia services such as *Tmnet*, *Bluehyppo*, *Tmnet Streamyx* and many more, to enable users to get connected to the world of digital technology, where information is interactively disseminated (Telekom Malaysia, 2004). Moreover, under ASTRO's operation, the All Asia Broadcast Centre has provided digital facilities with the latest broadcasting technology to make people's lives more interactive, exciting and convenient (ASTRO, 2004). However, Badarudin (1998) argues that although digital and multimedia services have been vigorously promoted by Telekom Malaysia and ASTRO, the Ministry of Information has fully controlled all programmes (local and foreign) to be aired by considering Malaysian culture and sensitivities. Thus, PR practitioners have played an important role in adapting the programmes to suit local needs (Theaker, 2001: 272).

In the future, although the new digital media will operate as the means of communication to reach the public, PR practitioners are expected to face challenges to balance this new technology with cultural sensitivity (Matera & Artigue, 2000). Using digital media, PR practitioners are able to communicate with their constituents interactively in order to build a favourable relationship between an organisation and its public (Theaker, 2001). Managing the relationship with the public can be associated with the two-way symmetrical communication model initiated by Grunig et al. (2002), with the emphasis on dialogue and negotiation.

Indeed, Malaysia, the fastest developing country in South East Asia (Bhuiyan, 1997), has projected its good reputation across the world. Mahathir Mohamad, the former Prime Minister, who published a book, *World Class Public Relations In Practice*, claimed that by using excellent public relations skills, Malaysia has come to represent the leading edge of globalisation by portraying the nation's image through world class mega-projects such as the world's tallest building (PETRONAS Twin Towers), the biggest airport (Kuala Lumpur International Airport), and the ultra-sophisticated Multimedia Super Corridor (Mohamad, 2003; Mohamad, 2005; see Bhuiyan, 1997). However, Malaysia has been criticised by anti-imperialist scholars for its support of Western imperialism, and for turning Malaysia into a new Asian capitalist country (Chomsky, 2004). In the next section, media freedom is discussed to see to what extent mainstream media play a role in shaping and influencing public perception.

### **2.3.7 Media Freedom in Malaysia**

Having described the profile of the media in Malaysia, it is worth briefly noting the development and trends of mass media in building and sustaining a civil society. As discussed earlier, the early development of public relations in Malaysia was in line with the infrastructure and development of mass media; therefore, media relations has been a major PR function (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004), with the structure, process and development of Malaysia's mass media having a significant impact on public relations practice.

The current government, which has ruled Malaysia since independence in 1957, has generally controlled all key mainstream media<sup>10</sup> (Anuar, 2000; Netto, 2002b). Netto (2002b) argues that this mainstream has developed to serve the government's policies in every national aspect relating to political, economic and social matters, with the result that only governmental political and economic interests are allowed to diffuse to the public in terms of shaping and influencing public perceptions. Since 1969, the government has proposed a censorship law and has banned any negative reports published in foreign magazines and newspapers (Anuar, 2000: 184). Owing to stringent media controls, the alternative parties have failed to challenge the government's mainstream media in influencing public's perceptions. Netto (2002b) argues that media freedom in Malaysia has been restricted in three ways:

1. Through restrictive laws.
2. Through ownership of media by political parties and connected business individuals.
3. Through self-censorship exercised by editors and journalists themselves (Netto, 2002b: 18).

In the light of such control over the mainstream media in Malaysia, Aliran, which is an alternative political party, has proposed adopting Charter 2000's guiding principles with the purpose of neutralising the media monopoly in order to encourage rounded perceptions within civil society (Netto, 2002b: 22). Five key principles of media freedom are as follows:

1. The media must be pluralistic, democratic, and accessible.

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<sup>10</sup> Print media: *Utusan Malaysia*, *Berita Harian* and News Straits Times, and broadcast media: TV1, TV2, TV3 and NTV7.

2. The media must be committed to upholding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.
3. The media must uphold ethical responsibility and professionalism
4. The media must consciously promote justice, freedom and solidarity
5. The media must empower the disenfranchised, downtrodden and dispossessed (Ibid: 22).

It is important to note that the media must be 'free' in order to encourage new ideas voiced by a civil society. When the media is used as a means to stimulate dialogue and negotiation, public relations practice in the context of relationship management is improved (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2004: 11). Thus, it is worth discussing the evolution of Malaysian public relations with regard to the history and development of PR professional associations since 1962. Such discussion also illustrates how Western PR knowledge influences the way in which Malaysian PR practitioners shape the PR industry.

### **2.3.8 The Development of Public Relations in Malaysia**

There are three perspectives on the early development of public relations in Malaysia. According to Hamdan Adnan (1987: 10), public relations began in Malaysia in the fifteenth century, whilst Nordin (1986: 13) maintains that Malaysian public relations was born in about 1945, when the Department of Publicity and Printing was developed to promote the new reform of Malaysia's independence during the British colonisation. However, Idid (in Sriramesh, 2004: 211) argues that the birth of public relations was in 1939, when the Director of Information was appointed to promote

government policies to the various publics. Idid also considers some other factors that demonstrated interest in public relations, such as the development of the mass media, alliances with foreign countries, and the pivotal role of corporations in developing this field (ibid).

In 1946, Mubbin Sheppard, the Director-General of the Department of Public Relations, played a key role in supporting the Malayan Union. During World War II, this department was responsible for influencing Malaysians in three main areas: to dispel rumours that the British had been defeated by Japan, but had instead withdrawn to New Delhi, India to prepare for a counter-attack; developing law and enforcement to control racial issues among Malaysians; and organising social campaigns to fight for food conservation (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 212).

In 1948 to 1960, during the Malaysian Emergency, when Malaysians had to fight the militant communists, the Department of Public Relations was responsible for informing and influencing people to organise social welfare programmes. This successful PR project was one of the great efforts that helped to win the war against communism. Due to the significant contribution of public relations, the Department of Public Relations, which had a number of branches in all states, was changed to the Department of Information. In 1952, this department became the Department of Information Services (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004).

The year 1957 has become memorable for all Malaysians for one of the greatest achievements in the country's history: formerly known as Malaya, it achieved independence from the British, and Tunku Abdul Rahman Al-Putra was appointed as

the first Prime Minister. The Department of Information Services played a pivotal role in informing and influencing public opinion by organising various political campaigns for the first national election in 1959 (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 213).

After 1959, the independent government of Malaysia began to direct political, economic and social developments. The central government and industries had been based in Singapore, but after the independence period, the government's administrative centre was shifted to Kuala Lumpur. Public relations was tactically used in informing and persuading the public to support government policies through the mass media. One of its great missions was to change peoples' perceptions of Malaysia as it reformed itself while pulling away from British colonial influence. During this period, public relations became strongly integrated with media relations to marshal a series of PR campaigns (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 213).

Additionally, the PR industry experienced advantages from the affiliation of Malaysia and Singapore, though this affiliation was not agreed by Indonesia and the Philippines. With the development of Malaysian PR consultancies and the awareness of PR clients, the public relations industry improved and grew, leading to the establishment of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia in 1963 (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 214).

With the growth of the PR profession, according to Ibrahim (1987), based on the Sambathan report, it was recommended that all ministries should have public relations officers to disseminate information about government policies to the public. Thus, public relations education was paid considerable attention by those at the top of



government, especially when seven people who possessed diplomas in mass communication were employed as public relations officers within central government (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 215). Significantly, the top government officials also introduced the post of press liaison officer in the ministries and the post of press secretary in the offices of the Prime Minister and Deputy Prime Minister. In 1979, clear guidelines were produced to describe the roles and responsibilities of public relations (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 215).

### **2.3.9 Professional Associations for Public Relations in Malaysia**

There are two main PR professional bodies in Malaysia: the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) and the International Association for Business Communicators (IABC). The IPRM and IABC have played an active role in shaping the Malaysian PR industry, particularly in increasing the profile of public relations practitioners, and organising numerous activities for them (Taylor & Kent, 1999; Mahpar, 2003; Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004).

#### **Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM)**

Public relations in Malaysia officially began when the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) was founded in March 1962 by a group of PR practitioners from commerce and government, aiming to achieve professional status for public relations. With the foundation of this association, PR practitioners were able to undertake professional programmes and activities to enhance the standards of the professionalism of public relations (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 222; IPRM, 2004). The

IPRM was headed by Dato' Mohd Sopiee Sheikh Ibrahim as the first president of this PR association, who also held the position of the Director General of Information. Interestingly, the first Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj, honoured the country's PR association by becoming its the first patron (IPRM, 2003). Additionally, the second Prime Minister, Tun Abdul Razak, was invited to attend the IPRM's events. Since the 1990s, the IPRM has been led by senior PR academics such as Professor Hamdan Adnan and Professor Dr Syed Arabi Idid (IPRM, 2004; Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004).

This major PR association was responsible for establishing the Federation of ASEAN Public Relations Organisations (FAPRO). On October 25, 1977, an Executive Committee Meeting held in Kuala Lumpur was attended by many representatives from Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand to discuss its foundation (IPRM, 2004).

Since the 1970s, the IPRM has been strongly supported and influenced by senior government figures. Directly and indirectly, this institute has seemingly also been used to propagate government policies to the public: thus, unsurprisingly, IPRM's activities have been organised to discuss political, economic and social issues (see Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004). Over the years, the institute has organised a number of seminars and conferences, as well as a debate between Cambridge and Oxford universities; a national seminar was held on 'The Role of Public Relations in the Implementation of the New Economic Policy' (September 1972) in collaboration with the Malaysian Centre for Development Studies under the Prime Minister's Department, and a public seminar entitled "Public Relations in the Management Mix"

was held in March 1978 that was supported by Tan Sri Ong Kee Hui, the Minister of Science, Technology and Environment. Additionally, several major activities, such as the Tuan Syed Zainal Abidin Memorial Lecture, were held between 1973 and 1997. In this lecture, the public relations industry's issues were the top topic discussed by eminent scholars and professionals such as Rais Yatim, the Minister of Information, Musa Hitam, the former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia, Sam Black, the former President of the International Public Relations Association, and Mike Beard, the former President of the Institute of Public Relations, the United Kingdom, (IPRM, 2004; Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004).

Since early 2004, under the leadership of Shameem Abdul Jalil, a senior PR practitioner and president of the IPRM, new developments in public relations have been supported. First, a new website for the IPRM was launched on 28 March 2004. An official online membership form with a permanent office address has been placed on its website. Other innovative programmes have also been scheduled and organised to articulate the practice of public relations.

In collaboration with Taylor's College, the institute managed to run a course entitled 'Practitioner Sharpen Your Pencils' facilitated by Sharifah Rozita and Doris Lim. This course aimed at honing the writing skills of PR practitioners (IPRM, 2004, August 19). A programme run by this association included a 'talk' with PR guru James E. Grunig regarding the importance of public relations at an executive suite level and about public perceptions of public relations (IPRM, 2004, July 24). Other events were a 'talk' to communication students of Lim Kok Wing College on 'Challenges for Public Relations Practitioners in the New Millennium', the launch of

'Coffee Table Book' on World Class Public Relations Practices published by a former Prime Minister, Dr Mahathir Mohamad, and a learning programme on *Erti Merdeka* (the meaning of independence) in collaboration with the University of Technology Mara (IPRM, 2004). However, it is argued that, under the new leadership, the institute has been primarily used to organise lectures based on vocational or practical skills rather than providing a sound theoretical base (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 223).

Besides organising these seminars and conferences, the IPRM has also developed professional awards such as the *Sang Kancil Awards* and the *IPRM Crystal Awards* to encourage more activities by PR practitioners. Additionally, the IPRM has circulated newsletters such as the *Berita IPRM* (IPRM News) for their members. On 21 October 2001, the Deputy Minister of Information, Dato' Khalid Yunus, initiated the idea of having the *Best Malaysian Newsletter Award* to encourage Malaysian companies to perform to the best practice standard in publishing newsletters. The institute awarded the *Best Malaysian Newsletter Award* to Sime Darby Berhad, which published a newsletter *Sime Group News* (Idid, 2005: 134-135). In addition, a new publication, *IPRM Newsbytes*, has also been published by Robert A. Kelly for IPRM members (IPRM, 2004). With support from PR expatriates, it is hoped that additional significant issues - particularly concerning the PR industry in a globalising world - will emerge and be discussed. Thus, this support could attract more non-members to join this association.

In terms of membership, there are seven levels awarded by the IPRM to their qualified members. They are 'Honorary member', 'Fellow', 'Member', 'Associate member', 'Affiliate member', 'Student member', and 'Corporate member'. The

council may confer 'Honorary membership' and 'Fellowship' on their senior members who have made exceptionally significant contributions to the PR industry. In order to be elected as a full member, practitioners are required to have had five years' working experience in the field and to have obtained the IPRM Diploma. If they have not yet fulfilled this requirement, they may be conferred associate membership. Importantly, the IPRM also encourages other related professions to join the institute. Those who are in this category may be accorded affiliate membership (IPRM, 2004).

Importantly, the professional association also acts as a PR examining body, and has provided education and training programmes at certificate level (130 contact hours) and diploma level (105 contact hours) in collaboration with local universities in the Klang Valley, Johor Bahru in Johor, Kota Kinabalu in Sabah and Kuching in Sarawak (IPRM, 2003 & 2004). The programme of study, which is aimed at producing 'a totally made-in-Malaysia product', seeks to provide a wide range of knowledge about public relations practice, coupled with computer skills such as cyber and digital communication. According to Valentine (in Raman, 1999), the former vice president of the institute, there are 3000 diploma graduates and over 5000 certificate graduates who could seek better careers in four relevant sectors: corporate, government, consultancy and non-government organisations. However, the training programmes conducted by the IPRM were not visible enough and also not available through their website. It seems that, arising from the document review and in-depth interviews (see Chapter 7), the institute has not made continuous progress in providing training programmes to their members.

The IPRM today, the oldest and largest PR association in Malaysia, is responsible for shaping the profession. It has almost 500 members who have joined professional development and training programmes organised by the association (IPRM, 2003 & 2004). It is understood that the principal language used by the IPRM is English (international language). However, the Malay language, which is the official and national language, has never been used in their activities. It is doubtful how local PR practitioners, especially from the public sector, who have used the Malay language professionally might benefit from these programmes and it is also questionable how sensitive the institute is to the multi-cultural aspects and local contexts in which public relations operates in Malaysia. Importantly, multicultural public relations encourages diversity of language with regard to international public relations practice. Furthermore, pertinent to this work, although this association has been long established to serve the public relations community in Malaysia, the development of proper research and continuing education within the Malaysian multicultural context seems to be a low priority.

Since its establishment, based on the research for this work, it seems that the role of the IPRM may be more likely to propagate government policies and may be seen as a traditionalist and political association, rather than becoming an independent professional association which develops innovation in the public relations profession. Thus, the IPRM has not yet developed a body of specific Malaysian PR knowledge, which would include suggesting new, distinctive functions for the public relations profession and new thinking in public relations in order to enhance the credibility and trust of Malaysian corporations. Indeed, arising from in-depth interviews (see Chapter 7), the role of the IPRM has been ineffective, as it still focus on the model of public

information rather than strategic communication management, and many of their agenda have not aligned with global benchmarking standards set by established PR professional associations such the Chartered Institute of Public Relations Malaysia and the Public Relations Society of America.

### **International Association for Business Communicators (IABC)**

The association was launched in 1970 with the aim of increasing public relations professionalism. The professional body has 120 chapters in 14 countries, including the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Philippines, Slovenia, South Africa, and Southern Africa (Cutlip et al., 2000: 160). In Malaysia, the global communication association was officially established in 1992 by a group of communicators from public relations, advertising, investor relations and marketing. Thus, the association is not purely a PR organisation. Practitioners who come from professions linked to public relations such as journalism, marketing and advertising are also allowed to gain full membership. However, many do come from public relations backgrounds (IABC, 2004). According to Wakefield (in Culbertson & Chen, 1996: 17), the association has organised a number of national conferences and other formal activities, with emphasis on global public relations; it also has a good relationship with the IPRM, as many members of the IPRM have also become members of this association. Thus, it has directly or indirectly contributed to the PR industry in Malaysia.

Currently, the Malaysia Chapter of the association, a new communications association, has 42 communication practitioners. It has actively promoted continuous professional development and relevant training programmes. The leadership series, which comprises forums or meetings, commenced in January 1999, and these have been held monthly to discuss communications industry issues. It also stimulates networking opportunities among business communicators. The association has also produced a bi-monthly journal, *Communication World*, and a monthly e-newsletter, *CW Bulletin*, to update business communicators regarding communication industry issues and opportunities (IABC, 2004). Like the IPRM, the language used by this association is English, as this has become the official language of administration, especially in the corporate sector. Diversity of language is important to attract and nurture local PR practitioners, especially from the public sector.

Since early 2004, under the presidency of Ghazalie Abdullah, the association's council members, who are responsible for a range of functions such as continuous professional development, special events, memberships, accreditation, and regional board activities, have been elected to mobilise the programmes of the association. Three main programmes - the 'Best Practices for Effective Communication Conference 2004', including an 'IABC Accreditation Workshop', the 'Malaysia IABC Gold Awards Competition 2004/2005' and the 'IABC LI Malaysia' - were set up to meet the goals of the association (Bernama, 2004a). Besides this, the association launched an annual competition in 2005, the 'Silver Quill Awards', which incorporates 24 categories in the following three divisions: communication management, communication skills and communication creative (The Star, 2004).



The purpose of the association is 'to build the brand, value, membership and funds of the Malaysia Chapter' (IABC, 2004). The establishment of this Chapter is important in equipping business communicators and students with professional skills by focusing on creativity, strategic planning and management, and also encouraging innovative ideas about how to improve various areas of communication management such as public relations, investor relations, marketing communication, and advertising (IABC, 2004). Furthermore, the purpose of IABC accreditation is to improve the standards of professionalism in communication among business communicators. Thus, there are some essential requirements to become skilled, professional communicators. In professional development programmes, qualified members earn their accredited business communicator (ABC) status, with the association issuing the certificate when qualified members meet one of the following requirements: they have had a minimum of five years' practical experience in the profession and hold a bachelor's degree; or they have had nine years of practical experience and passed an examination conducted by the association (IABC, 2004).

In addition, the IABC's research foundation was established to generate a number of applied research projects with regard to the strategic role of communication management (see Cutlip et al., 2000: 47). One of these projects was a large-scale survey on 'Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organisations' conducted by three PR scholars, Larissa A. Grunig, James E. Grunig and David M. Dozier (2002). However, this new research foundation has not yet produced any Malaysian survey research or outcomes.

## 2.4 Implications

It seems clear that the Malaysian PR industry has been substantially influenced by Western PR philosophies from the early establishment of public relations, and that this influence continues in today's development of the profession, not least in the use of English in much of the sector. Notably, in Malaysia, PR practitioners and business communicators are still likely to be practising traditional, one-way communication functions such as media relations and event management. These major functions of public relations can be interpreted as a technical role. Grunig (2003) argues that the press agency or publicity model is the most ineffective way to develop public relations practice. This has also been shown by Malaysian research carried out by Kaur (1997 in Grunig, 2003: 542) on 'the impact of privatisation on public relations and the role of public relations and management in the privatisation process'.

It might thus be worthwhile for the Malaysian PR industry to adapt Western philosophies to local PR practice. It should also move towards strategic managerial functions such as counselling management and reputation management based on applied research and educational development. It seems that although the IPRM has eagerly promoted rewards for excellence for Malaysian PR practitioners and students, the body is more likely to publicise and conduct social gathering activities such as 'Tea Talks', 'Breakfast Talks', contests, glittering ceremonies and similar activities, rather than developing rigorous management research. Additional funding has been spent on decorating the activities and inviting top corporation and government officers in the interests of attracting media coverage from local mainstream media; however, this can be interpreted as polishing the image of the discipline rather than

contributing to its maturation. Importantly, the funding could be used to conduct research development and continuous professional development to improve the discipline.

Furthermore, in terms of the medium of communication, learning a new language should be viewed as an entrance to another world where users may unlock new opportunities and learn different cultures. Becoming a 'global' practitioner, they must master at least two languages that are frequently used in the workplace in order to reach a wider market. A case study by Jon White on managing diversity is a good example here: in South Africa, reflecting concern with cultural diversity, different languages were used by members of the top management of Barloworld to describe their organisational strategy development. The company produced the 1999 *Annual Report* focusing on the key concept – 'creating shareholder value by building powerful industrial brands and long-term relationships'. It seems that the company has determined 'its unique strengths as an ability to manage diversity' and this must be aligned with the organisation's business strategy (White, in Moss & DeSanto, 2002: 84).

## **2.5 Summary**

This chapter offers an overview of the development of public relations and communication management in three different countries, America, Britain and Malaysia. Importantly, excellent public relations and communication management in Malaysia relies substantially on the pivotal roles of PR professional associations such as the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) and the International Association

for Business Communicators (IABC). It seems that these associations are still ‘young’ in contributing to the body of Malaysian PR knowledge. Research and education are key elements for raising the standards of PR professionalism, but these are not yet much in evidence. The literature review which follows seeks to offer an understanding of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study.

## CHAPTER 3

### LITERATURE REVIEW & THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

#### 3.0 Profession from a Sociological Perspective.

It is important to address three crucial questions: (1) What constitutes a profession?, (2) Who is a professional?, and (3) How does an occupation become a profession? (Morrell, 2004: 8; Neal & Morgan, 2000: 10). There are enormous debates, especially from a sociological perspective (Freidson, 1994; McDonald, 1995; Neal & Morgan, 2000; Watson, 2002; Larson, 1977; Moore, 1970; Halmos, 1973; Johnson, 1972; Wilensky, 1964), about what 'professionalisation' is and how 'professionalisation' can be developed for a particular sector. More recent debates have viewed management as a professional discipline<sup>1</sup> (Morrell, 2004; Squires, 2001; Mintzberg, 1996a, in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996). Indeed, all these perspectives have been discussed on the basis of two dominant notions of organising the division of labour.

In a sociological analysis, these two dominant ideas are: Adam Smith's notion of a free market for the principle of organising labour, and Max Weber's analysis of the rationalisation of work in a rational-legal bureaucracy. Smith's notion of the free market is the model accepted among entrepreneurs because the system is 'automatic, self-adjusting and efficient' in the competitive business marketplace, where everyone

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<sup>1</sup> A number of management scholars have 'borrowed' sociological concepts to improve the status and nature of management work. Moreover, Squires (2001: 484) argued that 'management has structural affinities with other professional disciplines such as medicine, engineering and architecture', and also is seen implicitly as 'applied social science'.

can do business without interference from a regulatory body (Freidson, 1994: 50). In contrast, Max Weber's notion of 'totality'<sup>2</sup> has been favoured among regulators and bureaucrats who seek to control and regulate the markets. It is believed that Weber's notion of 'totality' is more systematic and efficient when based on a hierarchical and formal organisation: every activity is planned and organised in an orderly way (Freidson, 1994: 55-56). Additionally, Weber's notion emphasises the importance of higher education and expertise as well as economic capital in increasing professionalism (MacDonald, 1995: 9).

Freidson (1994) points out that Smith's notion of the free market was criticised for producing individualistic and materialistic entrepreneurs in the era of capitalism. By contrast, Weber's notion of 'totality' emphasises collective units in a class system. Every member in the class system must comply with the regulation, licensing and policy set by a professional authority; thus, the behaviour that is important to maintain members' privilege is fully controlled by a supervisory authority, with all commodities that are produced by these members being fully standardised to meet the client's needs (Freidson, 1994; Larson, 1977: 69).

It is important to note that management must exercise authority because holistically, the management is responsible for how various tasks are coordinated. All tasks are performed relating to the levels of the workers' skills – clerical, semi-skilled and skilled. Occupational jurisdiction is necessarily established for every worker who needs to be licensed (Freidson, 1994: 102-104), for in order to produce great products

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<sup>2</sup> The notion of 'totality' or wholeness is about how people view the world as a whole. Weber's notion is influenced by Marxist theory. Marx's concept of society is a complex whole or totality encompassing both structure and super-structure (Siraj, 2005).

or commodities, it is important to produce skilled workers who are qualified to carry out distinctive tasks in the professional market. Indeed, the standardisation of professional services is crucial to unify and maintain the quality of products/commodities produced by professionals (Larson, 1977: 14; Mintzberg, (1996b) in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 658). Mintzberg (1996b, in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 659), who coined the term ‘professional bureaucracy’<sup>3</sup>, observed that all professionals like doctors and lawyers must be equipped with necessary knowledge and skills through a long period of formal training. Similarly, this thesis argues, ‘professionalisation’ is very important for certain management functions<sup>4</sup> such as public relations, as without interference from a regulatory body, corporate sins will be practised in the corporate world and this poses a threat to a civil society. For example, following a number of critical corporate scandals, such as the misconduct of Enron, Arthur Andersen and WorldCom in the early 2000s<sup>5</sup> (McGrath, 2005: 50), strict adherence to professional standards and a stringent code of professional conduct have been insisted upon by accounting professional associations (American Institute of Certified Public Accountants, 2005).

Within the framework of the example given, it is worth discussing why Weber’s notion of totality should be paid serious attention. The importance of proper accreditation and licensing is taken into account in developing a professional project; professionalism is also about gaining autonomy and status from a wider society (Larson, 1977: 56). In order to increase professionalism, professional bodies are

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<sup>3</sup> ‘Professional bureaucracy emphasises authority of a professional nature – the power of expertise’ (Mintzberg 1996b, cited in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 659).

<sup>4</sup> Management must become a science or profession (Mintzberg, 1996a cited in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 22).

<sup>5</sup> Multi-national corporations such as Enron, Arthur Andersen and WorldCom, which were recently accused of corporate fraud and scandals, have alarmed the accounting profession.

established to self-regulate the market - a process which may improve professional privilege, status and collegiality (Cutlip et al., 2000: 145) and minimise competition<sup>6</sup> (Abbot, 1988: 11) as well as protecting clients from unqualified practitioners (Freidson, 1994; Moore, 1970: 109-111). In contrast, Smith's notion of the free market sees this professionalism as a barrier to improving commodities based on global competition and gaining higher profitability for the organisation. Thus, some scholars see professionalism as a myth or illusory posturing when it is really about gaining power and monopolising certain markets (Larson, 1977; Watson, 2002; Morrell, 2004: 6).

In the absence of professionalism, workers may jeopardise the occupational system and pose a threat to society. Thus, in an occupational system, professional classes/groups are established to distinguish between qualified and unqualified practitioners, and professions can be said to rely on three major elements: expertise, credentials and autonomy (Freidson, 1994: 154). Moreover, Mark Neal and John Morgan (2000: 11), who addressed the development of new and established professions, stress the importance of several key issues as follows:

- 1) Why occupations strive so strongly for 'professional' status.
- 2) How the established professional institutions instil professional conduct among their members through regulations and training.
- 3) How the institutions and their public profiles are sustained by members' activities and discourse in the everyday pursuit of their work (ibid).

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<sup>6</sup> Profession is concerned with the standardised and high quality of services offered by professionals rather than producing a large quantity of commodities (mass-production) in a highly business-oriented competitive market. This is because all members belong to professional associations.



Apart from discussing the professional/occupational system generally, there are three occupational groups in the division of labour: professional, technician and craft (Freidson, 1994: 152). In a professional hierarchy, the professional is placed in the top rank, and this refers to someone who acquires esoteric knowledge and skills in a specific area or discipline (Larson, 1977). Furthermore, 'a service ideal and public trust and/or personal autonomy' are considered essential elements in becoming a professional (Bennet & Hokenstad, in Halmos, 1973: 24). To be a professional, someone needs to have had a long educational training and proof of passing certain levels of examination before he/she is qualified to practise in the occupation. In practice, under minimum supervision, they must perform difficult tasks and show the substantial results of their work. In contrast, technicians have elementary knowledge and skills about their roles and responsibilities. They may undergo a short educational programme prior to practising the occupation (but technicians can be experts too if they expand their knowledge; otherwise, they only perform clerical work). The lowest rank in the labour market is the craftsperson, who may have little or no theoretical knowledge or higher education. They are also considered 'blue-collar' workers who are strictly supervised and instructed to perform routine tasks (Freidson, 1994: 152). For example, it is common for an operator who has little or no academic qualification to perform routine work over long hours in the production line.

Professionalism is about exercising a degree of control and power over the society through influencing policy decision makers (such as the state) (Freidson, 1994: 41). Thus, it is important to ensure that professionals can influence a state's policy and maintain their professional privileges (Freidson, 1994: 44-45). A profession also

requires an exclusive jurisdiction which is capable of being established independently. In distinguishing a profession from another occupation, *altruism* is clearly practised in a professional service (Johnson, 1972: 13). Specifically, professional altruism is seen as a 'personal service' to clients which may influence all industrial societies (Halmos, 1970 in Johnson, 1972: 13).

Indeed, Freidson (1994: 43) notes that there are three key elements of a profession: the body of knowledge, the public itself, and the training institutions (and professional associations). Morrell (2004: 10) argues that in determining the qualities of a profession, two important aspects are taken into account: the body of knowledge (e.g. abstract, codified and expert) and 'the role of underlying science' – how professionals can apply particular knowledge to their work. Thus, it is essential to develop uniformity in the body of knowledge (Larson, 1977: 17). Specifically, 'the core element of the professionalisation project is the production of producers' (Larson, 1977: 50). The university is often a main site where the production of knowledge can be developed to produce skilled workers or professionals. Upon the completion of their training and educational development, professionals gain esoteric knowledge and skills to improve their professional services in the marketplace. Commonly, part of their training is to become reflective practitioners. Academic institutions are seen as 'arenas for the exercise of professional activity' (Schon, 1995: 3). In addition, the professionalisation project is interpreted as the monopolisation of particular competences and a concomitant acquisition of status and privileges for an occupational group (Larson, 1977: 51). Apart from noting the importance of higher education and exclusive jurisdiction for developing a professional project, building

respectability is crucial in the way the world perceives the value of a particular profession (MacDonald, 1995: 189).

According to Hodkinson and Issitt (1995: 4), it is worth noting that the concepts of competence and expertise are based on a post-Fordism perspective. This model rejects the classical Fordist aspect of mass production, and instead emphasises the importance of flexible specialisation. In a highly competitive business market, there are two ways for corporations to survive: maintaining low skills of mass production in producing low quality products, and high skills in which total quality management is at stake. The second route of industrial production is based on training and skills development. This leads to developing a framework of National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) as described in Figure 3.1.

This framework, with the emphasis on quality, may improve the classical models of professionalism in dealing with professional practice in a changing business environment. This model supports Weber's notion of the standardisation of a profession in terms of the determination of occupational groups and the levels of practice in the divisions of labour. Having discussed the sociological perspective of professionalism, in the next section, the terms 'profession' and 'professional' are thoroughly addressed to determine what constitutes a profession.

### Figure 3.1

The National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) Framework (1991, cited in Hodkinson & Issitt, 1995: 6)

**Level 1** – Performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine and predictable.

**Level 2** – Competence in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. Some of the activities are complex or non-routine, and there is some individual responsibility or autonomy. Collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a work group or team, may often be a requirement.

**Level 3** – Competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy and control guidance by others is often required.

**Level 4** – Competence in a broad range of complex, technical or professional work activities performed in a wide range of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of resources.

**Level 5** – Competence which involves the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of substantial resources features strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

### 3.1 The Confusion of the Terms 'Profession' and 'Professional'

The terms 'profession' and 'professional' are often misunderstood because some people claim that any occupation that relates to personal gain can be considered as 'professional'. It is common for advertisements to promise that a 'professional service' will be offered - for jobs ranging from direct selling to cosmetic surgery. This misleading concept should be corrected by arguing that the term 'profession' requires a theory of professional development system. Theodore Caplow (in Abbott, 1988: 11) maintains that a profession needs a structure and strict professional standards, and asserts that:

Professions begin with the establishment of professional associations that have explicit membership rules to exclude the unqualified. Second, they change their names, in order to lose their past, to assert their monopoly, and, most importantly, to give themselves a label capable of legislative restriction. Third, they set up a code of ethics to assert their social utility, to further regulate the incompetent, and to reduce internal competition. Fourth, they agitate politically to obtain legal recognition, aiming at first to limit the professional title and later to criminalize unlicensed work in their jurisdiction.

Similarly, L'Etang (1999: 283) points out that someone who considers him/herself a professional needs to undergo approved university training in collaboration with a professional association in order to equip him/herself with specialised knowledge and skills prior to practising the profession. L'Etang (1999: 283) adds that in order to achieve 'Chartered Status', the professional institution that is responsible for organising a 'professional project' must show that 50% of their members possess an approved qualification. Clearly, it is important to determine an ideal of professionalism as one which contributes to effective management within a particular field. Apart from grasping knowledge and skills, multiculturalism should be considered when we apply the theory of professional development to a multicultural

country like Malaysia. This basic conceptual theory is used by the researcher to develop this study.

### **3.2 Conceptualisation of This Study**

This section deals with a family of terms surrounding the idea of a profession from the perspectives of sociological theories and a functionalist model, as well as strategic management models. In public relations, the topic of professionalism is the top issue discussed by almost all PR scholars all over the world (see Grunig & Grunig, 2003; Sallot et al., 1997 & 1998; L'Etang, 2004; Sriramesh, in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003; Sriramesh, 2004; van Ruler, in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). It is worth noting that several terms are used - 'profession', 'professional', 'professionalism' and 'professionalisation' – and these will be explored in order to understand the development of the theoretical framework of this study.

#### **3.2.1 Definition of 'Profession'**

The word 'occupation', is derived from the Latin '*occupare*', which means 'to seize or to occupy', whilst a career (as a more expandable definition than occupation) is derived from the Latin '*carrus*' (cart) and '*carraria*', which means 'road for vehicles' (Kultgen, 1988: 81: 82) and here can be understood as the road travelled by someone. In other words, a career is 'the fate of a man (or woman) running his life-cycle in a particular society at a particular time' (ibid). However, offering a more complex explanation than the words occupation and career, profession is derived from the Latin '*pro + fateri*', which means 'to confess, to own to, to take the vows of a

religious order, to declare openly, to lay claim to some quality or feeling and to declare oneself proficient or expert' (ibid).

In understanding the words occupation, career and profession, several formal definitions of profession are identified. A simple definition of profession is 'a job that you need special skills and qualifications to do, especially one with high social status' (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002: 1125). Kultgen (1988: 4) expands the definition of profession by describing it as 'an institution that confronts individuals as a reality to which they must relate without the ability to change it significantly'. Whitehead states that a profession is 'an avocation whose activities are subjected to theoretical analysis, and are modified by theoretical conclusions derived from that analysis' (cited in Kultgen, 1988: 46). Whitehead offers a clearer explanation by describing a profession as requiring 'a special license to a particular group to organise itself within a special field of action' (ibid: 46). This particular group is called 'professional'.

### **3.2.2 Definition of 'Professional'**

A professional can be defined as 'someone who has special skills and qualifications' or 'someone who has a lot of skills or training' (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002: 1125). Watson (2002: 104) argues that the term 'professional' should be viewed as 'expert occupation' or knowledge-based occupation'. Cutlip et al. (2000) adds that the practice of professionals is based on knowledge and skills they acquire and how they commit themselves to maintaining their status and privileges in their society. Kultgen (1988: 73) also supports this view by positing that 'the authority of the professional is

based on technical competence, rather than status, wisdom, or moral character'. Not surprisingly, he or she is 'an authority in a special field of knowledge and skill not on other matters', and therefore deserves to enjoy a high status and prestige in a particular society; but at the same time he or she must uphold codes of ethics and professional conduct to protect the profession itself and benefit the society at large. The next definition is 'professionalisation', which is important to understand as a phenomenon or living system in which professionals are practising their skills and knowledge.

### **3.2.3 Definition of 'Professionalisation'**

The word 'professionalisation' simply refers to the formal, social process whereby a profession is legitimised within the institution of the profession and the society as a whole. The closely-related word 'professionalise' means 'to make an activity or organisation professional, especially by paying the people involved in it' (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002: 1125). More formal definitions have been offered, of which Kultgen's (1988: 100) is useful: 'the organization of an occupation into the form assumed by paradigm professions'. L'Etang (2004: 226) points out that 'professionalisation requires promotional efforts, and the aspiration for professional status is both a function and a symptom of promotional culture', while Cutlip et al. (2000: 149) importantly touch upon ethics, saying that 'professionalisation institutionalises the best practices and establishes standards of quality that serve the public interest'.



These concepts indicate something of what these terms mean and of the importance attached to professional activities. Professionals acquire a particular expertise which is commonly known as 'professionalism'.

### **3.2.4 Definition of 'Professionalism'**

The last important term to discuss is professionalism with respect to professional ethics. A simple definition of professionalism is 'the qualities and skills that someone with a professional job is expected to have' (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002: 1125). A more formal definition of professionalism, identified by Kultgen (1988: 9), is 'the occupational ideal for many non-professionals and is likely to become the ideal for more with the advance of industrialisation and proliferation of technologically based occupations'. In this definition, Kultgen (1988) described the occupational ideal as being important to our society as a whole. Professionals must thus uphold professional ethics to maintain their status and prestige in society. Cutlip et al. (2000) also support this stance by arguing for the importance of practising applied ethics rather than codes of ethics to maintain the professional status of public relations. They maintain that 'ethics without competence is meaningless and competence without ethics is directionless' (Cutlip et al., 2000: 143).

In public relations, in order to enforce such ethics, professional bodies like the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), the International Association for Business Communicators (IABC), the International Public Relations Association (IPRA), and, in Malaysia, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) must play a vital role in implementing and

maintaining the professional status of public relations. These professional associations must advocate and enforce accreditation and licensing for public relations practitioners (see Cutlip et al., 2000: 155-171). As a result of this enforcement, professional associations must not only be able to enhance the standards of professionalism within public relations but may also benefit society as a whole. Indeed, it is worth noting the multi-disciplinary perspectives (the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism) on professionalism to understand which aspects of professionalism are appropriate and should be focused on in terms of public relations.

### **3.3 Perspectives on Professionalism**

It is not enough to describe the definitions of a profession without relating it to the notion of professionalism itself. Ehling (1992: 440) noted that the term professionalism is not 'self-evident'. It requires an intellectual and analytical reasoning to raise the standards of professionalism in a discipline. There are a number of perspectives on professionalism that are practised by professional societies, both formally and informally.

Kultgen (1988) argues that there are two perspectives on the meaning of profession. First, there are the traditional 'learned' professions such as medicine, law, and architecture, which require highly technical skills, and are widely known as established professions, while the other perspective refers to professional ethics involving ideals, aspirations and rules of conduct such as those included by the 'learned' professions and applies to education (academicians and teachers),

engineering, accounting, science, counselling, government officials, and the military. Both perspectives require a comprehensive education and examinations for any qualifications (Ehling, 1992) and would therefore hardly include other occupational groups such as 'professional artists', 'professional athletes', 'professional thieves', or 'professional killers' (Kultgen, 1988: 5). It is important to differentiate between the professional practice that gains for a living or a commercial purpose, and the professional practice that needs a knowledge base, a societal value and a specific historical sense. Kimball (1992: 316) argues that:

A profession is not a money getting business. It has no element of commercialism in it. True, the professional man seeks to live by what he earns, but his main purpose and desire is to be of service to those who seek his aid and to the community of which he is a necessary part.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the second perspective on what constitutes a profession has become more popular and widely acceptable. In fact, some of these disciplines - such as accounting, engineering, and the sciences - have been successfully developed and accredited by society at large. Additionally, in the wake of information technology, it is likely that an increasing number of people are interested in pursuing contemporary professions rather than the traditional professions. For example, one of the growing contemporary professions in the United States and Europe is public relations, supported by professional organisations such as the Public Relations Society of America and the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, United Kingdom (PRSA, 2005; CIPR, 2005a). Statistics reveal a bright future for public relations in the United States:

According to the Bureau of Labour Statistics, public relations will be one of the fastest growing fields between 1998 and 2008, that does not require a Master's Degree or higher. The PRSA/IABC 2000 Salary Survey the number of PR professionals has raised from 22% in 1996 to 30%. In 1998, public relations specialists held approximately 122,000 jobs, according to the Bureau of Labour Statistics. Approximately 13,000 of those people

were self-employed. The Bureau of Labour Statistics also states that there were approximately 485,000 advertising, marketing and public relations managers working in all industries in 1998 (PRSA, 2005: 1).

However, public relations is not a 'true' profession because it has not yet met the criteria of professionalism, especially from a sociological perspective; it is therefore important to determine the distinct domain of expertise for public relations (Cornelissen, 2004: 171). In sociological terms, professions need to identify their exclusive jurisdiction in the market (Johnson, 1972: 13). It seems that the survival of the profession depends largely on the role of professional associations and also the rigorousness of the development of research and education in the discipline. The development of this emerging discipline can be better understood by discussing the concepts and definitions of public relations.

### **3.4 Definitions of Public Relations**

There have been many definitions of public relations based on how it functions in organisational settings. Understanding these definitions may strengthen the professionalism of this discipline. Thus, public relations practitioners must play an integrative role in empowering an organisation to build a favourable relationship between an organisation and its constituencies. The definitions of public relations can be divided into five important aspects:

1. Management function and mutual understanding
2. Communication function
3. Two-way communication
4. Persuasion
5. Reputation

Most scholars have emphasised 'management function and mutual understanding' as an effect in their definitions of public relations. For example, *Public Relations News*, a commercial newsletter, reports that:

Public relations is the management function which evaluates public attitudes, identifies the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest, and plans and executes a program of action to earn public understanding and acceptance (cited in Cutlip et al., 2000: 4).

Furthermore, Rex F. Harlow, a public relations scholar, defines public relations as:

The distinctive management function which helps establish and maintain mutual lines of communication, understanding, acceptance and cooperation between an organisation and its publics; involves the management of problems or issues; helps management to keep informed on and responsive to public opinion; defines and emphasises the responsibility of management to serve the public interest; helps management keep abreast of and effectively utilize change, serving as an early warning system to help anticipate trends; and uses research and sound and ethical communication as its principal tools (cited in Cutlip et al., 2000: 4).

The British Institute of Public Relations states that, 'public relations is the deliberate, planned, and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its public' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 7).

Two European countries have also stressed the aspect of mutual understanding in their definitions. For instance, the Deutsche Public Relations Gesellschaft of the Federal Republic of Germany describes public relations as 'the conscious and legitimate effort to achieve understanding and the establishment and maintenance of trust among the public on the basis of systematic research' (Wilcox et al., 1998: 5). Similarly, the Dansk Public Relations Klub of Denmark clearly defines public relations as 'the sustained and systematic managerial effort through which private and public

organisations seek to establish understanding, sympathy, and support in those public circles with which they have or expect to obtain contact' (Wilcox et al., 1998: 5).

Besides emphasising the management function as an effect in their definitions, Nolte, (in Cutlip et al., 2000) also stress the importance of two-way communication. They address the definition of public relations as 'the management function that establishes and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organisation and the publics on whom its success or failure depends' (ibid: 6). Similarly, Nolte points out that public relations is '... the management function which adapts an organisation to its social, political, and economic environment and which adapts that environment to the organisation, for the benefit of both' (cited in Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 7). In addition, Grunig and Hunt (1984: 6) simply state that, 'public relations is part of the management of communication between an organisation and its publics'. Although they emphasised the management of communication in the organisational context, they neglected mutual understanding as an important aspect. Therefore, this definition may be considered insufficient in describing the practice of public relations comprehensively.

On the other hand, Lawrence W. Long and Vincent Hazelton state that 'public relations is a communication function of management through which organisations adapt to, alter, or maintain their environment for the purpose of achieving organisational goals' (cited in Wilcox et al., 1998: 4), thus emphasising the communication function as one of the most significant aspects in their definition.

In today's competitive business environment, reputation plays a vital role in the survival and success of multinational companies. As a result of this concern, the British Institute of Public Relations emphasises reputation as an effect in defining public relations:

Public relations is about reputation - the result of what you do, what you say and what others say about you. Public relations practice is the discipline which looks after reputation with the aim of earning understanding and support, and influencing opinion and behaviour (cited in Newsom et al., 2000: 3).

Another public relations scholar, Peake, states that 'public relations is the planned persuasion to change adverse public opinion or to reinforce public opinion, and the evaluation of results for future use' (cited in Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 7). He thus places particular emphasis on persuasion.

Indeed, the First World Assembly of the International Public Relations Association in Mexico City produced a clear and comprehensive definition of public relations in August 1978: 'The art and science of analysing trends, predicting their consequences, counselling organisation leaders, and implementing planned programs of action which will serve both the organisation's and the public's interest' (cited in Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 7). Furthermore, considering concepts of multiculturalism, Banks (1995: 21) points out that public relations is:

The management of formal communication between organisations and their relevant publics to create and maintain communities of interest and action that favor the organisation, taking full account of the normal human variation in the systems of meaning by which groups understand and enact their everyday lives.

This definition comes close to describing best practice in public relations, which is concerned with mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics and also stresses the importance of culture and diversity for different communities in

different locations. An added definition initiated by Hutton (1999: 211) describes public relations as 'managing strategic relationships'. This definition may seem simple but it has a great deal of substance, as it focuses on management, leadership and mutual understanding. The combination of Banks' and Hutton's definitions and the consideration of diversity management may yield a highly comprehensive public relations definition to prepare for major new challenges in future public relations roles. In addition to discussing the definitions of public relations from Western PR scholars, it is worth noting some definitions described by Malaysian PR scholars and professionals.

#### **3.4.1 Defining Public Relations: A Malaysian Perspective**

This section aims to discuss the definitions of public relations from the viewpoints of Malaysian PR scholars and professionals. Emphasising the importance of influencing public opinion, Mohd Sopiee Sheikh Ibrahim, who was the first president of the IPRM, in 1973 defined public relations as:

The 'art and science' that deals with the opinions of the people and an organisation's relationship with the people it is involved with. The importance of public relations as a discipline that deals with public opinion – as a means of exchanging attitudes and of molding public opinion – needs to be put across clearly (cited in Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 216).

The second Prime Minister of Malaysia, Tun Abdul Razak, who is also known as Malaysia's Father of Development, asserted that public relations played an important



role in informing and persuading Malaysian people, who are multi-ethnic, to accept the New Economic Policy<sup>7</sup> in order to build a great Malaysian society (ibid).

James Peter Chin, who was the vice president of the IPRM, stressed the importance of the image of a company rather than focusing on the quality of products and services. In his definition of public relations, the relationship between an organisation and its publics is imperative. He pointed out that public relations was:

...the art of maintaining harmony between the general public and the company. If the public thinks well of a company, it can be of benefit to the company in the market place (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 217).

Beyond the world of commerce and considering the importance of the image of central and local governments, Ahmad Sarji Abdul Hamid in 1990 viewed public relations as:

An image maker for the various ministries and government agencies and a source of information that would encourage debate about government policies and performance (Idid, in Sriramesh, 2004: 217).

In Malaysia, public relations is widely known as *Perhubungan Awam*, which is a direct translation from English to the Malay language. Generally, Malaysian people have understood that public relations is about disseminating information and influencing publics through the mass media.

According to Syed Arabi Idid (in Sriramesh, 2004), there were debates regarding the definition of public relations among Malay practitioners working in the public and

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<sup>7</sup> 'The Malay-Muslims, as a community, have undergone interesting social changes, especially, after the ethnic riot of May 1969 and subsequently, the introduction of the pro-Malay-Muslim affirmative action policy, called the New Economic Policy (NEP), introduced and implemented in 1971' (Aziz and Shamsul, 2004: 354).

private services. In 1962, the IPRM preferred to use the term *perhubungan raya*<sup>8</sup> to maintain the acronym. Thus, it became the 'Institut Perhubungan Raya Malaysia' in Malay, and in English, it is called the 'Institute of Public Relations Malaysia'. Some Malay practitioners did not agree with this and insisted that the association use the term *perhubungan awam* to address it as the 'Institut Perhubungan Awam Malaysia'. In practice, the term *perhubungan raya* is only used for the association's abbreviation, and no governmental or private organisation has used this term. Instead, the term *perhubungan awam* was widely used in government and private services from the 1960s to the end of the 1990s to describe public relations functions.

Since the early 1990s, it seems that many major Malaysian corporations have begun to use the new term 'Corporate Communications' to replace the conventional term 'Public Relations'. Evidence from reviewing corporate literature shows that 'Corporate Communications' (*Komunikasi Korporat*), which deals with reputation management, had been introduced due to the new reforms of two government policies: the Industrial Policy and the Privatisation Policy in the 1990s. Possible reasons why the new term is applied are that it emphasises the management effect (van Ruler, 2000) as a public relations function and also views the public relations role as being beyond publicity and media relations.

In Malaysia, *Perhubungan Awam* is typically used as a tactical tool by traditional institutions such as government agencies to disseminate a particular policy and to influence their publics to react positively (Adnan, 1987: 4). In contrast, *Komunikasi*

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<sup>8</sup>The term 'raya' is associated with 'national' in the light of the early role of the IPRM as a non-government organisation in supporting the government policies.

*Korporat* is used managerially by Malaysian corporations to promote a company's products and services to multiple audiences such as customers, suppliers, corporate clients, and legislators (Abdullah, 2000; 27). The term *Komunikasi Korporat* is also associated with corporate image, identity and reputation (Melewar, 2003: 197). However, these two terms (Public Relations versus Corporate Communications) have often been misunderstood and have been much debated by management and public relations scholars (Cornelissen, 2004: 48).

In fact, with the adoption of the Privatisation Policy, a number of privatised government institutions, such as Telekom Malaysia (the national telecommunication provider), Pos Malaysia (the national post office) and University Putra Malaysia (one of the established public universities), have changed the title 'Division of Public Relations' to the 'Division of Corporate Communications' to extend the role of public relations from publicity to more advanced functions, such as counsel management and reputation management (Selamat, 2000: 3). This development clearly illustrates that the role of public relations is now changing in Malaysia. Importantly, public relations is also more likely to integrate its marketing functions to enhance an organisation's performance, which has resulted in integrated terms such as 'Marketing Communications' or 'Marketing Public Relations' (Gregory, 2000: 15; Gregory, 2002: 226). For example, a Malaysian PR firm, Ovation Sdn Bhd offers marketing communication services to their clients. Some Malaysian corporations have also developed their 'Divisions of Marketing Communication' to run mixed communication activities (Mahpar, 2005). The next topic discussed is the importance of professionalism from the perspective of public relations, which has been profoundly influenced by the disciplines of sociology and psychology.

### **3.5 Professionalisation: A Perspective on Public Relations**

It is worth noting that understanding the definitions of public relations may help to shape the notions of professionalism in this field. Indeed, it is important to discuss the notion of the professionalism of public relations because it is absolutely not enough to view the professional status of public relations as being based on the huge amount of income the practitioners gain (Ehling, 1992) or the prestige and popularity they earn.

Over the years, there have been many debates on professionalism in public relations. A number of leading PR scholars in the United States of America and Europe have viewed public relations as a profession from different perspectives. However, they have all claimed that professional status is highly important for PR practitioners and educators in achieving proper recognition from society as a whole.

One of these scholars is Edward L. Bernays, in America, who was also known as the father of public relations, and who coined the term the 'new profession of public relations counsel' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cutlip et al., 2000: 124). Grunig and Hunt (1984) also support this concept by arguing that, being a profession, a distinction may be drawn between the new PR professionals and traditional communication technicians. They also argue that 'an occupation becomes a profession when a majority of its practitioners qualify as professionals' (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 66). However, L'Etang and Pieczka (1996) apparently view this issue from the sociological perspective and question Grunig and Hunt's (1984) concept by arguing about the required size of the aforementioned majority of PR practitioners and what

the pivotal roles of practitioners are in society. Indeed, Cutlip et al. (2000), who also wrote the best-selling PR textbook, *Effective Public Relations*, add that aside from being committed to high standards of ethics and professionalism, PR is more varied than other skilled occupations and must be viewed as a unique profession that serves the public interest. In supporting this argument, they confidently assert that practising applied ethics is essential for PR practitioners: it is a form of self-regulation to uphold that professionalism.

Sam Black (1976), one of the pioneers of public relations in Britain, in turn argues that public relations practice is quite similar to medical practice. It would seem that he held that public relations should be viewed as a traditional profession, which is the first perspective of professionalism described by Kultgen (1988). In contrast, L'Etang and Pieczka (1996) argue that public relations must be viewed as a new profession beyond the traditional ones. It should provide additional academic courses and research, especially from the perspective of applied social science, to develop the sociology of public relations.

Wright (1979) simply notes that professional status will have been achieved when

... public relations has a body of knowledge, a professional society, a code of ethics, a system for accreditation of practitioners by examination, a process for reporting violations including reviewing and censuring, a foundation for furthering public relations research and education, specified curricula at university level, (L'Etang & Pieczka, 1996: 2).

Indeed, it is very important for public relations to achieve a professional status by adopting the second perspective of professionalism described by Kultgen (1988). This perspective needs to be aligned with management concepts such as strategic management, corporate strategy and the organisational goals of an organisation. Thus,

public relations practitioners may become strategic integrators to build a favourable relationship between an organisation and its publics.

Although the future of public relations shows promise, top management executives, as Bahl asserts (1995: 136), are still not always aware of the importance of public relations to an organisation and simply view this field as an art, and one which is very subjective and difficult to measure. However, public relations should be seen as a serious profession, one which focuses on strategic management (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Cutlip et al., 2000). Discussing case studies may further help to explain the nature of the emerging professionalism of public relations.

### **3.6 Debates on PR Professionalism**

The notions of professionalism in public relations can be grasped by describing case studies conducted by PR scholars from all over the world. These case studies are important in discussing status among PR practitioners and educators pertaining to the characteristics of the professional, such as core values, ethics, the body of knowledge, professional organisations, and education (Grunig & Hunt, 1984: 66).

Although public relations has been widely practised in developed and developing countries, there is firstly still a conceptual debate and some confusion concerning the standards of PR professionalism, and secondly there is a vital gap between the standard of professional practice that is desirable and requisite, and existing professional practice. These phenomena may have not only diminished professional abilities among practitioners but also directly or indirectly confused the general

public, who simply view public relations as an 'occupation' rather than as a serious 'profession'.

In European countries, especially Britain, as well as the United States of America, many PR scholars have studied the standards of the PR industry with regard to its professional status. Arguably, there are four main requirements in the form of interdisciplinary guidelines to identify a 'profession'. It must have:

... a well-defined body of knowledge, completion of some standardized and prescribed course of study, examination and certification by a state, and oversight by a state agency which has disciplinary powers over practitioners' behaviours (Sallot et al., 1997: 198).

To these guidelines, Nelson adds that there are:

... five important characteristics of professionalism: professional values, membership in professional organizations, professional norms, an intellectual tradition, and development of technical skills (in Sallot et al., 1997: 198).

Notably, Nelson's (1999) procedure has been applied by PR scholars over the past 20 years to determine the standards of professionalism within public relations (Cameron et al., 1996). Therefore, these concepts are among the most influential in measuring the basic level of professionalism in public relations. In order to gauge professional attributes among PR academics and practitioners, Sallot et al. (1997: 199) discuss eight major dimensions of public relations identified by: 'knowledge and skills in managing PR activities (particularly objectives and goals); communication strategies; research; salary; role in the organisation; ethical guidelines for self-regulation; education/training; and accreditation/licensing'. Although many PR practitioners agree the importance of accreditation (registration) and technical competencies, they ignore the importance of licensing in determining the standards of professionalism in

this field (Cameron, et al., 1996: 51). However, it is arguable that Sallot, Cameron and Lariscy's studies are viewed narrowly, as the standards of PR professionalism can be increased by acquiring technical expertise such as media production skills. From a strategic management perspective, today's PR practitioners require not solely technical expertise but also managerial competencies in managing their work in a complex business environment. This is the reason why this study attempts to examine the standards of PR professionalism from multiple perspectives (the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism).

Parkinson (2001) argues that PR practitioners have to adopt a code of ethics which is focused on professional rather than personal ethics, and, in addition, Grunig (2000) maintains that PR practitioners must uphold core professional values in order to alter organisational behaviour. The core values identified by Grunig (2000: 23) are 'collectivism, collaboration and societal corporation and communal relationships'. Besides discussing professional ethics, accreditation and core values, Elmer (2000: 190) finds that there is no consistent level of functional professionalism in PR practitioners' performances. Kruckeberg (1998: 235), on the other hand, argues that the field of public relations must be viewed as 'an occupation that requires its own identity as well as clearly defined professional parameters'.

In contrast, Steiner (1999) questions the importance of professionalism in public relations management by arguing:

The uniformity of thought and conformity of behaviour that underpin professionalism can increase the gulf between PR theory and practice, diminish the richness of experiences and undermine the identity of PR professionals (1999: 1).



Although Kruckeberg (1998) and Steiner (1999) approach the profession from different perspectives, they both agree on the importance of identity for PR practitioners and on the future directions of public relations.

In discussing the identity of public relations, the body of PR knowledge pioneered by the foremost American scholars has been the most widely adopted by academics and practitioners in other developed countries, especially Britain, and in developing countries, particularly those in Asia (Sriramesh, in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). For example, the Philippine PR industry, which is controlled by males, is an adoption of the American Western model and is thus urban-centred (Panol, 2000).

Although there has been rigorous development in the body of American PR knowledge, surprisingly, a study by Culbertson and Chen (1996: 412) reveals that mastering journalistic skills in PR education in America has been overemphasised. They also note some shortcomings in the PR curriculum, especially in communication courses offered by 15 schools and departments of journalism. In fact, although a new curriculum, International Public Relations, has been developed and studied, much of it is still too close to journalism studies. Therefore, in the PR curricula, public relations academics need to design a comprehensive programme, not merely focusing on journalistic skills (Ehling, 1992: 462-463).

In their contribution to this discussion, L'Etang and Pieczka (1996:13) argue that there has been a huge discrepancy between the educational development of public relations in Europe (especially the United Kingdom) and that in America. They oppose the American PR curriculum and argue that PR education should be integrated

and made interdisciplinary by drawing from the conventional disciplines, such as 'moral philosophy, philosophy of language, sociology, epistemology, and media studies, and also from specific disciplines such as psychology, management and marketing' (ibid).

Another study (by Ekachai & Komolsevin, 1998) indicates that although the American PR model has been generally adopted in Thai PR education, PR academics at private universities perceive the curriculum to be somewhat lacking. This study proposes additional comprehensive courses, such as 'interpersonal communication, intercultural/international communication, integrated marketing communication and new media technology' (Ekachai & Komolsevin, 1998: 1).

In addition to this argument, van Ruler (2003) has challenged European PR scholars to produce their own body of PR knowledge, and not replicate that in the Anglo-American model, by arguing that research is one of the most important factors in improving the quality of professionalism in Europe (Hansen, 2003). Although the recent establishment of professional bodies like the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR) in the United Kingdom has substantially contributed to the quality of professionalism, there remains a lack of research into professionalism in Europe (see Koper, in van Ruler & Vercic, 2004). The European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) was specifically aimed at enhancing the international body of PR knowledge (see van Ruler & Vercic, 2004).

Besides emphasising the importance of research, it has been said that academic education is an ultimate instrument in attaining a professional status for public

relations (L'Etang, 1999; Ehling, 1992; Singh & Smyth, 2000; Stacks et al., 1999). In contrast, top management officers of the IPR, UK, Doug Smith (1990 in L'Etang, 1999) and Peter Walker (1993 in L'Etang, 1999), along with a PR academic, Mallison (1996 in L'Etang, 1999), who are opposed to such academic ideas, believe that PR professionals crucially need to possess sufficient vocational training in the field (L'Etang, 1999). Nonetheless, PR practitioners and academics have agreed that special elements such as training, experience and expertise outcomes are important for career development in public relations (Stacks et al., 1999).

It is also worth noting the importance of dominant coalitions and strategic decision-making at the strategic managerial level in organisations in achieving the status of professionalism in public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984; White & Dozier, 1992; Ehling, 1992). Supporting this argument, more than half of the top management officers in Australia play significant roles in strategic management functions (Singh & Smyth, 2000). Furthermore, excellent public relations practitioners or PR professionals are able to have executive power to contribute to management decision-making in any company policy the organisation develops and implements (White & Dozier, 1992). By mastering a professional basis of knowledge, PR practitioners can play a managerial role at the top management level and thus enhance the value of public relations:

More than anything else, excellent public relations departments are characterised by a professional base of knowledge – especially the knowledge needed to play a managerial, strategic, symmetrical, and ethics role in an organisation. Increasingly, excellent public relations practitioners have studied public relations formally in a university, continuing education program, or lectures and seminars of a professional organisation. Even more commonly, excellent practitioners continually read, study, and learn – through books, scholarly journals, and professional publications. They think about and approach their work like a

scholar: thinking, searching the literature, planning, and evaluating what they do (cited in Grunig & Grunig, 2003: 540).

For example, as a result of the contribution of communication consultants from the Marketing & Communication Agency Ltd (MCA) to management decision-making in Barlows's corporate strategies, several management changes were made. These included the use of multilingual communication, especially in their 1999 Annual Report, to appeal to stakeholders from European countries; managing cultural diversity among their employees; and changing the company name from Barlows to Barloworld to improve its corporate identity (White, in Moss & DeSanto, 2002: 84). This case shows that public relations is not only about communication but also involves influencing the behaviour of strategic constituencies (shareholders and employees, including the senior management team and customers) in making their contribution to organisational strategy development.

In contrast, in the Netherlands, although top management officers have been found to value public relations as a strategic management function, most PR practitioners are observed to practise a low level of communication management which coordinates production and representation (van Ruler, 2000: 412). Thus, PR practitioners there seem to play a technical rather than a managerial role (van Ruler, 2000; Park, 2003). PR practitioners need more than knowledge of press relations to practise today's public relations management (Hutton, 1999 & 2001; Gregory, 2000; White & Mazur, 1995). In addition, two studies (Bahl, 1995; van Ruler, 2000) indicated that there is a lack of significant knowledge of public relations management among a large number of PR executives.



When discussing the aspects of public relations management, it is argued that public relations is able to play a vital role in supporting strategic decision-making, and building a distinct relationship between an organisation and its constituencies (Kitchen, 1997a: 60). Supporting this argument, Warnaby and Moss (in Kitchen, 1997) challenge the traditional theory of strategic management in public relations - advanced by Grunig and his research team - by proposing a fresh, emerging model of strategic management in public relations which describes a key role for public relations at the highly strategic managerial level. Here, the role of public relations is regarded as being a dynamic and 'environmental scanning role' in managing the issues and crises organisations may grapple with. It should also constitute 'distinctive-capabilities strategies' in supporting organisations with regard to three key dimensions: reputation, corporate architecture and innovation (Warnaby & Moss in Kitchen, 1997: 66). This concept is necessary to achieve a competitive advantage in today's business environment (Kitchen, 1997a).

Besides discussing the notion of PR professionalism in Western countries, there are a few local studies regarding the profile of public relations practitioners in Malaysia. Idid (in Sriramesh, 2004), who conducted research on the profiles of PR practitioners, found that 23% of respondents reported having bachelor's degrees and only 4% had master's degrees. In 1994, a second study by Idid revealed that there was a sharp increase in the number of PR practitioners holding academic qualifications. The results showed that 44% of respondents had bachelor's degrees and 9% master's degrees. Additionally, evidence from in-depth interviews conducted by Kaur (2002 in Sriramesh, 2004: 220) indicates that 80% of the heads of PR departments possessed university degrees and 17% had a diploma in public relations. Apparently, the

majority of Malaysian PR practitioners now possess university degrees, believing that having a degree enhances the professionalism of their practice. This study would positively contribute to the development to the PR industry in Malaysia (ibid).

In terms of practitioners' roles and responsibilities, Idid in 1977 and 1992 (Sriramesh, 2004) conducted local studies focusing on typical PR functions - press and media relations, and event management (see Table 3.1). It is arguable that, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, those typical functions described in Table 3.1 are no longer viewed as distinctive knowledge and skills (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001). Today's PR practitioners are required to master skills well beyond publicity and event management. However, there have been no local studies conducted with regard to an advanced level of public relations functions focusing on strategic communication management or reputation management.

**Table 3.1: Practitioners' Responsibilities (Idid's studies in 1977 & 1992)**

**Source: Sriramesh, (2004: 221)**

<b>The Functions of Public Relations</b>	<b>1977</b>	<b>1992</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Dealing with press	78	76
2. Holding press conferences	81	-
3. Answering public queries	95	83
4. Receiving guests	94	82
5. Maintaining relationship with other government departments	92	-
6. Master of ceremonies	72	79
7. Publications	73	75
8. Advice on public views	73	61

Although many studies have been conducted on the current development of public relations, there remains a huge gap between the perceptions of PR academics and practitioners (Stacks et al., 1999; Neff et al., 1999). One of the major factors is that most PR academics and practitioners think of public relations as a communication function. Although a few of them may realise the importance of the PR management function, it seems that they fail to integrate theories of PR management with their practice in reality.

Some improvements in defining the role of public relations have certainly been made by PR scholars, but it is arguable whether Asian PR academics and practitioners should simply adopt Western PR theories in their daily practice without considering their own cultural diversity, including racial differences, religion and language, which is evident in their multi-ethnic communities. How important are cultural differences in practising excellent public relations? Practitioners and academics in this field should be concerned about cultural differences in both English and non-English-speaking countries, for it is arguable that multicultural public relations is not a unique element in a developing country: every country now promotes multicultural policies. Understanding cultural diversity may solve societal problems which are seen as institutional rather than individual (Andrewes, 2005), which is why the theme of cultural diversity 'communicating for diversity, with diversity, in diversity' was vigorously debated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> World PR Festival in Trieste.

Unsurprisingly, in developed countries like Greece and Spain, public relations is still mainly viewed as media relations, i.e., with a publicity or marketing function (van Ruler & Vercic, 2004). Therefore, it is important to study an expanded concept of

public relations management, one that is from a more holistic and international perspective. Therefore, understanding the system theory of organisations (see Cutlip et al., 2000) and the theory of strategic management (see Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996; Kitchen, 1997a) is central to my philosophical agenda in framing this study.

### **3.7 A System Theory of Organisation and a Model of Boundary-Spanning**

The system theory of organisation,<sup>9</sup> a well-established management model, is an appropriate instrument on which to build a theoretical framework for this study. This theory has been used to explain how public relations practitioners work effectively in two different environments, both internally and externally: in dynamic and static organisational environments. The theory explains that non-professional PR practitioners might follow a course of action reactively in the static environment, whilst in the dynamic environment, PR professionals react more proactively in managing tasks assigned by an organisation (Cutlip et al., 2000: 233-235).

Indeed, it has been said that the system theory is one of the major public relations theories central to the practice of many leading PR scholars (Cutlip et al., 2000; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; White & Dozier, 1992; Warnaby & Moss, in Kitchen, 1997). This theory emphasises 'the concept of adjustment and adaptation' with regard to mutual relationships between organisations and their publics. Cutlip et al. (2000: 228 and 229) defines a system as 'a set of interacting units that endures through time within an established boundary by responding and adjusting to change pressures from

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<sup>9</sup> The system theory, which is known as Cybernetic Systems, was originally developed by Norbert Wiener (Stacey, 2000: 22).



the environment to achieve and maintain goal states'. From the perspective of public relations, the system is an integration and coordination of components involving the relationship between organisations and publics. For example, at the strategic planning, PR professionals are responsible to formulate corporate communication policies in helping the organisation to adapt to strategic changes e.g. how the organisation communicates the changes in its policies to their stakeholders. At the strategic implementation, the series of PR programmes should be aligned with specific public interests, to which organisations need to pay considerable attention. Thus, there is a requirement for a boundary-spanning role between organisations and their publics (White & Dozier, 1992; Grunig & Hunt, 1984; Warnaby & Moss, in Kitchen, 1997).

The boundary-spanning role has a strong relationship with the system theory initiated by organisational theorists to describe the interaction between the structure of organisations and their environment (Warnaby & Moss, 1997, in Kitchen, 1997). Originally, the concept of 'boundary-spanning' is initiated by an organisational theorist, Howard Aldrich (1971, 1977 [with Herker], & 1979). Aldrich's idea of boundaries is influenced by Weber's notion of a formal organisation (Weber, 1947, in Aldrich, 1971). Aldrich and Herker (1977: 217) argued that:

Defining organisations in terms of boundaries to interaction allows a parsimonious definition of the role of formal authority in an organisation: authorities are persons who apply organisational rules in making decisions about entry and expulsion of members.

There are a number of perspectives on defining this boundary-spanning. According to White and Dozier (1992: 93), a boundary-spanner is an 'individual within the organisation who frequently interacts with the organisation's environment and who

gathers, selects and relays information from the environment to decision makers in the dominant coalition'. Similarly, Leifer and Delbecq (1978: 41, in Kitchen, 1997: 14) defined boundary-spanners as 'functioning as exchange agents between the organisation and its environment'. Aldrich and Herker (1977, in Kitchen, 1997: 14) point out that a boundary-spanner will play two important roles: 'information processing', concerning appropriate information that is filtered and facilitated for use in strategic decision-making, and 'external representation', referring to how an organisation may improve its legitimacy among external audiences. Thus, the definitions given are concerned with how two 'actors' - an organisation and its audiences - can be mediated in the environment; public relations or communication practitioners, as representatives of an organisation, may act as boundary-spanners to interact with the internal and external audiences in a complex environment.

From the public relations perspective, a system consists of two important components: a subsystem and a suprasystem. When the system is described as an organisation, publics can be considered as parts of its environment. The subsystem, a component/unit of organisation, is viewed as a public relations unit. This subsystem produces a series of PR programmes. The PR unit (subsystem) is a set of integrated and coordinated components/units within an organisation-public system. Therefore, an organisation (system) uses the public relations unit (subsystem) to achieve mutually beneficial goals: the organisational goals and the public's (environment) satisfaction. In 'a higher-order social suprasystem', there is a need for an organisation to react effectively to different circumstances and in different locations (Cutlip et al., 2000: 232).

At the higher level of the suprasystem, a public relations department, viewed as an adaptive subsystem, plays an important role in adjusting and adapting to the changes in an environment. Specifically, an adaptive subsystem, which is more varied than other subsystems such as 'production, supportive-disposal, maintenance and managerial subsystems'<sup>10</sup>, is expected to observe the system's environment and make adaptations and adjustments when it needs to in order to achieve a possible symmetrical system (Cutlip et al., 2000: 232). For example, during a crisis, PR practitioners must inform and explain to the public what an organisation is doing and what it will do to solve the problems. A great deal of effort is required to gain the public's trust. Thus, relationship management is a key function in maintaining the reputation of an organisation (Yang & Grunig, 2005: 321).

In response to the system's environment, public relations practitioners representing organisations are required to adapt and adjust to new situations depending on the exposure of the organisation to their public. According to Cutlip et al. (2000), there are two models of system theory: open and closed systems models. The closed system model can be viewed as involving no adaptation and adjustment to environmental changes, whilst the open system model is more flexible and permeable in order to adapt and adjust to different situations. Therefore, the success of organisations depends on the open system model that organisations may adopt to become visible and transparent to strategic publics.

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<sup>10</sup> For further explanation of these subsystems, see Daniel Katz and Robert L. Kahn, *The Social Psychology of Organisations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966: 39-47).

This theory of PR management may be considered highly appropriate to apply to the Malaysian environment, by which Malaysian organisations may develop a series of PR programmes to achieve organisational goals in order to strengthen a symmetrical relationship between organisations and strategic publics. With the explosion of information and communication technology, for example, promoting a mega-information technology project such as 'Malaysia's Multimedia Super Corridor' requires an effective series of PR programmes which consider the organisational culture of Malaysian corporations in both the public and private sectors. All strategic publics<sup>11</sup> must be made aware of the importance of this project to the nation's strategic development. Symmetrical approaches to this project require a great deal of effort in adapting and adjusting the systematic imbalances between the project owner and the strategic publics.

At the higher level of the suprasystem, these programmes should be aligned with local and cultural circumstances, such as the principal languages that are professionally used by Malaysian PR practitioners, with sensitivity to Malaysian culture and other related multicultural aspects, and should not only focus on organisational goals per se. Thus, multiculturalism cannot be ignored in this study.

### **3.8 The Importance of Multiculturalism**

Malaysia, seen as one of the fastest developing countries (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003), has a rich multiculturalism and cultural diversity, as described in Chapter 2. It is

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<sup>11</sup> Strategic public here refers to stakeholders (shareholders, directors, management team, employees, suppliers, government, and related communities) who are interested in a particular business and may gain benefits from the socio-economic activities.

worth stressing again that multiculturalism and cultural diversity have a significant impact on the practice of public relations in developed and developing countries (Wakefield, in Culbertson & Chen, 1996: 17). With consideration of Marshall McLuhan's notion of a global village, people now live and interact in a multi-complex environment where the diversity of races, religions, cultures and languages is taken into account (Motau, 2004). In a survey by the Public Relations Society of America conducted in October 2004 and January 2005, a lack of promotional efforts to attract additional multicultural employees and a complacency by PR employment agencies regarding vacancies for multicultural candidates were found to be major challenges faced by the PR industry in understanding multiculturalism and cultural diversity (Adam, 2005: 6).

Over the years, models of multiculturalism have been ignored, even though they are now acknowledged as essential to good public relations in developed and particularly developing countries. A case study by Cummings and DeSanto (in Moss & DeSanto, 2002) revealed that in the 1960s, the International Public Relations Group of Companies (IPRGoC), which served various prominent Japanese companies (but which used Canadian public relations practices), failed to convince their local and national clients in Asia, especially in Japan. Additionally, this organisation had to compete with its close competitor, Shandwick International, which was endeavouring to strengthen its local capacity in Japan. Due to some corporate issues, such as internal politicking, a power struggle among various dominant members and the stiff competition with Shandwick International, the IPRGoC collapsed. As a result, former personnel decided to build a new organisation, Worldcom Public Relations Group.

Under new leadership and with strong personal relationships among members, this organisation has developed international networks based on the concept of partnership. By emphasising 'glocalisation' (adaptation to local orientation), the organisation has become the world's third largest PR organisation.

In a highly global setting, most organisations have focused their strategic PR programmes on a diverse range of stakeholder groups, ranging from an individual stakeholder to local communities (Cornelissen, 2004; see also Argenti, 1998), instead of focusing on a single public. In the dynamic business environment, most organisations have also employed multicultural PR practitioners from different educational backgrounds, cultures and characteristics, as well as from different countries to run the strategic programmes for their public relations. Diversity management, based on a symmetrical approach to public relations, requires this approach (Wakefield in Culbertson & Chen, 1996: 17).

Understanding cultural diversity and multiculturalism is very important to articulate a sensitive and multi-aspect approach to excellent public relations, especially in a rapidly developing country like Malaysia. Thus, understanding cultural sensitivity, including language, religious rituals, taboos and suchlike, may reduce conflict within an organisation and enhance organisational performance (LaBahn & Harich 1997). For example, in an Islamic country, considerable attention should be paid to appreciating religious rituals in the workplace, as, if it is effectively performed, religious faith may enhance employees' performance and the productivity of the organisation. Learning from the calamitous experiences of the IPRGoC, Cumming and DeSanto (in DeSanto & Moss, 2002: 246) suggest that expatriate PR practitioners

working in a particular country such as Japan should be sensitive to local cultures and encouraged to communicate in their clients' language.

In addition to this, although Western PR theories (predominantly from the US) have been well developed and are widely practised by global corporations, it would be useful to apply international (global) public relations in their practitioners' activities. Sriramesh (in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003: 511) argues that with regard to PR education, many Asian countries have come to favour a 'West is best' mentality, as they have adopted US PR curricula, course materials, and so forth rather than developing international (global) public relations. He argues that to be 'multicultural professionals, a comprehensive PR education should deliver knowledge on the linkages between public relations and key environmental variables that influence the practice internationally' (ibid).

Using Hofstede's intercultural dimensions, Wilhelm (1998 in Sitaram and Prosser, 1998) points out significant cultural differences in management skills between Malaysian and American academics. In this regard, Sriramesh (in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003) stresses that theories of public relations require multicultural sensitivity, particularly in a transitional country, as the existing theories have been profoundly influenced by Western philosophy.

Sriramesh and White (1992: 609) argue that there are strong linkages between culture, communication and public relations. They are all affected directly and indirectly by the way organisations operate their businesses. Understanding of international public relations requires a holistic view and a global and multilingual approach (Sriramesh,

in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003) rather than merely polishing the image of communication services. Indeed, there is an urgent need to develop international public relations and bring out the implications of its practice in a rapidly developing or transitional country like Malaysia, which is multilingual, multi-ethnic and multi-religious. Bank (1995: 116) points out that:

Training for cultural sensitivity, international adjustment, intercultural communication, and valuing diversity are essential to creating personal changes in multicultural settings. A diverse and rapidly expanding variety of approaches to these sorts of training are available, and organisations should assess their needs and select a training modality that suits their conditions.

In Malaysia and Singapore, communication campaigns have always been aligned with 'intercultural harmony' (Sriramesh, in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003: 515). Examples are the celebration of '*Hari Merdeka*' (Independence Day), which is concerned with local cultures for all races in those countries. To cater for such circumstances, 'every public relations professional must become a multicultural communicator' (Sriramesh, in Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003: 505), with specialised training and development on multicultural facets such as corporate culture, religion, language and suchlike taken into account. This concept gives special advantages to PR professionals who may work with any ethnic group and any country in the world. Thus, it is hypothesised that in the globalisation era, becoming a multicultural communicator can add value to public relations roles. This concept is a direct parallel with the development of the universal professional project in public relations, which is the main theoretical framework of this study.

Further to discussing the system theory of organisation and the concepts of multiculturalism from the perspective of public relations, it is worth discussing other



models of management, such as strategic management and core competency strategies (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996; Warnaby & Moss, in Kitchen, 1997). Applying these models to the practice of public relations is very important to achieving the highest standards of PR professionalism, as discussed in Chapter 1. Malaysian PR practitioners urgently need to equip themselves with knowledge about their particular context – specific knowledge and professional skills to improve their competencies. They might then be able to develop an innovative series of PR programmes for the organisations in which or for which they work in order to venture into the era of globalisation.

### **3.9 The Rise of Strategic Management and Strategy Development**

From the organisational perspective, Quinn (cited in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996) defines strategy as

...the pattern or plan that integrates an organisation's major goals, policies, and action sequences into a cohesive whole. A well-formulated strategy helps to marshal and allocate an organisation's resources into a unique and viable posture based on its relative internal competencies and shortcomings, anticipated changes in the environment, and contingent moves by intelligent opponents (cited in Mintzberg & Quinn 1996: 3).

In public relations practice, strategy is 'the determination of the basic long-term goals and objectives of an enterprise, and the adoption of courses of action and the allocation of resources necessary for carrying out these goals' (Cutlip et al., 2000: 371). Cutlip et al. (2000: 378) also pointed out that strategy is 'the overall concept, approach, or general plan for the program designed to achieve a goal'. Similarly, Oliver (2001: 3) defines strategy as 'the means or process by which an organisation aims to fulfil its mission'. These definitions suggest that strategy is an instrument used

by an organisation to achieve corporate visions and missions by formulating a series of interacting elements within an environment's system at large.

Furthermore, additional coherent concepts and definitions of strategic management are discussed. Strategic management is

... a process that enables any organisation - company, association, non-profit, government agency - to identify its long term opportunities and threats, mobilise its assets to address them and carry out a successful implementation strategy (Cutlip et al., 2000: 373).

Bowman (1990) adds that the process of strategic management includes the way in which organisations make strategic decisions and bring about their implementation. In order to develop an effective strategy for an organisation in relation to an environment, managing organisational resources and competences is paramount and must be aligned with environmental changes (Johnson & Scholes, 1999). In understanding these concepts, competent public relations practitioners who practise strategic thinking must manage the organisation's reputation and good standing effectively and efficiently (Cutlip et al., 2000: 370).

Indeed, Mintzberg (1996a in Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 12) expands the definition of strategy and argues that the term 'strategy' should not be viewed as 'deliberate strategy' or a linear process drafting from an initial stage to the ending stage. From a holistic view, an 'emergent strategy' is treated as an ideal strategy that is explicitly practised by strategists or leaders. This kind of strategy articulates the importance of consistency in their courses of action. In the process of implementation, strategists may find unpredictable pressures such as government intervention, technological barriers, cultural differences and related factors (ibid). Thus, a strategic process

should be best viewed as a map that shows and guides PR strategists to practise effective strategic planning (Cornelissen, 2004). In addition, Oliver (2001) argues that Johnson and Scholes's model of corporate strategy (1984 version) provides an over-simplified approach to the strategic management process: it starts from developing organisational goals and undertaking an implementation, ignoring the communication process. This model should therefore be amended by adapting a more complex approach such as the alignment of those elements with the communication process. Thus, the importance of strategic management to public relations may articulate a better understanding of the underlying role of public relations to attain and maintain its organisational goals and missions.

A Barloworld case study by Jon White (in Moss & DeSanto, 2002: 85) identified the perceptions of the senior management group, including the company's Chairman and CEO, of how the company's goals and objectives were communicated to their staff around the world, including Spain and Portugal. This study reveals that communication (in public relations) is a key to effective change management, focusing on the ability of the corporation (Barloworld) to comprehend their technical and managerial staff's understanding regarding the company's goals and strategic development. In September 2000, this company had made decisions to change the company name (and also its subsidiaries' names) from Barlows to Barloworld. As a result, the company also strengthened the new name by developing an integrated visual identity throughout the world.

There have been a number of public relations scholars (particularly from one school of thought – '*Grunigism*') who have used strategic management models to strengthen

the models of public relations (Grunig, 1992; Grunig & Grunig, 2003; Cutlip et al., 2000; Lim et al., 2005). However, they all show a lack of understanding about the application of strategic management to public relations practice. It is arguable that Grunig and Grunig (2002) and Lim et al. (2005) studied 'excellent' public relations and communication management from a strategic management perspective whilst their study still remained within the domain of communication, specifically the four models of public relations: press agency/publicity model, public information model, two-way asymmetrical model and the two-way symmetrical model, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Thus, if the role of public relations has been empowered as a dominant coalition to achieve organisational goals and missions (Grunig & Grunig, 2003; Cornelissen, 2004), public relations scholars must view public relations as being beyond communication practice. White and Mazur (1995) argue that it is important to expand the contribution of public relations to more than communication and representation. It can be further argued that strategic public relations or communication management must be aligned with the strategic development of an organisation and also incorporated into its corporate strategy (Cornelissen, 2004). The emphasis on an inclusion of corporate governance and corporate advisory services is thus strongly preferred in this study. These elements are considered a 'grey' area in public relations but can provide a managerial role in nurturing PR professionals.

### 3.9.1 Strategic Public Relations Management

As outlined above, understanding the strategic management of public relations is very important. However, as noted in previous studies, with environmental pressures the role of public relations has been diminished. This has been due in some instances to a crisis in professionalism, particularly as public relations is often viewed by organisations as having a marginal role (Kitchen, 1997a: 23).

Over the decades, the main reason for the diminishing of public relations observed in most studies (particularly in the *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations*) pertains to strategic public relations management being less likely to consider Chief Executive Officers' views on the value of public relations. Grunig et al. (2002), who studied the value of public relations from CEOs' viewpoints, find that CEOs wanted senior PR practitioners to become communication liaisons (manager) rather than technicians<sup>12</sup>. White and Murray's (2004) study on 'CEOs' expectations of a changing public relations practice' reveals that although CEOs valued highly public relations in their business performance, they questioned the calibre of PR practitioners in managing PR work. Thus, there are very limited numbers of studies on strategic public relations from the perceptions of senior directors or boards of directors, such as chief operation officers, chairmen, chief technology officers, chief operating officers and suchlike (really dominant coalitions), who understand the value of public relations and communication management from a large corporation's or a large client organisation's perspectives.

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<sup>12</sup> Using the four models of public relations as described in Chapter 2, Grunig et al.'s (2002) study on 'excellent public relations and effective organisation' was funded by IABC and conducted over five years.

In addition, as described earlier, an empirical study by van Ruler (2000) revealed that there are no separate public relations departments in two-thirds of the organisations in the Netherlands. Instead, public relations, which is placed at a middle management or line production level, is housed in different departments such as the secretariat of the directorate (33%), marketing or marketing communications (24%), or office management (15%). Thus, senior PR officers, who only practise a media relations function (62%), do not have an 'executive seat' at the boardroom in organisations in the Netherlands. Another empirical study, by Kitchen and Moss (1995, in Kitchen, 1997: 28), showed four negative perceptions of public relations:

- (1) Public relations is still viewed with a degree of suspicion and distrust by the public at large.
- (2) Media tend to treat public relations as a cynical exercise in cover-up and/or subterfuge.
- (3) Both the above tend to hamper perceptions of public relations as a serious legitimate managerial discipline.
- (4) There is still low participation at UK board level by public relations practitioners.

In addition, in 2003, there was a case study on the effectiveness of the competencies and skills of PR or communication practitioners working for KPN, the Dutch telecommunication provider. This study was intended to audit the 'three following competencies and skills: (1) *the knowledge and use of communications theory, processes and tactics*; (2) *the knowledge and use of management and organisation theory, processes and tactics*; and (3) *the knowledge and skills incorporating research and environmental scanning*'. The study revealed that communication managers who played a technical role had insufficient knowledge of 'strategic planning' and 'communication strategy development' (Cornelissen, 2004: 164; see Leuven, 1999).

More generally, many societies have come to view the role of public relations as spin-doctoring because PR practitioners performing as media communicators have only highlighted the positive side of organisations rather than managing their organisation's social responsibilities. Importantly, public relations practitioners as 'boundary-spanners' (Warnaby & Moss, in Kitchen 1997: 13; Grunig & Grunig, 2003: 95) should play a significant role not only to achieve organisational goals and missions but also to build strategic relationships with strategic constituencies and wider societal communities.

Indeed, this study focuses on how concepts of strategic management and strategy development may be compatible with a system theory of organisation. Additionally, core competency strategies are key elements of public relations management, which are discussed in the following section.

### **3.9.2 Core Competency Strategies**

From the communication management literature, van Riel and Berens (in Kitchen & Schultz, 2001) emphasise the importance of knowledge and skills to an organisation. Concerning a corporate branding strategy, the parent company must have similar core competencies in all business units. For example<sup>13</sup>, the company 3M has allowed its research and development (R&D) employees to spend 15% of their time on how they might improve the company's products and services.

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<sup>13</sup> This example shows that the value of public relations is not only about enhancing PR practitioners' competencies per se (typically as liaison officers), but is also about how public relations can be of value to other departments such as R&D in the context of corporate branding strategy.

Thus, there are two core competency strategies that empower PR practitioners to play a bigger role in the dominant coalition (top management) in an organisation:

- (1) Identifying a set of knowledge and skills that are considered distinctive capabilities in managing their work professionally.
- (2) Determining personal competencies that will enhance the value of public relations.

Why are core competency strategies important to this study and how are they related to the professionalism of public relations? Core competency strategies are seen to include several important elements, such as *a set of skills or knowledge, being flexible and permeable* (capable of providing long-term benefits), and *customer-relationships* in order to fully integrate with today's competitive business environment (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 66). Public relations or communication requires an integrated approach to focusing on internal and external stakeholders. Regarding this approach, Kitchen and Schultz (2001: 107) note that 'product design, packaging, brand name, pricing strategy, location, ambience of accessibility (or distribution), and customer services are all forms of communication'. In addition, a survey of 'practitioners' use of technology in the top 50 US PR firms' reveals the software programmes used by US PR practitioners in public relations (Matera & Artigue, 2000: 24). The software programmes used were 'word processing (100%), online information and retrieval services (100%), desktop publishing (90%), graphic design (81%), database searches/research (81%), electronic spreadsheets (81%), fax transmission services (81%), database management (76%), electronic mail/telex services (76%), media monitoring services (67%), and teleconferences services (33%)' (ibid: 24-25). Thus, today's PR practitioners need to appreciate several underlying elements of core



competency such as understanding products and services design, technological creation and improving customer services in terms of the corporate communication context.

Indeed, Henderson and William (in DeSanto & Moss, 2002) assert that Shell, the transnational oil company, put trust in a strategic public relations approach to focusing on personal communication in order to build a strong relationship with their internal and external constituencies, rather than relying on a corporate advertising programme.

Besides emphasising a communications strategy, excellent public relations practitioners need holistic knowledge of corporate communication management to help enable the building of relationships with multiple stakeholders, beyond the practising of media relations<sup>14</sup>. For example, Mobil, another global oil company, view communication functions as the ‘management of brand contacts’ (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001: 377-378). Using the integration of new (electronic) media and traditional (press release) forms, the company has built a strong relationship with multiple stakeholders such as employees, suppliers, customers, government, media, and communities.

Indeed, acquiring a wide range of knowledge about the particular corporate world in which they operate should be a core competency for proficient PR professionals. Concerning the perception of a Chief Executive Officer about top PR professionals, Ed Block asserted that:

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<sup>14</sup> Media relations here is viewed as a reactive communication function. ‘The person who fixed things with media when the coverage was negative, or was responsible for spinning some corporate value out of nothing, or organised the corporate parties and create some type of ‘buzz’ about the organisation’ (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001: 377).

In this role, I need someone with an exquisite public relations 'gut' combined with *a comprehensive knowledge of the business and its external and internal environment*. I want someone who is in touch with the 'soul' of the business, someone who shares my vision and understands my sensibilities. I don't need a 'handler' or a gatekeeper. I need someone whose counsel, over time, will influence my thinking in broad terms, not someone who hectors me on every piddling issue that crosses my desk. I also want someone whose counsel is sought out by others in top management because it is timely and thoughtful and helpful – not because it comes from someone who has special access to me (cited in Cutlip et al., 2000: 372).

Such an ambition leads to other important factors that may challenge today's PR practitioners - being flexible and permeable as well as understanding trends which focus on the needs of strategic constituencies and the community at large. As today's organisations are involved with a complex environment, their departments of public relations should be able to focus on a dynamic series of PR programmes, not a one-off activity only, as every PR programme needs full commitment and consistency from the whole public relations team.

Apart from mastering a knowledge base and skills, possessing personal competencies such as charisma, creativity, intellectual leadership, initiative and enthusiasm, being credible as well as being able to apply decision-making strategies are 'must have' qualities for public relations professionals. These personal qualities should be viewed as 'applied and professional skills' in managing PR functions effectively and efficiently. Evidence from a qualitative study by DeSanto and Moss (2004), which studied 31 senior PR practitioners in US and UK organisations, articulated the importance of PR practitioners' personal competencies such as charisma in improving the value of public relations. Additionally, a 2003 survey by the CIPR, UK, showed that a total of 17 criteria of individual competency - including integrity, verbal communication, creativity, assertiveness and confidence – were very important in

three main sectors: the public sector, the private sector, and consultancy. One of the talented senior PR practitioners interviewed stressed that the senior management group often formally discussed the company's policy and corporate issues and that they also worked together to achieve the best solutions. Considering the importance of personal competencies, Theaker (2001) emphasises that the PR industry needs to attract new talent and also invest in training and development in terms of the quality of practitioners:

As long as tactical PR takes the limelight in terms of attracting new talent into the industry, nothing will change. Only positioning and promoting PR as a cerebral discipline where brain power and strategic thinking are paramount will give PR a place on the board (Theaker, 2001: 270).

These personal competencies should not, of course, include bad traits such as arrogance or being over-emotional, as these may jeopardise the relationships between an organisation and its publics, as well as damage the reputation of the organisation. For example, in a national conference of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), Coca-Cola PR executives, who sounded somewhat arrogant, commented that reputation management was not really important to their company; consequently, their PR activities were mainly 'brand promotion', which is associated with one-way communication or 'ad hoc' advertising (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001: 375).

Only when most PR practitioners have gained the necessary skills and in-depth knowledge outlined above and have accredited qualifications will public relations attain and maintain the highest standards of professionalism. It is argued that substantial working experience alone is not enough to gain intellectual skills and personal competencies, as this may be undermined by emotion and personal interest. The suggested intellectual skills and personal competencies should be developed

through continuous professional development and appropriate higher education organised by PR professional associations and universities. Theaker (2001) also highlights that the future of the PR industry depends largely on education and Continuous Professional Development (CPD). Strengthening the relationships between PR professional bodies, universities and practitioners is therefore key to building higher standards of PR professionalism. Thus, there is a need to amend the old PR models and theories to bring greater value to the best practice of public relations.

The next section of this chapter will look at the theoretical approach to public relations management in this thesis in order to clarify the concepts and theories discussed earlier in this chapter.

### **3.10 Theoretical Framework of This Study**

This study mainly aims to reconceptualise the standards of professionalism of public relations from multiple perspectives: the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism. Based on Weber's notion of rationalisation and Wilensky's model of professional development (Wilensky, 1964: 142-146), adapted by Neal & Morgan (2000: 12), it is believed that this study will develop a 'professional project' for public relations with the purpose of increasing professionalism. Exclusive jurisdiction, the standardisation of professional services, the regulation sanction, and the role of professional associations are seen as critical elements in developing the desired 'professional project'. Nurturing professionals is a long and complex process of educational and professional developments and depends

on two core elements: (1) determining the distinct domain of expertise for public relations, and (2) identifying levels of practice and competencies among PR practitioners.

It is worth noting two opposing views, the first posited by the foremost PR educator and practitioner Herbert Lloyd, an IPR President (from 1968 to 1969). Greatly concerned about the status of professionalism in the industry, he argued that:

We must establish a Chair ... at the London School of Economics. You must have *public relations taught at the university level* (PR qualification). Once you've done that you've gone a long way towards increasing its status (L'Etang, 1999: 274 original emphasis).

In contrast, Tim Traverse-Healy, another IPR President (from 1967 to 1968), placed his emphasis on personal abilities, and commented that:

In taking on people, degrees don't matter a damn. What does matter is to have *critical ability* (personal abilities) to be able to assess a situation and the factors affecting it. You must have maturity ... This is the sort of man (sic) who will go to the top (L'Etang, 1999: 274).

As this study also aims to reduce the gap between academia and practice, both opposing views stated can be considered as a 'chicken and egg' situation. It is essential to note that *PR qualifications* and *personal abilities* are inseparable facets in attaining the highest standards of PR professionalism. They are important elements for the educational and professional standards of public relations management. Importantly, the PR industry must produce practitioners with a strong academic background. A 2003 survey by the CIPR, 'Unlocking the Potential of Public Relations: Developing Good Practice', reveals that there is room for UK PR practitioners to strengthen their theoretical background, rather than relying solely on practical experience (CIPR, 2005a). Additionally, PR practitioners must undergo

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) to develop their personal competencies. This is a base for the integration of educational and professional standards of PR professionalism.

In order to seek the integration of educational and professional standards of public relations, it is important critically to view what professionalism is and what is required. According to Kultgen (1988), as discussed earlier in this chapter, there are two kinds of profession: traditional professions like medicine, law, architecture and the ministry, and contemporary professions, such as engineering, accountancy, etc., all offering comprehensive scope for an ideal of professionalism. Acquiring moral competency or proficiency is important for PR practitioners in demonstrating their skills, especially for specific tasks. Other sociological scholars such as Freidson (1994), Larson (1977), and McDonald (1995) see professions such as medicine, law, accountancy and engineering as one entity, since they all have an exclusive jurisdiction in the divisions of labour. Therefore, it is argued, because in corporate practice public relations does not have an exclusive jurisdiction (Cornelissen, 2004), public relations (or corporate communication) needs to define a distinct domain of expertise that is difficult to imitate by other occupations.

It is worth reiterating that the term 'professionalism' has been debated extensively by sociological scholars in identifying the divisions of labour, especially with regard to occupational roles in a wider society (Freidson, 1994; Larson, 1977; Vollmer & Mills, 1966; Moore, 1970; McDonald, 1995; Abbott, 1988). There is, in particular, much debate on the definition of a 'profession', in an attempt to determine what a 'true' profession is and the criteria of professionalism (Freidson, 1994: 14). One of the

commonly identified main characteristics of a profession is formal education (Larson, 1977; Freidson, 1994; MacDonald, 1995), and thus, while professionals need to have specialised knowledge which is abstract and theoretical, they equally require professional skills which need 'the exercise of complex judgement' (Freidson, 1994: 112).

In this study, criteria of professionalism from a sociological perspective are important in defining what a true profession is and how public relations may gain a stable professional status from a wider society, not only among the PR community. Under a universal accreditation programme, professions like medicine, law and accountancy have met and maintained the criteria of professionalism such as gaining technical competencies from an accredited educational institution, becoming members of a professional body, and abiding by codes of ethics (Freidson: 1994: 154).

Significantly, Greenwood (in Vollmer & Mills 1966: 9) noted the elements of professionalisation as follows:

- (1) A basis of systematic theory.
- (2) Authority recognised by the clientele of the professional group.
- (3) Broader community sanction and approval of this authority.
- (4) A code of ethics regulating relations of professional persons with clients and with colleagues.
- (5) A professional culture sustained by a formal professional association.

Similarly, McKinlay (in Halmos, 1973: 64) identified ten core characteristics of a profession, which can be summarised as follows:

- (1) Standards of education and training.
- (2) Potential practitioners experiencing a complex process of socialisation compared to other occupations.
- (3) Licensing for professional practice.
- (4) A role for members of the profession in granting licensing;
- (5) Legislation.
- (6) A level of income, prestige and power which may attract high-calibre potential practitioners to enter the profession.
- (7) Evaluation and control.
- (8) More stringent norms of practice than in other occupations.
- (9) Membership of professional bodies.
- (10) The profession is more likely to be a 'terminal occupation'<sup>15</sup>.

Wilensky's model of a way to achieve professional status is also influential. Wilensky (1964: 142-146 adapted by Neal & Morgan, 2000: 12) proposed four pillars of professional development:

- 1) The profession must become a 'terminal' occupation (full time). This is compulsory for the process of professionalisation because 'it entails routinisation of the work and a relatively high level of commitment to the development of the profession' (Neal & Morgan (2000: 18).
- 2) The establishment of exclusive training schools (approved by a professional association) where a steady development of approved curricula is established.  
  
Exclusive academic and/or professional qualifications must be clearly set up to

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<sup>15</sup> A 'terminal occupation' can be described as 'the occupation became full time' (Neal & Morgan, 2000: 12) in which a person who has undergone substantial training and qualifications in a particular field has dedicated his/her life to practise that profession.



demonstrate the substantial and rigorous knowledge and skills of the profession.

- 3) On completion of such training as in (2), all graduates must join the professional association and adhere to membership criteria and regulations set by the association. Qualifying examinations are offered to evaluate the levels of practitioners' competencies. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is mandatory for all members to expand their knowledge and skills. The profession is also seen as 'lifelong learning'.
- 4) All members must abide by rules of conduct (a formal code of ethics) and the stringent regulation formed by council members of the professional association. Eliminating unqualified practitioners, minimising internal competition, protecting clients and focusing on a service ideal are parts of the regulation sanction that is clearly stated in their code of ethics.

Having discussed the concepts and criteria of professionalism, applying those criteria to public relations practice in Malaysia would be useful. Although this model of professional development has been widely used in sociological analysis (to measure the standards of professionalism), the model may need to be modified by considering cultural diversity and multiculturalism in Asian countries, especially Malaysia. In addition, some concepts of corporate strategy<sup>16</sup> identified by Kitchen and Schultz (2001) and Mintzberg and Quinn (1996) have been employed to modify the

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<sup>16</sup> As discussed earlier in this chapter, management is seen as a professional discipline. Public relations here is a management discipline. Thus, knowledge of corporate strategy is essential for today's public relations practitioners in gaining professional expertise, autonomy and credentials. Poignantly, some US PR scholars such as Sallot, Cameron, Weaver, Newsom, Turk and Kruckeberg seem to have abandoned this knowledge in favour of their work in the communication domain.

dimensions of professionalism. When combined with the numerous elements mentioned above, including those derived from strategic management perspectives, the cultural diversity and multiculturalism approaches create a comprehensive and more practically focused framework. Thus, this study can contribute to the body of public relations knowledge.

It is hypothesised that the system theory of public relations and core competency strategies will strengthen concepts of public relations management in Malaysia. Thus, the role of public relations theory can guide PR practitioners to practise coherently according to the abovementioned tenets of Wilensky's model (adapted by Neal & Morgan, 2000: 12), and thence to improve the PR industry. For this reason, the application of a system theory of public relations, one of the most important PR management theories, and of core competency strategy, another of the strategic management models, has been made to provide an in-depth discussion of the professionalism of public relations management.

With the application of a system theory of public relations, professionals in the field can play adaptive roles in shaping the standards of professionalism based on the concepts of adjustment and adaptation of public relations. These concepts are important in managing the openness and transparency of organisations to their environment. Therefore, public relations, viewed as a 'true' profession, should be able to respond to the dynamics of the real world, especially in the highly competitive business environment (Cutlip et al., 2000; Cornelissen, 2004: 167).

In addition to this theory, the core competency strategy, identified by Mintzberg and Quinn (1996) and DeSanto and Moss (2004), is employed to observe educational and professional standards from a strategic management perspective. This core competency strategy is chosen in this study because, as mentioned earlier, it focuses thoroughly on *a set of skills or knowledge, being flexible and permeable* (capable of providing long-term benefits), and *customer-relationships* (Mintzberg & Quinn, 1996: 66). Therefore, elements of this approach may be compatible with the elements of system theory. Indeed, this study is possibly the first attempt to find a convergence between system theory, one of the theories of public relations identified by leading public relations scholars, and core competency strategy, one of the approaches of strategic management.

With the strength of the concepts of strategic management in public relations, a model of boundary-spanning is very useful in determining distinctive roles for public relations and improving the quality of PR professionalism. White and Dozier (1992) and Kitchen (1997a) expanded the concept of the boundary-spanning role of public relations by emphasising the importance of strategic decision-making from the perspective of strategic management when venturing into today's competitive business environment.

There are quite a number of research papers on PR professionalism published in the leading public relations and communication management literature, yet they all fail to determine what the professional standards of public relations are, for a number of reasons. First, some strongly focus only on media relations (spin-doctoring). Second, professional standards are viewed from practitioners' personal perceptions alone, and

not by top management teams of large organisations who, arguably, have a view of the real value of public relations from a perspective of strategic management. Third, there is a lack of understanding about what constitutes 'strategic management' in the context of business strategy and in applying this to public relations practice. Ironically, some public relations scholars additionally seem to have failed to define an exclusive jurisdiction for public relations.

Indeed, it is useful to define an exclusive jurisdiction (the distinct domain of expertise) for public relations. Here, public relations is viewed as a distinctive management discipline which influences the behaviour of diverse groups of strategic constituencies (customers, employees - including top management team - investors and regulators) in a diverse and complex business environment. It is suggested that both corporate governance and corporate advisory arenas should be at the heart of strategic public relations management. With such expertise in public relations management, it is hypothesised that every organisation will need public relations services.

Having identified the importance of corporate governance and corporate advisory services, this study will investigate the views of business leaders, including CEOs or senior directors, on the real value of public relations and the visions they have about the 'professional project' that the PR professional bodies must pursue in order to gain professional status and privilege from a wider society. As building respectability (McDonald, 1995 & Johansen, 2001: 67) is a core element of professionalisation, it is then possible to launch a schema for full professionalisation of public relations - one which differentiates public relations from marketing, journalism, and advertising, but

also one that must achieve a stable professional status like established professions such as accountancy, law and medicine.

### **3.11 Objectives and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to explore the status and standards of professionalism of public relations from multiple perspectives - the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism - in Malaysia. Four objectives of this study and seven main research questions are developed to achieve this purpose:

#### **Objective 1:**

This study will determine the profile of PR practitioners and the core functions of public relations in major Malaysian corporations.

#### Research question 1 – two sub-questions:

- a) What is the current profile of PR practitioners?
- b) What is the current practice of their core PR functions?

#### **Objective 2:**

This study will focus on the extent to which (1) chief executive officers or senior directors, (2) PR senior practitioners, and (3) PR academics perceive the standards of professionalism of public relations management in Malaysia. This approach will answer the general question of the thesis: *is public relations a profession?* Four dimensions of PR professionalism are developed as the theoretical framework of this

study: (1) knowledge base and personal competencies, (2) research and education, (3) a code of ethics, and (4) accreditation and licensing.

Research question 2 – three sub-questions:

- a) What is the extent of knowledge and skills in determining the standards of professionalism in public relations?
- b) How important are specialised knowledge and skills, and personal competencies to PR practise?
- c) Are corporate governance and corporate advisory services necessarily the distinct domain of PR practitioners' expertise?

Research question 3 – two sub-questions:

- a) What is the extent of research and education (and the establishment of exclusive training schools) in improving the standards of professionalism in public relations?
- b) How important are research and education to PR practice? Should PR develop its own distinctive schools?

Research question 4 – two sub-questions:

- a) To what extent is a code of ethics important in increasing the standards of professionalism in public relations?
- b) How important is a code of ethics to PR practice?

Research question 5 – two sub-questions:

- a) What is the extent of accreditation and licensing in setting the standards of professionalism in public relations?

b) How important are accreditation and licensing to PR practice?

**Objective 3:**

This study will examine the role of the Malaysian public relations professional association, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, in improving the standards of PR professionalism in that country.

Research question 6:

How effective is the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia in developing the standards of professionalism in public relations?

**Objective 4:**

The arrival of multinational corporations, with their needs and demands, has changed public relations practice. It would be a major challenge for global PR practitioners to practise public relations in a diverse and complex business environment. This study will investigate how multinational corporations can adapt their PR business strategies to the multicultural environment in Malaysia.

Research question 7 – two sub-questions:

- a) To what extent are public relations services adapted to multicultural facets (e.g., taboos, language, race and religious sensitivity) in formulating and practising PR business strategies?
- b) How do Malaysian organisations manage global public relations?

### **3.12 Summary**

This chapter has elaborated a detailed conceptualisation of the framework of this study by highlighting the concepts and definitions of underlying elements with regard to PR professionalism. A combination of the sociological analysis of profession, the system theory of organisation, strategic management models and multiculturalism models is discussed thoroughly with regard to the framework of this study. The development of these models and theories is justified by being based on substantial previous research carried out by PR scholars from America, Europe, and Asia in order to develop the theoretical framework here.



## CHAPTER 4

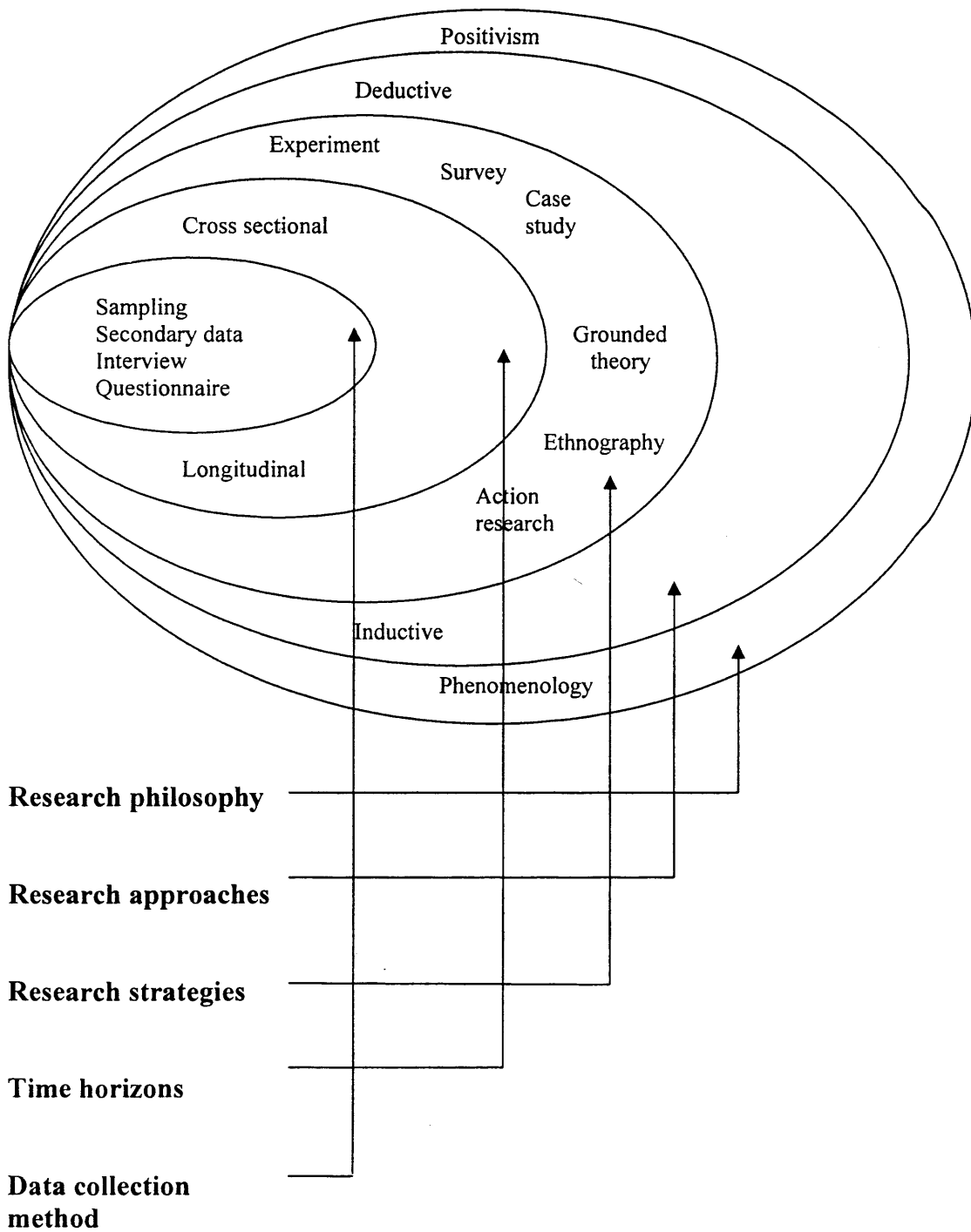
### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.0 Research Philosophy

Understanding research philosophy helps researchers to develop knowledge in a scientific manner. It is worth noting two dominant paradigms in conducting scientific research in social science: positivism and phenomenology (Saunders et al., 1997 & 2000). These two paradigms require different types of data collection. A positivistic approach is based on quantitative observation, which provides descriptive data about particular subjects of study. Because of its highly structured methodology, appropriate research instruments such as a questionnaire survey or an experiment are preferred in conducting this particular type of research. In contrast, a phenomenological approach is used to study more complex human experiences of life and involves in-depth and detailed descriptions of events and direct quotations. This qualitative research is more subjective and requires certain types of data collection such as in-depth interviews and focus groups (Saunders et al., 2000).

As shown in Figure 4.1, the research 'onion' (Saunders et al., 2000) can guide researchers in how they might formulate and implement their research strategy through five stages of research development: research philosophy, research approach, research strategy, time horizons and data collection method.

Figure 4.1: Research Onion (Saunders et al., 2000: 85)



For this research, positivistic and phenomenological approaches are employed to achieve the research objectives of the study. It is believed that combining both approaches, which is called ‘triangulation’, will allow the methods to complement each other and provide results that are more comprehensive. The literature review discussed the importance of the standards of PR professionalism. The study aims to determine key dimensions of PR professionalism in the context of strategic management and multiculturalism. The findings should provide a thorough understanding of what constitutes PR professionalism and what elements of the ‘professional project’ of public relations are significant for the future direction and development of the PR industry.

#### **4.1 Research Strategy**

This chapter discusses a triangulation approach with regard to the research methods used in this study. In order to achieve the research objectives developed in Chapter 3 (Literature Review), three phases of research were undertaken. The first phase involved a quantitative survey using a *postal questionnaire* to seek a broader picture of the standards of PR professionalism. This phase involved quantitative survey research, consisting of identifying a population and a sampling procedure, developing a pilot study, and designing a questionnaire survey. The second phase entailed a qualitative survey using *in-depth interviews with PR academics and PR practitioners* to explore in greater depth the standards of PR professionalism in the light of the establishment of a ‘professional project’ for public relations. Importantly, the third phase documented *in-depth interviews with CEOs/senior directors* to seek their expectations and insights with regard to the development of the standards of PR

professionalism. Apart from conducting interviews, *reviewing academic and corporate literature* concerning Malaysian public listed companies was utilised to seek a wide range of information, particularly about the development of the Malaysian public relations industry. Using a triangulation method, this study provides comprehensive results rather than depending merely on a single method.

Specifically, this study aims to explore and determine the status and standards of professionalism in Malaysia's public relations industry with particular attention given to the factors of the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism. Indeed, conducting scientific research in public relations is not a new public relations activity. In order to develop effective public relations, Broom and Dozier (1990) developed a four-step public relations process, beginning with determining public relations issues/problems, planning, implementing, and finally, evaluating the PR programme. Newsom (2000) added the importance of quantitative and qualitative research for PR professionals to measure public relations practice.

Appropriate justification for the use of the combination of quantitative and qualitative survey methods in this study is necessary. The process of combining two research methods, qualitative and quantitative approaches, called triangulation, as described above, can be described as follows:

Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour (Cohen & Manion, 1989: 269 in Burton 2000: 298).

Nowadays, a good deal of research is carried out using a triangulation approach to enhance the reliability and validity of the study (see Bryman, 1993; Fielding & Fielding 1986). This combination approach may yield some benefits to this study.

First, the quantitative approach will produce a descriptive analysis (e.g. profile of PR practitioners and dimensions of PR professionalism) by analysing and interpreting the data thoroughly. Second, qualitative analysis will unlock some key themes of the dimensions of PR professionalism within public relations documents in complex circumstances (e.g. a multicultural country like Malaysia) (see Burton, 2000).

A small number of PR research projects have been carried out using the triangulation approach, notably a study of PR professionalism in three different country/regions: America, Western Europe and Asia. As shown in Table 4.1, the American research on PR professionalism was mainly focused on quantitative survey research. In contrast (see Table 4.2), the Western European research on PR professionalism was substantially focused on qualitative observations/case studies. In Asia, as illustrated in Table 4.3, there have been a number of research projects on PR professionalism using qualitative and/or quantitative approaches. Due to the lack of a triangulation approach to studying public relations, it will be useful to develop a research project using quantitative and qualitative analysis to study PR professionalism in Malaysia. Additionally, although Dozier et al. (1995) and Grunig & Grunig (2002) studied the value of public relations from the viewpoint of CEOs, no study specifically on public relations professionalisation (in the light of the four suggested dimensions of PR professionalism) from the viewpoint of CEOs/senior directors has been conducted over the last two decades.

Prior to conducting a pilot study and the actual study, an early observation was carried out in March 2003 to seek the critical issues and problems with regard to the

**TABLE 4.1: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PERTAINING TO ASPECTS OF PR PROFESSIONALISM (ANGLO-AMERICAN)**

Authors	Focus of Study	Unit of Analysis	Research Method
Sallot, Cameron, & Weaver-Lariscy (1998)	Public Relations Professionalism	251 US PR practitioners	Postal survey
Sallot, Cameron, & Weaver-Lariscy (1997)	Professional Standards in Public Relations	291 US PR educators	Postal survey
Cameron, Sallot, & Weaver-Lariscy (1996)	Developing Standards of Professional Performance in Public Relations	598 US PR practitioners	Postal survey
Ehling (1992)	Public Relations Education	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Stacks, Botan & Turk (1999)	Perceptions of Public Relations Education.	258 PR educators & practitioners	Postal survey
Freitag (2002)	Ascending Cultural Competence Potential: Profile of U.S. Public Relations Practitioners	424 US PR practitioners	Postal survey
Pinkleton, Austin & Dixon (1999)	Orientation in Public Relations Research & Campaign Evaluation	300 US PR practitioners	Postal survey
Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig (1998)	Trends in Public Relations Roles: From 1990-1995	Two studies: 678 and 1027 PR practitioners	Postal survey

Kruckeberg, D. (1998)	The Future of Public Relations Education	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Parkinson (2001)	The PRSA Code of Professional Standards and Member Code of Ethics	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Neff, Walker, Smith, & Creedon (1999)	Outcomes Desired by Practitioners and Academics	PR educators & practitioners	Postal survey
Starck & Kruckeberg (2003)	Ethical Obligations of Public Relations in an Era of Globalisation	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Grunig & Grunig (2003)	Public Relations in the United States: A Generation of Maturation	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Grunig (2000)	Collectivism, Collaboration, & Societal Corporatism as Core Professional Values in PR	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Grunig, Grunig & Dozier (2002)	Organisation of the communication function	323 organisations in US, Canada and UK	Postal survey & interviews
Grunig & Grunig (2002)	Implications of the IABC Excellence Study for PR Education	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
David (2004)	Extending Symmetry: Toward a Convergence of Professionalism, Practice, & Pragmatics in Public Relations	PR educators & practitioners	Case study

**TABLE 4.2: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PERTAINING TO ASPECTS OF PR PROFESSIONALISM (EUROPE)**

<b>Authors</b>	<b>Focus of Study</b>	<b>Unit of Analysis</b>	<b>Research Method</b>
L'Etang (1999)	Public Relations Education in Britain in the context of Professionalisation	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
L'Etang (2002)	Public Relations Education in Britain	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
L'Etang (2003)	The Myth of the 'Ethical Guardian'	PR educators & practitioners	Comparative study
Van Ruler (2000)	Communication Management in the Netherlands	643 PR practitioners (Quantitative) 522 PR practitioners (Qualitative)	Postal survey Observation survey
Van Ruler, Vercic, Flodin & Buetschi (2001)	Public Relations in Europe: A Kaleidoscopic Picture	25 countries (1 <sup>st</sup> round – 29 PR practitioners, 2 <sup>nd</sup> round – 31 PR practitioners & 3 <sup>rd</sup> round – 23 PR practitioners)	Qualitative survey
Lages & Simkin (2003)	The Dynamics of Public Relations: Key Constructs and the Drive for Professionalism	15 PR practitioners 297 PR practitioners	In-depth interviews Postal survey
Elmer (2000)	Beyond Professionalism: Government Relations	23 PR practitioners 170 (Buyers & Providers)	Interviews Postal Survey
Cornelissen (2000)	Toward An Understanding of the Use of Academic Theories in Public Relations Practice.	PR educators & practitioners	Case study



Cornelissen & Thorpe (2001)	The departmental arrangement of communication disciplines, interaction and coordination between communication departments	85 directors of heads of corporate communications and/or marketing	Postal survey & interviews
Skinner, Mersham & Valin (2003)	Global Protocol on Ethics in Public Relations	PR educators & practitioners	Case Study
Rawel (2002)	Influence of Professional Association in Public Relations Education	PR educators & practitioners	Case Study
Moss, Warnaby & Thame (1996)	Role, scope, organisation and type of practices within public relations function at retail organisation	Senior manager of four retail organisations in UK	In-depth interviews
Moloney (1999)	Public Relations: Does the Industry Need Regulating?	32 PR practitioners	Postal Survey

**TABLE 4.3: THEORETICAL AND EMPIRICAL RESEARCH PERTAINING TO ASPECTS OF PR PROFESSIONALISM  
(ASIA & AUSTRALIA)**

Authors	Focus of Study	Unit of Analysis	Research Method
Steiner (1999)	How Important is Professionalism in Public Relations Management?	PR educators & practitioners	Comparative analysis
Sriramesh (2002)	The Dire Need for Multiculturalism in Public Relations Education: An Asian Perspective.	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Sriramesh (2001)	International Public Relations: A Framework for Future Research	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Panol (2000)	Philippine Public Relations: An Industry and Practitioner Profile.	127 Corporate PR practitioners & 247 Government PR practitioners	Postal survey
Park (2003)	Discrepancy between Korean Government and Corporate Practitioners Regarding Professional Standards in Public Relations	128 Korean PR practitioners 8 Korean PR practitioners	Postal survey In-depth interviews
Singh & Smyth (2000)	Australian Public Relations: Status at the turn of the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century.	PR organisations from 1994-1999 (only 1999 data reported)	Content analysis (Postal survey)
Motion, Leitch & Cliffe (2003)	Public Relations in Australasia: Friendly Rivalry, Cultural Diversity & Global Focus.	PR educators & practitioners	Case study

Khattab, Umi (2000)	Public Relations Education in Malaysia	PR educators & practitioners	Case study/comparative
Bahl (1995)	Whither Asian Public Relations?	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Ekachai & Komolsevin (1998)	Public Relations in Thailand.	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Wu & Taylor (2003)	Public Relations in Taiwan: Roles, Professionalism & Relationship to Marketing	22 practitioners in Taiwan	Qualitative survey
Black & Hartel (2002)	Public Relation Orientation: Development, Empirical Testing & Implications for Managers	205 managers in Australia	Postal survey
Chen & Culbertson (2003)	Public Relations in Mainland China: An Adolescent with Growing Pains	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Chay-Nemeth (2003)	Becoming Professionals: A Portrait of Public Relations in Singapore	PR educators & practitioners	Case study
Kim (2003)	Professionalism and Diversification: The Evolution of Public Relations in South Korea	PR educators & practitioners	Case study

development of the PR industry in Malaysia. Twenty emails were sent to top public relations practitioners in Malaysia. However, only three replied and stated some critical issues that hampered the PR industry, as described in Chapter 1 (see Malaysian PR industry).

Specifically, this study is divided into two research methods, as described in the graphic presentation, Figure 4.2, which shows how the research strategy is developed.

(1) Firstly, the quantitative method (postal questionnaires) focuses on the perceptions of two groups of PR practitioners: in-house PR practitioners and PR consultants in the Klang Valley, Malaysia, with regard to the standards of the professionalism of public relations management. The aim of this phase is to provide detailed descriptive and analytical data with regard to PR professionalism in Malaysia. Thus, the adapted dimensions of PR professionalism are tested and analysed to determine what professional practice is desirable and requisite and what professional practice is performed in reality (Cornelissen, 2004).

To further understand the dimensions of PR professionalism, (2) secondly, the qualitative method (in-depth interviews and a review of policy documents) is used to gain a critical and comprehensive view of educational and professional standards of public relations management. The three small target institutional groups for this study are academic institutions that educate PR practitioners with an emphasis on theory, corporations that produce PR services and business leaders/policy makers who influence the practice of PR services.

**Figure 4.2: Research Strategy,  
Design, and Methodology**

	<b>Quantitative analysis</b>	<b>Qualitative analysis</b>
RESEARCH STRATEGY	Survey research: Postal Questionnaire (Burton, 2000 & Babbie, 1995)	Exploratory research: In-depth Interviews & Document Review (Saunders et al., 2000 & Daymon & Holloway, 2002)
RESEARCH DESIGN	(1) Define population sampling (structured) (2) Construct a set of questions (3) Disseminate questionnaires through mail	(1) Define population sampling (unstructured) (2) Construct a set of questions (3) Conduct a series of interviews – in person (4) A review of corporate and academic literature
POPULATION	Public relations & corporate communication practitioners	Public relations & corporate communications practitioners, academics and business leaders
TYPE OF SAMPLING DESIGN	Stratified Random Sampling (Babbie, 1995)	Purposeful sampling
LOCATION	Klang Valley: (six urban centres: Kuala Lumpur, Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya, Shah Alam, Klang and Kajang)	
THEORETICAL ISSUE ELEMENT (1)	Gap between educational & professional standards Perception of PR management professionalism	
SELECTION OF CASES	Corporations/Firms	Institutions/organisations
OBSERVATION UNITS	(1) In-house PR practitioners: (2) PR consultants	(1) CEO/Senior Directors (2) PR practitioners (3) PR academics
ELEMENT (2)	<b>Dimensions of PR professionalism</b>	
DATA ANALYSIS	(1) Construct coding sheet. (2) Data/inputs are keyed in to SPSS programme. (3) Outputs are presented.	(1) Transcribing inputs from digital voice recorder (2) All data transferred to digital wave player (3) Outputs presented
INTERPRETATION & DISCUSSION	(1) Outputs are interpreted and discussed. (2) Some recommendations are proposed.	(1) Critical and extensive discussion. (2) Some recommendations are proposed.

## **4.2 Location of the Study**

The fieldwork for this study was implemented within the Klang Valley, Malaysia, as it is a booming urban entity in Malaysia which has grown rapidly, incorporating six urban centres: Kuala Lumpur (the capital of Malaysia), Petaling Jaya, Subang Jaya, Shah Alam, Klang, and Kajang. It should be understood that most large corporations and prominent universities and colleges are centrally located in this urban state.

## **4.3 Research Method 1 – A Postal Questionnaire**

This medium-scale study of PR professionalism was based on a quantitative approach, and was conducted through survey research by self-administered questionnaires. It is worth noting the definition of ‘survey’, which indicates the suitability of this application to the research problems discussed in the previous chapter.

Survey is a way of producing information to describe, compare, and predict attitudes, opinions, values, and behaviour based on what people say or see and what is contained in records about them and their activities (Fink, 1995:14 in Burton 2000).

This research method was chosen because the objective of this study is to provide descriptive data about the profiles of PR practitioners and the key elements of PR professionalism in Malaysia in order to determine the status and standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia. Burton (2000: 289) argued that providing descriptive research is important for PhD research as it may develop an original contribution to the body of knowledge of a particular discipline in the social sciences.

### 4.3.1 Population and Sampling Procedures

With regard to the population of this study, 500 public listed companies and 45 PR consultancies were gathered from a database of the latest edition (2003) of the Directory of Malaysian Companies (*Buku Merah*). Obtaining an appropriate database was a crucial part of the sampling procedure. In February 2004, the researcher contacted the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia requesting access to a published database of members. After several unsuccessful attempts were made, the researcher presumed that there was no specific directory of public relations published by the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia.

This study, therefore, is based on a stratified random sampling (Babbie, 1995). Two hundred questionnaires were mailed to named addressees at two large and distinct groups within the PR industry in the Klang Valley, Malaysia from 5 March 2004 to 30 May 2004. These questionnaires were sent with a covering letter requesting participation and were accompanied by postage-paid return envelopes. The two major groups within the PR industry were:

- 1) 173 corporations: in-house PR practitioners (public listed companies within the Klang Valley).
- 2) 27 PR consultancies: PR consultants/specialists (PR firms within the Klang Valley).

Held as being representative of these groupings, the practitioners were selected from among top management, such as heads, managing directors, managers or officers-in-charge of the respective corporations and firms practising public relations, and were

deemed to have an important role with regard to improving the quality of their PR services. Notably, a singular feature of public relations practice was observed: different companies used different job designations to describe the public relations role. For example, 'communication manager', 'corporate communication manager', 'corporate affairs manager', 'public affairs manager', and 'information manager' were all used. In addition, unlike other management disciplines, it was found that not all Malaysian corporations have a single (in the sense of unified) department of public relations or communication. Although there is the diversity of job designation, in public listed companies they all generally practise the same roles in the sense of typical PR functions such as media relations, corporate events, marketing communication, issue communication and suchlike. The initial mailing yielded 51 usable responses (representing a 25.5% return rate) from 5 March to 30 April 2004. Follow-up telephone calls were made the second week after mailing, which achieved an additional 17 responses (8.5% return rate) at the end of May 2004. Thus, the total usable responses received from 200 PR practitioners in the Klang Valley yielded an effective response rate of 34%.

#### **4.3.2 The Pilot Study for the Questionnaire Survey**

Conducting a pilot study is one of the important elements in the research process to detect errors or mistakes in the questionnaire (Babbie, 1995; Broom & Dozier, 1990) and determine the reliability and validity of the designed questionnaire (Burton, 2000). According to Fowler (1993, in Burton, 2000), an effective pilot study requires a small-scale study of between 20 to 50 respondents.



Initially, the researcher developed an online questionnaire (see Appendix) using the web software DreamWeaver, coupled with cooperation from webmasters at Cardiff University, in order to increase the rate of response. During the pilot study, 20 online questionnaires were emailed to the selected email addresses in the second week of February 2004, which received only one usable response. Then, a second mailing by email was made a week later and this yielded no response at all. Therefore, the researcher switched the instrument of study from an online questionnaire to a mail questionnaire, presuming that the Internet culture is not yet embedded in Malaysian organisational culture.

On 1st March 2004, the actual pilot study was conducted with 26 adult students who were enrolled on an executive programme for a Master's in Corporate Communications degree at the Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication, *Universiti Putra Malaysia*. Based on the records from the main office of the Department of Communication, all respondents have had at least one year's working experience in public relations and communication management as a pre-requisite prior to undergoing the executive programme. With permission from one of the PR lecturers, the pilot study was conducted in the classroom at the Department of Communication, *Universiti Putra Malaysia*. A briefing about the pilot study was given to all respondents prior to distributing questionnaires to the students in the classroom. The time given to complete the questionnaires was 15 minutes only. The researcher himself then collected all the questionnaires to be analysed: after creating a coding sheet, they were then analysed using the programme SPSS. Prior to undertaking the main study, the researcher

scrutinised the pilot questionnaires and amended some wording errors: one additional question was also added.

For example:

In section C, question no. 9:

‘Do you know about the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia?’

If Yes, please answer the following questions

If No, please proceed to Section D’

The use of the contingency question in this questionnaire was important to minimise confusion (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001) and also sought to ensure the consistency of the questions asked. In fact, the layout of the questionnaire was amended to avoid any ambiguity and ensure the selected practitioners would better understand and answer the revised questionnaire in the main survey.

Measuring the same issues with different items is known as internal consistency (Burton, 2000: 343). The most widely used indicator to measure the coefficient scale is Cronbach’s alpha, which ideally should be more than 0.7 (Pallant, 2002). Using the programme SPSS, Cronbach’s alpha was tested to determine the degree of reliability of the designed questionnaire. The results of the statistical test are presented as follows:

1. Section C: professional standards of public relations (6 items): 0.843
2. Section C: the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (5 items): 0.915
3. Section D: a set of knowledge and skills (19 items): 0.873
4. Section E: education and research development (13 items): 0.812
5. Section F: accreditation and licensing (7 items): 0.852

6. Section G: public relations role (8 items): 0.852

### 4.3.3 Designing the Questionnaire Survey

A questionnaire, the most common survey instrument (Burton, 2000), is 'a written, structured series of questions' (Broom & Dozier, 1990:154) to measure the attitudes of respondents regarding the particular issues (Burton, 2000). Designing a reliable questionnaire survey was not an easy task, as this required consistency in a systematic and thorough measurement approach (Burton, 2000); hence, the questionnaire can easily be understood and answered by the selected respondents.

The nine-page questionnaire was designed to describe with quantitative data the standards of professionalism in the PR industry. Designing the layout of the questionnaire was a crucial part before administering it. The front page of this questionnaire included a cover letter noting the purpose of the questionnaire (stating that it was to collect data for this PhD). The cover letter also explained the importance of this academic project to Malaysia's PR industry; it noted that the estimated length of time respondents may need to complete the questionnaire was about 15 minutes; it described that all information given would be used for academic purposes only; it revealed the identity of researcher; and lastly, it requested that the questionnaire should be returned in the pre-addressed enveloped provided.

Balnaves and Caputi (2001) noted that it is worthwhile to pose simple questions first and the difficult ones later on. Therefore, the first section of the layout asked demographic questions about the respondents; they were then asked to answer

questions that were more complex. These questions also needed to be simple and short, as well as easy to understand. Avoiding double-barrelled questions was essential to avoid any confusion. For example, in Section C, Question 7, 'In the future will public relations become more integrated with, or distinct from strategic management?' This question was divided into two sentences: 'In the future will public relations become more integrated with strategic management' and 'In the future will public relations become more distinct from strategic management'. In fact, understanding the frame of reference was one of the important aspects of designing the questionnaire (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001: 82). As respondents of this study were public relations practitioners, particularly managers, it was important to use the language (the frame of reference) they understand. Thus, wordings like 'expertise', 'professional', and also abbreviations like 'PR' or 'IPRM' (Institute of Public Relations Malaysia) would easily be understood.

In terms of the body of the questionnaire, this can be divided into seven sections as follows:

Section A: Details about respondents

Section B: Details about respondents' jobs

Section C: Perception of public relations/corporate communication

Section D: A set of knowledge and skills

Section E: Education and research development

Section F: Accreditation and licensing

Section G: Public relations roles

#### **4.3.4 Description of the Profile of Respondents**

In Section A, there were seven items designed to determine the profile of respondents, which comprised gender, age, ethnic origin, formal education, professional qualifications, membership of professional bodies and the languages they speak professionally in the workplace. It is important to clarify the distinction between formal education and professional education. Formal education is normally offered by public or private universities or colleges, whilst professional education refers to the accredited courses offered by professional bodies. In Section B, eight items were asked to identify the job description of respondents, which consisted of the main sector they worked for, job title, the main industry they worked for, annual income, salary review, benefits, the publications they read regularly and job designation. In Section C, nine items sought to find out how respondents perceived their work, such as the functions of public relations, current and future career, improvements in the PR industry, professional standards within public relations, and the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia.

The nominal, ordinal and interval levels of measurement were used to facilitate the analysis of this study. For example, in Section B, Question No. 5: 'Into which range does your annual income fall?' related to an interval-level question (Balnaves & Caputi, 2001). Furthermore, the most commonly used scaling technique to determine the intensity of agreement or involvement was a Likert scale (see Burton, 2000; Babbie, 1995). The scale used was 1: very low, 2: low, 3: neutral, 4: high, and 5: very high, when asked about the level of involvement of their organisation in public relations functions. Respondents were also asked to rate their level of agreement with

two main statements: the professional standards of public relations and the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, based on Likert-type scales of 1: strongly disagree, 2: somewhat disagree, 3: neutral, 4: somewhat agree, and 5: strongly agree.

The use of closed-ended and open-ended questions was also incorporated in order to seek comments from respondents, especially on the standards of professionalism in Malaysia's PR industry. Burton (2000) argued that open-ended questions allow respondents to express their opinion rather than guessing the answer for the particular questions.

#### **4.3.5 Dimensions of Professionalism within Public Relations**

Importantly, the adapted dimensions of professionalism of public relations, such as a set of knowledge and skills and personal competencies, research and education, a code of ethics, and accreditation and licensing, were employed in the design of the questionnaire. These dimensions can be seen in four sections, Section D (19 items), Section E (13 items), Section F (7 items) and, finally, Section G (8 items), which were designed to identify how important the adapted dimensions of PR professionalism are to PR practice. In order to measure the respondents' perceptions of the given statements, they were asked to indicate their level of agreement based on a 5-point Likert scale of 1: not important at all, 2: somewhat unimportant, 3: uncertain, 4: somewhat important, and 5: very important (see Babbie, 1995).

The questionnaire was written in English and not translated into the Malay language, though Malay is a national language in Malaysia. This is due to the use of English as a

principal language in the private sector, including multinational companies such as Hill and Knowlton, GCI Worldwide, and so forth, as well as being widely used as a second language in the government sector. Furthermore, the government of Malaysia has strongly encouraged Malaysian citizens to use English professionally to broaden their knowledge in order to prepare for the challenges of globalisation (Chin, 2005).

#### 4.4 Research Method 2 - In-depth Interviews

The purpose of interviewing was '*to understand the life worlds of respondents*', notably the details about their roles and the environment in which they are professionally involved (Bauer & Gaskell, 2000: 39). It had been said that the interview is one of the most commonly used methodological techniques (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998) to '*understand the experience of other people and the meanings they make of that experience*' (Seidman, 1998: 3).

Interviews were used in this study as one of methodological techniques to understand PR practitioners' life world, specifically about their work and the environment in which they work. Bauer and Gaskell (2000: 39) noted that interviews also benefit researchers by offering several functions:

It may be an end in itself, providing a 'thick description' of a particular social milieu; it can be used as a basis for generating a framework for further research; it may provide empirical data to test expectations and hypotheses developed out of a particular theoretical perspective.

Unlike quantitative methods, this qualitative tool requires an interviewer to participate actively in discussing particular topics (Seidman, 1998; also see Daymon & Holloway, 2002). In terms of the size of the sample, Saunders et al. (1997) argued that

the positivistic approach (a quantitative method) needs a large sample of respondents; in contrast, the phenomenological approach (qualitative method) requires a small number of informants. Thus, these interviews were conducted with two small groups of PR people: PR academics and PR practitioners. Additionally, a series of interviews were conducted with CEOs/senior directors of large corporations, especially public listed companies, who have a view on the real value of public relations.

A summary of the interviews that were conducted with four groups, respectively PR academics, practitioners and CEOs/senior directors as well as related parties, is presented in Table 4.4, which provides a brief profile of informants to support the reliability and validity of this method.

**Table 4.4: Interviews with Four Groups**

<b>Group A: Interviews – PR Academics<sup>1</sup></b>						
<b>Academic institution</b>	<b>Job Designation</b>	<b>Size of Institution</b>	<b>Faculty/school</b>	<b>Expe-rience in function</b>	<b>Qualifi-cations</b>	<b>Professional affiliation</b>
A1	Professor/Dean	Big/Public	Faculty of Art & Social Science and Research Centre	38 years	PhD, MA, & BA (Hons)	Fellow of IPRM
A2	Senior lecturer	Big/Public	Faculty of Modern Languages/ Dept. of Communication	10 years	MA, BA (Hons) & Diploma	none
A3	Lecturer	Big/Public	Faculty of Social Science/Dept. of Media Studies	5 years	MA & BA (Hons)	none
A4	Lecturer	Big/Private	Faculty of Art/Dept. of Communication	4 years	PhD, MA & BA (Hons)	none

<sup>1</sup> Those participants selected are full-time PR lecturers and/or have a formal qualification in communications/public relations and also have demonstrated their contribution to the PR industry. There is an extreme shortage of PR academics teaching and conducting research specifically in public relations in Malaysia (Khatab, 2000). Although a range of PR subjects is offered by universities, PR subjects are always taught by part-time lecturers from other institutions or the PR industry.



<b>Group B: Interviews – PR Practitioners</b>						
<b>Company</b>	<b>Job Designation</b>	<b>Size of company &amp; Sector</b>	<b>Year listed in KLSE<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>Qualifications</b>	<b>Expe-rience in function</b>	<b>Professional Affiliation</b>
C1	Managing Director	Big/ Global firm	-	- MA & BA (Hons)	30 years	- A former member of IPRM - Member of PRCAM
C2	Head/ Director	Big/ Banking	-	- MBA, MA & BA (Hons)	25 years	- Member of IPRM - Member of IABC
C3	Head/ Director	Big/ Property	1961	- MSc & BSc (Hons)	17 years	none
C4	Head/ Director	Big/ Energy	1990	- MA & BA	23 years	- Member of IABC
C5	Manager	Big/Oil & refinery	1994	- BA (Hons)	13 years	none
	Senior Executive			- BA (Hons)	6 years	none
C6	Manager	Big/ Gaming	1970	- MBA & BA (Hons)	12 years	- Member of IPRM - Associate member of MIM
C7	Manager	Big/ Auto-mobile	1990	- SPM (GCE - O level)	22 years	Member of IPRM
C8	Head/ Director	Big/ Food & Beverage	1989	- MA & BA (Hons)	19 years	Member of IABC
C9	Officer	Big/Sport	-	- BA (Hons)	10 years	none

<b>Group C: Interviews – Chief Executive Officers/Senior Directors</b>					
<b>Corporation</b>	<b>Job Designation</b>	<b>Size of company &amp; Sector</b>	<b>Year listed in KLSE</b>	<b>Experience in function</b>	<b>Major clients/ Supervisors of senior PR staff</b>
C1	Chief Executive Officer	Big/Oil & refinery	1960	21 years	Major Client
C2	Chief Executive Officer	Big/Waste management	-	23 years	Major Client
C3	Chief Executive Officer	Big/Automobile	1990	38 years	Major Client
C4	Chief Executive Officer	Big/Property development	2000	20 years	Major Client
C5	Chairman	Big/Banking	1967	37 years	'Supervisor' of senior PR staff / Major Client

<sup>2</sup> KLSE – Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange

C6	Chairman	Big/ Conglomerates: properties, hotel, plantation and manufacturing	1990	32 years	'Supervisor' of senior PR staff
C7	Chairman	Big/World class/Shipping	-	35 years	'Supervisor' of senior PR staff / Major client
C8	Deputy Chairman	Big/ Conglomerate: properties, construction, manufacturing, education, and healthcare	1984	34 years	'Supervisor' of senior PR staff / Major Client
C9	Adviser to Chief Executive Officer	Big/ Telecommunication	2002	25 years	'Supervisor' of senior PR staff
C10	Senior General Manager of Legal counsel, Corporate affairs & Facilities management	Big/ Oil & refinery	1994	26 years	'Supervisor' of senior PR staff / Major Client

**Group D: Interviews with related parties**

<b>Job Designation</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Institution</b>	<b>Experience in function</b>	<b>Appreciation/leadership</b>
Vice President	Female/ Chinese	Institute of Public Relations Malaysia	25 years	Fellow of IPRM Accredited Public Relations (APR)
Director of Educational State Divisions	Male/Malay	Selangor State Division, Ministry of Education	45 years	DPMS, SMS & AMN

#### 4.4.1 Educational and Professional Standards within Public Relations

Drawing from a sociological perspective of profession, this study particularly sought to examine the educational and professional standards within public relations in Malaysia. In order to do this, several important elements within PR education were

explored: the PR curriculum (undergraduate and postgraduate degrees), the mediums of communication, and PR graduates' workplaces. Mainly, four adapted dimensions of professionalism - a set of knowledge and skills, research and education, a code of ethics and accreditation/licensing - were investigated. Particularly for the latter point, four established universities (both public and private) were chosen to examine the educational standards within public relations.

On the other hand, in order to gauge professional standards within public relations, ten PR practitioners from nine large corporations and ten CEOs/senior directors from ten big corporations in the Klang Valley voluntarily agreed to be interviewed. Firstly, this study sought to investigate how they perceived PR professionalism, especially with regard to the abovementioned four adapted dimensions of professionalism in order to enhance the quality of PR services. In addition, this study also identified the prospects for and emerging directions in the PR industry in Malaysia. Finally, this study also examined the medium of communication – and specifically the official language used in the PR industry.

#### **4.4.2 Defining Educational and Professional Terms**

It was important to clarify the terms, both educationally and professionally, that were used to identify the key themes of PR professionalism. According to Macmillan's English Dictionary (2002: 444), educational is '*relating to education*'. Thus, public relations education consists of curricula (undergraduate and postgraduate), research development (journal papers and conference papers), and the medium of communication. In contrast, professional is '*relating to work that needs special skills*

*and qualification(s)*' (Macmillan English Dictionary, 2002: 1125). Therefore, the professional(ism) (of public relations), from a broader view, may be described as relating not only to the specialised knowledge and skills gained from accredited qualifications but also to the core competencies like creativity and rationality that a PR person may possess. These two terms, educational and professional, may be measured by looking at the achievements or the quality they might produce.

In the light of studying the educational and professional standards of public relations, this concept can be categorised into several key themes of public relations: (1) the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations - distinct domains of PR expertise; (2) PR education - the establishment of exclusive training schools; (3) accreditation and licensing - voluntary accreditation versus mandatory accreditation; (4) the importance of a code of ethics; (5) cultural diversity management; and (6) the effective role of the professional institute of public relations (IPRM). These themes were developed based on the theoretical framework set up and the results of interviews with CEOs/senior directors, PR practitioners and academics. Thus, in order to seek out how PR people perceive these themes, two research techniques were employed: in-depth interviews were conducted, and a review was undertaken of corporate and academic documents consisting of a wide range of collected information from companies' websites, annual reports, newsletters, and reported news, as well as the PR curricula (including courses outlines), journals, monographs, and other relevant academic publications.

#### 4.4.3 Designing an Interview

The importance of the layout of interviewing was not ignored, as this determined the success or failure of this study. Four sets of interview questions were put together. The structure of the interview can be divided into three parts: introduction, specific questions and concluding question. The introduction focused on the daily work of practitioners and academics and their responsibility, the meaning of public relations and the diversity of terms used to describe public relations. The second part asked specific questions to explore the educational and professional standards within public relations. Finally, the conclusion asked interviewees to reflect on the outlook for the Malaysian PR industry. The researcher also created a slightly different set of questions for the 'alternative witness' by emphasising the Malaysian educational system, its achievements and the role of education in supporting the PR industry.

Some changes were made to the layout of the interviews for CEOs/senior directors. The structure of the interview was divided into three parts: the first part included the value of public relations to organisational strategy development, the second part comprised specific questions on PR professionalism – PR as a profession, accreditation and licensing, a code of ethics and state recognition - and the last part focused on diversity management – cultural sensitivity and globalisation/localisation. The researcher also interviewed the vice president of the IPRM, emphasising 'the professional project' the institute is pursuing – accreditation (registration) and licensing (legislation), state recognition, royal patrons, memorandums of understandings (MOU) with several ministries and research projects and relevant elements of PR professionalism.

#### 4.4.4 Administration of Interviews

These interviews took place between March and May 2004. All interviewees were selected randomly from the same framework of study used in the first phase of this study. Due to the cultural diversity in Malaysia, the interviews included the three main races: Malay, Chinese and Indian. Of 20 selected PR academics and practitioners, only 14 of them replied and agreed to be interviewed. Of two selected non-PR sector key informants, only one replied and consented to be interviewed. First, a cover letter noting the purpose of this interview was delivered to informants via email. Then all the interviewees were contacted by telephone or email to set an appointment. With the permission of interviewees, a cassette recorder was used to record the conversations, which helped the researcher to conduct the interview smoothly and efficiently. All interviews were undertaken at the interviewees' places of work. The interviews were conducted in English and/or Malay - depending on which language the interviewees preferred. During the interviews, a set of questions was used to guide the conversation and, importantly, the researcher also posed probing or follow-up questions to stimulate the conversation on the topics discussed. Having flexibility to discuss the topics of interest with interviewees and encouraging an interactive process between interviewer and interviewee may enhance the quality of interview (Daymon & Holloway, 2002: 166). At the end of the conversation, interviewees were rewarded with a small token<sup>3</sup> of appreciation for getting involved in this study. After the interview, the researcher himself transcribed all the interview data (see findings of the study).

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<sup>3</sup> This expression of appreciation is regarded as normal in Malaysia.

Additionally, between mid-November 2005 and February 2006<sup>4</sup>, the researcher also conducted a series of interviews with CEOs/senior directors of large corporations and/or major clients of public relations services in the Klang Valley who understand the real value of public relations and communication management. Table 4.4 shows the size of sample – Group C. In November and December 2005, the researcher reviewed the directory database from the homepage of the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange. Every public listed company had produced a current annual report. Through the annual report, the researcher reviewed the profile of the board of directors and corporate information such as organisational structure, the latest office address, website, email address and telephone and facsimile numbers. The researcher also reviewed newspapers, newsletters, bulletins and suchlike to find business leaders who have a view of the real value of public relations. Sending emails to a number of PR leaders to find business leaders who have contributed to the PR industry, such as those to whom the IPRM has awarded the ‘Most PR Savvy CEO’ award, was a part of the strategy in framing the sample of the study. Of 26 selected business leaders with large corporations and/or major clients of PR services, only ten replied and agreed to be interviewed. Five of them replied but declined for some reason, such as, ‘too busy’ and ‘matter of policy’. Eleven did not respond. All potential informants were contacted through email, telephone and facsimile. The cover letter and the interview schedule (see Appendix) were officially sent to their corporate communication managers asking their help to arrange interviews with their bosses/supervisors<sup>5</sup>. Then, appointments were set up to conduct face-to-face interviews at the informants’ office. The interviews lasted about one to two hours. During the interview, central questions

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<sup>4</sup> Note: between mid-November and December 2005: scheduling appointments, and between January and February 2006: visiting and interviewing informants.

<sup>5</sup> Normally, corporate communication managers report directly to CEOs/Chairmen.

were about the value of public relations, the required elements of the professionalisation of public relations and multiculturalism (how multicultural issues may affect their organisational strategy development and the role of their PR managers in handling particular situations). Some probing questions were asked to seek more information and clarify their opinions/expectations. A digital voice recorder was used to record conversations between the interviewer and interviewees after permission was obtained. All data were transferred to computer software, and a digital wave player for the process of transcribing. All valuable inputs were then analysed and interpreted as findings of this study.

Further to the series of interviews with three groups, an interview with the vice president of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia was conducted in the IPRM office at Petaling Jaya to gain insights into and ideas about the ‘professional project’ that the professional institute has undertaken and is working on, especially with regard to the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations and accreditation and licensing (see Table 4.4 Group D). In order to gain an overview of the educational system and its implications for society, an interview with an alternative (in the sense of not being directly in the field of PR) party, the Director of Educational State Divisions, Ministry of Education, Malaysia, was carried out (see Table 4.4 Group D). These two interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis. The length of each interview was between one and three hours.



## **4.5 Document Review**

In order to supplement the in-depth interviews used in this study, the researcher gathered and reviewed the desired information as well as possible information about how PR is practised in the selected organisations in the Klang Valley. This technique involved the analysis of two sets of documents: organisational documents emerging from PR practitioners' work, such as business plans, key performance indicators, annual reports, as well as operational reports, letters, press releases, organisational newsletters, bulletins and relevant documents; whilst academic documents included course outlines, journal papers, conference papers, publications, news releases regarding the PR curriculum and relevant documents.

Daymon and Holloway (2002) pointed out that such documents, a rich source of data for qualitative research, record the organisational activities from the early establishment of an organisation to today's operational activities, as well as their exceptional contributions to society. This approach helped the researcher to analyse and interpret the day-to-day public relations activities.

### **4.5.1 Administration of Document Review**

In order to study PR practitioners' work, the researcher gathered the organisational documents by visiting the organisations selected for the previous research technique, in-depth interviews. These visits were made between March and May 2004 and also January and February 2006. The same samples were used to gather organisational documents, particularly the strategic plans of corporate communication divisions,

organisational/divisional charts, key performance indicators, press releases and relevant public relations activities. Prior to visiting these organisations, official letters acknowledging the researcher as a PhD student from Cardiff School of Journalism and Media Studies, Cardiff University and ethical statements prepared by Cardiff School of Journalism and Media Studies, Cardiff University were delivered to the selected organisations noting the purpose of this study and the identity of the researcher. It was also made explicit that the study would use all the data given only for academic purposes and maintain necessary confidentiality. Daymon and Holloway (2002) have argued that extensive data can be provided by such a document analysis – not only is this non-intrusive as a research tool, but has another benefit over interviews, since these are often limited by the length of time allowed by the key informants.

Apart from visiting corporations to gather documents, some important documents, such as annual reports, press releases, bulletins and corporate reports, were also gathered from the websites of corporations (mostly public listed companies). Importantly, most organisations participating in this study provided comprehensive and up-to-date information on their websites. It was common for the information that was available on the website to be provided by the respective organisations' departments of public relations or corporate communication, including annual reports, press releases, online newsletters, information about products and services, the histories of the organisations, profiles of the boards of directors, as well as the 'mission and vision' statements of each organisation and, lastly, their current strategic development statements.

In order to access academic documents, all the data were gathered by visiting the selected universities in the Klang Valley: the National University of Malaysia, the *Universiti Putra Malaysia*, the University of Malaya, the Islamic International University, Monash University of Malaysia and the Mara Technology University. The visits were also made between March and May 2004. During the fieldwork, the researcher had some difficulties in accessing some confidential information from these universities due to some unexpected circumstances. For example, according to one of PR educators, the school of communication, Monash University of Malaysia, is involved the process of restructuring: thus, the revised PR curricula proposal is currently under review for the purpose of offering a Bachelor of Communication specialising in public relations. Therefore, during a visit to the university, some evidence (policy and academic documents) gathered was incomplete and inadequate. In order to overcome these difficulties in obtaining information, the researcher also visited the websites of most universities and private colleges in the Klang Valley to gain additional comprehensive data, including the programmes of study, course outlines, the academic department/school offering the PR degree, the PR textbooks used for teaching, as well as journals, research papers, and other relevant publications. Reviewing documents as a supplementary research tool may produce extensive results.

#### **4.6 Ethical Considerations**

In Malaysia, with a strict regulatory government system, some Malaysians are less likely to answer political questions, especially those relating to government policies. Netto (2002b: 17) has argued that the government of Malaysia has controlled freedom

to express opinions relating to government policies as they consider it may jeopardise the political and economic development of the country. Considering the sensitivity of this matter, the researcher employed some strategies to avoid any hint of threat and to achieve the data collection efficiently. First, a clear and unambiguous letter was sent to the selected respondents asking their agreement to be interviewed. Second, all respondents were told that all information collected would remain confidential and would be used for academic purposes only. The researcher also distributed an ethics statement (see Appendix) to participants during interview sessions.

#### **4.7 Summary**

This study is centrally concerned with the standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia, and has thus adopted a triangulated approach in terms of the methodology. Using a postal questionnaire and in-depth interviews sought to bring out information regarding how practitioners and academics view PR practice (and thus reinforce it as a profession). More importantly, the expectation of business leaders about the standards of PR professionalism opens a new paradigm and future challenges that PR professionals will deal with. The research methods employed in this study were adjusted within a Malaysian environment in which, importantly, there are multi-ethnic and multi-religious facets. This 'adjustment' meant the inclusion of all of these facets (such as in terms of choice of interviewees). Planning the research techniques, implementing the fieldwork, and analysing the data were the essential processes for the operationalisation of this study. In the next chapter, the results of this study will be given and discussed, seeking to answer the research questions of this study.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RESULTS & FINDINGS**

#### **(PHASE I – A POSTAL QUESTIONNAIRE)**

##### **5.0 Introduction**

This chapter presents the quantitative results and findings of this study. The fieldwork took place from 1 March 2004 to 30 May 2004 within the Klang Valley, Malaysia. The data was gathered to determine the profile of PR practitioners and the core functions of public relations in major Malaysian organisations. Importantly, the data collected sought to examine the status and standards of public relations professionalism drawn from the theoretical framework of this study.

##### **5.1 Phase I: A Postal Questionnaire**

Using the statistical tool the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 11.0, the body of numerical data gathered in this study presents a descriptive analysis of several key topics. Some predictive arguments are suggested based on the analysed data and relevant PR literature. The key topics addressed are: (1) the descriptive profile of PR practitioners; (2) the functions of public relations; (3) the professional standards of public relations; (4) the perceptions of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia; (5) the perceived importance of a body of knowledge and skills and personal competencies to PR practice; (6) the perceived importance of PR education and research to PR practice; (7) the perceived importance of PR accreditation and

licensing to PR practice; and (8) the perceived importance of the role of public relations in Malaysian corporations and firms.

## **5.2 Descriptive Profile of Respondents**

The respondents in the quantitative study consisted of a sample of PR practitioners who worked for the following three sectors: in-house private sector, in-house public sector, and consultancy. Of 200 copies of the postal questionnaire circulated to the selected practitioners, only 68 PR practitioners responded, 44 (64.7%) of whom worked for the in-house private sector; 20 (29.4%) were employed by the in-house public sector; and 4 (5.9%) were categorised as PR consultants who worked for PR firms in the Klang Valley. As illustrated in Table 5.1, 25 of the respondents (36.8%) were male and 43 (63.2%) were female, which reflects that there are a greater number of females than males working in the PR industry. The age of the practitioners ranged from 19 years to over 46 years. However, the largest number of practitioners in all sectors were between 26 and 45 years. Only 14.7% were aged over 46 years (see Table 5.2). About two-thirds of the respondents were Malay and a quarter were Chinese, with the rest Indian, Iban and others (Table 5.3).

Almost half of the respondents used English professionally and over 40% used the Malay language (see Table 5.4). In Malaysia, English is widely used as the language of administration, and the Malay language is used as the national language. According to Table 5.5, two-thirds of the respondents reported having a bachelor's degree, with only 22% having a master's degree. The data shows that 18.8% majored in business studies, 14.1% in journalism, 7.8% in public relations, 3.1% in broadcasting and 39%

**Table 5.1: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Gender According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy  
(N = 68)**

Gender	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Male	10	14.7	13	19.1	2	2.9	25	36.8
2. Female	34	50.0	7	10.3	2	2.9	43	63.2
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

**Table 5.2: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Age According to the Categories of  
In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy  
(N = 68)**

Age	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. 19-25 years	4	5.9	1	1.5	0	0.0	5	7.4
2. 26-45 years	34	50.0	17	25.0	2	2.9	53	77.9
3. 46 years and over	6	8.8	2	2.9	2	2.9	10	14.7
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100



**Table 5.3: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Ethnic Origin According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

Ethnic Origin	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Malay	25	36.8	15	22.0	2	2.9	42	61.8
2. Chinese	13	19.1	3	4.4	1	1.5	17	25.0
3. Indian	1	1.5	2	2.9	0	0.0	3	4.4
4. Iban	3	4.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	4.4
5. Others (PR expatriates)	2	2.9	0	0.0	1	1.5	3	4.4
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

**Table 5.4: Distribution of the Languages that PR Practitioners Speak Professionally According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

What languages do you speak professionally?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. English	40	31.0	18	13.9	4	3.1	62	48.1
2. Malay	35	27.1	15	11.6	4	3.1	54	41.9
3. Chinese	4	3.1	3	2.3	1	0.8	8	6.2
4. Tamil	1	0.8	2	1.6	0	0.0	3	2.3
5, Other (French)	1	0.8	0	0.0	1	0.8	2	1.6
<b>Total</b>	81	62.8	38	29.4	10	7.8	129*	100

\* The total number of responses here was not 68, as respondents may have 'ticked' more than one item.

**Table 5.5: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Academic Qualifications According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

Academic Qualifications	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Certificate/diploma	5	7.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	5	7.4
2. Bachelor's Degree	26	38.1	20	29.4	2	2.9	48	70.6
3. Master's Degree	13	19.1	0	0.0	2	2.9	15	22.0
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

in other disciplines (bachelor's degrees). Just over 14% had an MBA, which is considerably more than those with a postgraduate PR/communication degree (3.1%) (see Table 5.6). Only a very small number of practitioners in both the in-house private and public sectors had PR degrees, and there were none in consultancy. As seen, most respondents were well educated, although their degrees were in different disciplines. Surprisingly, the business and management degree holders practising in the PR profession were greater in number than those with mass communication degrees. Apparently, owing to the changing demands of the global markets, PR practitioners who possess qualifications in business and management dominate this profession.

Table 5.7 shows that nearly 80% of the respondents had never joined any of the PR professional associations. Only a few (9.6%) reported becoming members of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM), followed by the International Association for Business Communicators (IABC) (5.5%), then by the Public Relations Consultants' Association of Malaysia (PRCAM) (4.1%), and finally, by the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) (2.7%). Respondents who worked in consultancy were more likely to join professional associations - IPRM, PRCAM and IABC - compared with practitioners in both the private and public sectors. None of respondents in the in-house public sector had joined any PR professional association, which is probably due to a lack of awareness among PR practitioners of the value of being a member of these professional bodies. Another possibility is that the professional bodies have not impressed upon them sufficiently that membership would help them in their profession.

**Table 5.6: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Professional Qualifications According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Professional Qualifications	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Certificate/diploma	6	9.4	0	0.0	1	1.6	7	10.9
2. Mass Communication degree (Journalism)	6	9.4	3	4.7	0	0.0	9	14.1
3. Mass Communication degree (Public Relations)	2	3.1	3	4.7	0	0.0	5	7.8
4. Mass Communication degree (Broadcasting)	2	3.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	3.1
5. English Literature degree	4	6.2	2	3.1	0	0.0	6	9.4
6. Law degree	2	3.1	0	0.0	1	1.6	3	4.7
7. Science degree	2	3.1	2	3.1	0	0.0	4	6.2
8. Education degree	1	1.6	2	3.1	0	0.0	3	4.7
9. Islamic Studies degree	2	3.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	3.1
10. Business Studies degree	6	9.4	5	7.8	1	1.6	12	18.8
11. MBA	9	14.1	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	14.1
12. Postgraduate PR/communication degree	1	1.6	0	0.0	1	1.6	2	3.1
<b>Total</b>	43	67.2	17	26.6	4	6.4	64*	100

\* The total number of respondents was 68, but four of them did not specify their professional qualification.

**Table 5.7: Distribution of the Professional Bodies that PR Practitioners Join According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Professional Bodies	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Institute of Public Relations Malaysia	4	5.5	0	0.0	3	4.1	7	9.6
2. Public Relations Consultancy Association Malaysia	0	0.0	0	0.0	3	4.1	3	4.1
3. International Association of Business Communicators	2	2.7	0	0.0	2	2.7	4	5.5
4. Chartered Institute of Marketing	1	1.4	1	1.4	0	0.0	2	2.7
5. None of the above	38	52.1	19	26.0	0	0.0	57	78.1
<b>Total</b>	45	61.7	20	27.4	8	10.9	73*	100

\* The total number of responses here was not 68, as respondents may have 'ticked' more than one item.

With regard to the PR practitioner's job, as shown in Table 5.8, overall, over half the respondents reported holding managerial posts, with the rest describing their function as a 'technical post'. Specifically, the number of practitioners in the in-house private sector who reported holding managerial posts was greater than those in the in-house public sector. All respondents in consultancy held managerial posts. Regarding the primary areas of PR activity (see Table 5.9), over 20% reported working with government subsidiaries, including education and health, and consumer products/services respectively. Some also worked with industrial products (13.4%) and banking/financial institutions (15.9%).

It seems that PR practitioners have earned handsome remuneration from the organisations they work for (see Table 5.10). Nearly half of the respondents reported that their annual income from public relations was more than RM61,000; 17.6% earned from RM21,000-RM25,999; 13.2% from RM36,000-RM40,999; and 11.8% less than RM14,999 (see Table 5.10). Unsurprisingly, 20 respondents in the in-house private sector and all in consultancy reported earning more than RM61,000 annually, compared with two practitioners in the in-house public sector. Two-thirds said that their salaries were reviewed every year and nearly 30% reported having no regular salary review (see Table 5.11).

Apart from their salary, respondents also gained through a range of benefits from their organisations. Nearly 30% of the respondents reported having petrol/business mileage allowances; others had official use of mobile phones (21.8%), while another benefit was maternity leave (24.0%); use of company cars and medical cover were both reported by 8.2%, followed by profit sharing (6.8%). Other benefits were car/housing

**Table 5.8: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Job Rank According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

Job Rank	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Director	3	4.4	1	1.5	3	4.4	7	10.3
2. General Manager	3	4.4	0	0.0	1	1.5	4	5.9
3. Manager	20	29.4	4	5.9	0	0.0	24	35.3
4. Senior Executive/Officer	3	4.4	6	8.8	0	0.0	9	13.2
5. Executive/Officer	15	22.0	9	13.2	0	0.0	24	35.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>64.6</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>29.4</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5.9</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>100</b>



**Table 5.9: Distribution of the Primary Areas of Activity According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Primary Areas of Activity	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Consumer products/services	15	18.3	0	0.0	3	3.7	18	21.9
2. Industrial products	9	10.9	0	0.0	2	2.4	11	13.4
3. Media/broadcasting	6	7.3	0	0.0	2	2.4	8	9.8
4. Technology/telecommunication	5	6.1	0	0.0	3	3.7	8	9.8
5. Government subsidiaries	0	0.0	17	20.7	2	2.4	19	23.2
6. Banking/financial institutions	8	9.8	3	3.7	2	2.4	13	15.9
7. Property	4	4.9	0	0.0	1	1.2	5	6.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>57.3</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>24.4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>18.2</b>	<b>82*</b>	<b>100</b>

\* The total number of responses here was not 68, as respondents may have 'ticked' more than one item.

**Table 5.10: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Annual Income According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy  
(N = 68)**

Annual Income	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Under RM14999	2	2.9	6	8.8	0	0.0	8	11.8
2. RM15000-RM20999	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
3. RM21000-RM25999	8	11.8	4	5.9	0	0.0	12	17.6
4. RM26000-RM30999	3	4.4	2	2.9	0	0.0	5	7.4
5. RM31000-RM35999	4	5.9	1	1.5	0	0.0	5	7.4
6. RM36000-RM40999	7	10.3	2	2.9	0	0.0	9	13.2
7. RM41000-RM45999	0	0.0	1	1.5	0	0.0	1	1.5
8. RM46000-RM50999	0	0.0	1	1.5	0	0.0	1	1.5
9. RM51000-RM55999	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
10. RM56000-RM60999	0	0.0	1	1.5	0	0.0	1	1.5
11. Over RM61000	20	29.4	2	2.9	4	5.9	26	38.1
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

**Table 5.11: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Salary Review Frequency According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

How frequently do you have a salary review?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Every six months	1	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	1.5
2. No regular salary review	10	14.7	7	10.3	1	1.5	18	26.5
3. Every year	33	48.5	13	19.1	3	4.4	49	72.0
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

loans, club memberships and entertainment allowances, each accounting for 1.5% (see Table 5.12).

Despite having substantial remuneration from the organisations they work for, half the respondents intended to change their current career, either by moving to higher management positions or shifting from an in-house PR department to consultancy work or moving completely to other managerial disciplines such as human resource management. However, none of the respondents in consultancy intended to change their career as PR consultants (see Table 5.13a). Thus, the role of in-house public relations departments in both the private and public sector needs to be improved.

As shown in Table 5.13b, there were particular reasons why PR practitioners made the decision to leave or stay in their current position. About a quarter of respondents who wanted to change their current position reported: 'PR activities are too mundane & would prefer a new challenging career'. Nearly 5% said they wanted 'to earn a better salary' and some (2.9%) reported 'having difficulty convincing boardroom (about the value of their work) as no proper policy is in place for effective administration and execution as well as no recognition from the general public'; a similar percentage reported 'too formal dealings with strictly legal & regulatory functions'. The rest noted that there was a 'lack of understanding about public relations and no (job) satisfaction' and 'too great a workload & very routine'. These unstructured statements are quite similar to my argument as presented in Chapter 3, which is that public relations is still having an identity crisis (see van Ruler, 2000) and needs to be improved at the managerial level (Grunig & Grunig, 2003) in order to venture into today's competitive business environment.

**Table 5.12: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Benefits According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and consultancy**

What benefits does your position include?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy		N	%
	N	%	N	%	N	%		
1. Petrol/business mileage allowances	23	17.3	8	6.0	4	3.0	35	26.3
2. Maternity leave	22	16.5	10	7.5	0	0.0	32	24.0
3. Mobile phone	23	17.3	2	1.5	4	3.0	29	21.8
4. Medical cover	10	7.5	1	0.8	0	0.0	11	8.2
5. Company car	7	5.3	2	1.5	2	1.5	11	8.2
6. Profit share	6	4.5	1	0.8	2	1.5	9	6.8
7. Car/housing loan	0	0.0	2	1.5	0	0.0	2	1.5
8. Club membership	2	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.5
9. Entertainment allowances	2	1.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.5
<b>Total</b>	95	71.4	26	19.6	12	9.0	133*	100

\* The total number of responses here was not 68, as respondents may have 'ticked' more than one item.

**Table 5.13a: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perception of their Career Development According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

Would you like to change your current career over the next three years?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	23	33.8	12	17.6	0	0.0	35	51.5
No	21	30.9	8	11.8	4	5.9	33	48.5
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

**Table 5.13b: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of  
Their Career Development  
(N = 68)**

<b>Would you like to change your career over the next three years?</b>	<b>F*</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Yes: Decision to change their career as PR practitioners</b>		
1. PR activities are too mundane & would prefer a new challenging career.	15	22.0
2. To earn a better salary	3	4.4
3. Having difficulty convincing boardroom – no proper policy in place for effective administration & execution; and no recognition	2	2.9
4. Too formal dealings with strictly legal & regulatory functions	2	2.9
5. Shifting from an in-house PR department to a PR consultancy	2	2.9
6. Lack of understanding about public relations & no (job) satisfaction	1	1.5
7. Too great a workload & very routine	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>38.1</b>
<b>No: Decision to stay and look forward to working as PR practitioners</b>		
1. Great & challenging career	6	8.8
2. Very rewarding mentally and financially	5	7.4
3. Good company & employer	4	5.9
4. Full career potential	3	4.4
5. Secure job - Comfort zone	3	4.4
6. Well-experienced in PR	2	2.9
7. Very interesting career	2	2.9
8. Communicating with client – less routine work	1	1.5
9. Full (job) satisfaction	1	1.5
10. Suitable job for the qualifications held	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>44.1</b>

**Note: The estimated percentages are based on the frequency with which they were mentioned.**

In contrast, some emphasised that they would stay working as PR practitioners for various reasons, such as it being 'a great and challenging career' (8.8%) and 'very rewarding mentally and financially' (7.4%). Nearly 6% pointed out that they worked for a 'good company and employer'. This work also had 'full career potential' and 'a secure job (within) the comfort zone', these answers each accounting for 4.4% of responses equally. Nearly 3% gave reasons such as they were 'well-experienced (in this field)' and that PR was a 'very interesting career'. Others variously reported that they were 'able to communicate with clients', had 'full (job) satisfaction' and they were 'suitably qualified'. These more positive perceptions (presented in Table 5.13b) may indicate a bright future for the public relations profession. The results show that the proportion of practitioners who wanted to stay in this career was higher than those wanting to leave.

As can be seen in Table 5.15, respondents were asked to describe the job title of their position. Normally, practitioners carry a title which describes the core responsibility of their particular job, such as 'Manager of Public Relations', 'Manager of Corporate Communications' and 'Manager of Corporate Affairs'. The study indicates that nearly 30% of respondents described their position as 'corporate communications', followed by 'information/communication' (22.1%) and 'public relations' (20.6%). 'Public affairs' and 'marketing communications' were equal in number at 10.3%, with the least being 'corporate affairs' (8.8%). Specifically, 17 respondents in the private sector described their position as 'corporate communications', seven respondents in the public sector used 'information/communication', and all respondents in consultancy preferred to use 'public relations'. Van Ruler (in Sriramesh & Vercic,



**Table 5.15: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Job Titles According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

How would you describe your position?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Corporate Communication	17	25	2	2.9	0	0.0	19	27.9
2. Information/Communication	8	11.8	7	10.3	0	0.0	15	22.1
3. Public Relations	5	7.4	5	7.4	4	5.9	14	20.6
4. Marketing Communication	7	10.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	10.3
5. Public Affairs	7	10.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	10.3
6. Corporate Affairs	0	0.0	6	8.8	0	0.0	6	8.8
<b>Total</b>	44	64.6	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

2003: 226) argued that most PR practitioners in the Netherlands no longer use the term 'public relations': instead, they now use new terms such as 'corporate communications', 'communication management' or 'communication' to describe public relations management activities.

Generally, respondents in the corporate or private sector in my study preferred to use commercial terms such as 'corporate communications' or 'corporate affairs' to describe their PR functions, whilst the public sector or non-government organisation preferred to use common terms such as 'information' or 'communication', as they were more likely to be involved in publicity or events management. The preferred title they used was not only for the designation they held but also for the department or division they worked for, such as the 'Department of Public Relations', the 'Department of Public Affairs' or the 'Division of Corporate Affairs'. Clearly, Malaysian corporations have created substitute terms for public relations which are very confusing. Thus, this trend is not good for the PR industry. Grunig and Grunig (2003: 347) argued that the term 'public relations' should be used and maintained rather than substituting it with vague terms. Later, in the qualitative analysis of this study in Chapter 6, the same issue will be discussed in great detail by asking interviewees why they use the different job titles to describe the PR functions.

Besides discussing the diversity of job titles, it is worth noting the publications PR practitioners read regularly. Leading the field was *Business Week* (23.5%), followed by *The Economist* (22.5%), and then *PR Journal/Review* (11.8%); *Time* and *The Edge* were equal at 6.9%, with *Berita IPRM*, *Harvard Business Review*, and *Malaysian Business* equal at 5.9%. Others were *Marketing Journal/Review* (3.9%), and *Fortune*

(2.9%). The least read were *Forbes* and *Newsweek* (1.9%) (see Table 5.14a). Based on the data shown, it seems evident that PR practitioners across all sectors predominantly read business and management publications to try to increase their knowledge of the corporate world.

### **5.3 The Functions of Public Relations**

Having drawn a profile of PR practitioners and their profession, it is now worth presenting the perceived levels of involvement of their organisations in various PR functions (see Table 5.16). Nearly two-thirds of respondents dealt with public information and corporate communication/reputation in their organisation. Half of them reported being involved in media relations/publicity and strategic communication management, with about one-quarter saying their activity involved political communication. Nearly one-third reported practising issue/crisis management and sponsorship respectively. Specifically, the data also shows that practitioners from the three main sectors were less likely to practise the three following PR functions: sponsorship, crisis/issue management and financial/investor relations, each with mean scores of 2.8.

This finding implies that Malaysian corporations and public-sector organisations are practising a range of basic and advanced levels of public relations, depending on the circumstances of the organisations' needs. Their PR practitioners are not only involved with publicity or media relations, which are considered technical PR functions, but also, importantly, practise an advanced level of PR functions such as

**Table 5.14a: Distribution of Publications that PR Practitioners Read Regularly According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

What publications do you read regularly?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
1. Business Week	14	13.7	7	6.9	3	2.9	24	23.5
2. The Economist	14	13.7	6	5.9	3	2.9	23	22.5
3. PR Journal/Review	4	3.9	6	5.9	2	1.9	12	11.8
4. The Edge	5	4.9	1	1.0	1	1.0	7	6.9
5. Time	4	3.9	2	1.9	1	1.0	7	6.9
6. Harvard Business Review	4	3.9	0	0.0	2	1.9	6	5.9
7. Berita IPRM	4	3.9	1	1.0	1	1.0	6	5.9
8. Malaysian Business	4	3.9	1	1.0	1	1.0	6	5.9
9. Marketing Journal/Review	3	2.9	0	0.0	1	1.0	4	3.9
10. Fortune	2	1.9	1	1.0	0	0.0	3	2.9
11. Forbes	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	1.9	2	1.9
12. Newsweek	1	1.0	0	0.0	1	1.0	2	1.9
<b>Total</b>	59	57.6	25	24.6	18	17.5	102*	100

\* The total number of responses here was not 68, as respondents may have 'ticked' more than one item.

**Table 5.16: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Level of Involvement of their Organisation in PR Functions According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

PR Functions	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			Overall Mean Scores
	Low %	Neutral %	High %	Low %	Neutral %	High %	Low %	Neutral %	High %	
1. Media Relations/Publicity	10 (14.7)	12 (17.6)	22 (32.4)	8 (11.8)	4 (5.9)	8 (11.8)	0	0	4 (5.9)	3.3
2. Public Information	6 (8.8)	15 (22.1)	23 (33.8)	3 (4.4)	2 (2.9)	15 (22.1)	0	0	4 (5.9)	3.5
3. Corporate Branding	9 (13.2)	15 (22.1)	20 (29.4)	8 (11.8)	6 (8.8)	6 (8.8)	0	0	4 (5.9)	3.3
4. Sponsorship	16 (23.5)	14 (20.6)	14 (20.6)	11 (16.2)	5 (7.4)	4 (5.9)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	2.8
5. Crisis/Issue Management	21 (30.9)	13 (19.1)	10 (14.7)	9 (13.2)	3 (4.4)	8 (11.8)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	2.8
6. Financial/Investor Relations	17 (25.0)	12 (17.6)	15 (22.1)	10 (14.7)	5 (7.4)	5 (7.4)	0	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	2.8
7. Strategic Communication Management	12 (17.6)	9 (13.2)	23 (33.8)	8 (11.8)	4 (5.9)	8 (11.8)	0	0	4 (5.9)	3.3
8. Marketing Communication	8 (11.8)	14 (20.6)	22 (32.4)	10 (14.7)	5 (7.4)	5 (7.4)	1 (1.5)	0	3 (4.4)	3.2
9. Political Communication	23 (33.8)	10 (14.7)	11 (16.2)	12 (17.6)	2 (2.9)	6 (8.8)	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	0	2.4
10. Corporate Communication/Reputation	5 (7.4)	13 (19.1)	26 (38.1)	9 (13.2)	1 (1.5)	10 (14.7)	0	0	4 (5.9)	3.4

Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Very low' and '5' equalled 'Very high'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of involvement of their organization in PR functions.

strategic communication management, financial/investor relations and corporate branding. This finding supports the study by Lines (2004) regarding the importance of corporate reputation and media coverage in building strategic business among Asian corporations. Thus, the organisations are aware that projecting corporate reputation and gaining media coverage may enhance their transparency and openness to their publics.

#### **5.4 Public Relations is a Part of Strategic Management Discipline**

In the future, the function of public relations may be broader, with public relations in Malaysia focusing more on alignment with strategic management. As shown in Table 5.17, almost all respondents agreed that public relations would be integrated with strategic management. It is therefore important for PR practitioners to view public relations as a serious core management discipline, and not one that only requires knowledge of mass communication or journalism. This finding may be considered the unique feature of public relations compared to other social science disciplines. Indeed, Grunig and Grunig (2003: 324) argue that excellent public relations needs to be part of a strategic management process to foster internal and external public participation in strategic decision-making in producing an organisational policy. The next findings show how the professional PR practitioners surveyed view their work.

#### **5.5 The Professional Standards of Public Relations**

Of the six items tested, the majority of respondents in all sectors viewed their work as a serious profession, based on the following key elements: 'a professional is someone

**Table 5.17: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of Strategic Management According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

In the future, will public relations...	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Become more integrated with strategic management	41	60.3	19	27.9	4	5.9	64	94.1
Become more distinct from strategic management	3	4.4	1	1.5	0	0.0	4	5.9
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

who is proficient or an expert' (85.3%) with mean scores of 4.3; 'requiring professional skills' (82.4%) with mean scores of 4.1; 'a profession is more highly valued than an occupation' (80.9%) with mean scores of 4.1; 'having specific personal expertise' (80.9%) with mean scores of 4.0; and 'I view my job as a profession' (76.5%) with mean scores of 4.0. In fact, over half reported 'they have had substantial training in professional skills' with mean scores of 3.6 (see Table 5.18). This result implies considerable awareness of the importance of this emerging profession among PR practitioners and probably underscores the important role PR professional bodies such as the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia should have in shaping the emergence of the PR industry.

## **5.6 Perceptions of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia**

Regarding the five items tested, PR practitioners across all sectors felt that the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia was still far from excellent in developing the highest standards of PR professionalism. On all items, a low rating in terms of mean score was produced (see Table 5.19b): the lower the mean score, the poorer the degree of perception of this institute. Specifically, respondents who worked in the private and public sectors were relatively unsure of the role of the IPRM in shaping the PR industry, whilst respondents from consultancy rated all statements given as significantly low. In addition, nearly one-third did not know of the existence of the institute (see Table 5.19a).

This study also examined PR practitioners' expressed opinions of the IPRM by dividing these opinions into two categories: negative and positive statements. As



**Table 5.18: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Professional Standards of Public Relations  
According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Items	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Disagrec %	Neutral %	Agree %	
1. I believe that a professional is someone who is proficient or expert.	10 (14.7)	8 (11.8)	34 (50.0)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
2. I believe that a profession is more highly valued than an occupation.	3 (4.4)	8 (11.8)	33 (48.5)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.1
3. I view my job as a profession.	5 (7.4)	9 (13.2)	30 (44.1)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.0
4. I have specific personal expertise.	5 (7.4)	5 (7.4)	34 (50.0)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.0
5. My work requires professional skills.	3 (4.4)	7 (10.3)	34 (50.0)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.1
6. I have had substantial training in professional skills.	11 (16.2)	12 (17.6)	21 (30.9)	0	4 (5.9)	16 (23.5)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (2.9)	3.6

**A higher score across the range of questions supports the notion that the respondents regard both themselves as professionals and PR as a profession.**

**Table 5.19a: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy (N = 68)**

Do you know about the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia?	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR						Total	
	In-house private sector		In-house public sector		Consultancy			
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Yes	27	39.7	17	25	4	5.9	48	70.6
No	17	25	3	4.4	0	0.0	20	29.4
<b>Total</b>	44	64.7	20	29.4	4	5.9	68	100

**Table 5.19b: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM)  
According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Statements	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	
1. IPRM plays important roles in shaping the emergent PR industry	4 (5.9)	12 (17.6)	11 (16.2)	0	7 (10.3)	10 (14.7)	3 (4.4)	0	1 (1.9)	2.3
2. IPRM offers members good services	5 (7.4)	18 (26.5)	4 (5.9)	0	11 (16.2)	6 (8.8)	3 (4.4)	1 (1.9)	0	2.1
3. IPRM is effective and efficient	8 (11.8)	15 (22.1)	4 (5.9)	0	10 (14.7)	7 (10.3)	3 (4.4)	1 (1.9)	0	2.1
4. IPRM exists to support PR professionals & non-professionals	2 (2.9)	14 (20.6)	11 (16.2)	0	6 (8.8)	11 (16.2)	1 (1.9)	1 (1.9)	2 (2.9)	2.4
5. IPRM offers a range of qualification and training programmes for members	2 (2.9)	10 (14.7)	15 (22.1)	0	11 (16.2)	6 (8.8)	3 (4.4)	0	1 (1.9)	2.3

**The total is not 68 (100%), as respondents skipped these questions if they answered NO to Q9 (see Table 5.19a).**

**Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Strongly disagree' and '5' equalled 'Strongly agree'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the better the perception of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia.**

shown in Table 5.19c, negative statements (53.4%) were more common than positive statements, which accounted for only 7.4%. Significantly, within the negative statements, some viewed the institute as 'does not promote the PR profession extensively to the general public' (14.7%); being 'an ineffective and inefficient PR association' (11.8%); and 'should be more people-friendly' (4.4%). In contrast, only a few (7.4%) offered positive statements such as 'it is a good PR body and has potential to be one of the most prominent organisations in Malaysia' (2.9%); 'a good platform to address PR issues' (1.5%); and 'a good foundation for young PR executives' (1.5%). Apparently, in this case, the role of the institute seemed not to be robust and rigorous enough in contributing to the emergence of the PR industry. Thus, hard work and perseverance are required from council members of this professional body to vigorously promote and shape the emergence of the industry, coupled with a need to improve professionalism among potential PR practitioners through PR education.

Apart from reviewing the role of the IPRM, it was worth noting the PR textbooks practitioners have read recently. Based on Table 5.14b, there are 42 PR books highlighted by respondents, the most popular being *Corporate Communication* by Paul Argenti. The second most popular was *Effective Public Relations* by Cutlip, Broom and Center, also known as 'the bible of public relations', which is claimed to be the best-selling book to PR academics and practitioners from all over the world (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003). Most of the books highlighted by respondents were in the scope of business and management, especially from related literature such as public relations, corporate communication management and marketing communication.

**Table 5.19c: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (N = 68)**

<b>What do you think about the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia?</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>NEGATIVE STATEMENTS</b>		
1. Does not promote the PR profession extensively to the general public	10	14.7
2. An ineffective & inefficient PR association	8	11.8
3. Should be more people-friendly	3	4.4
4. Has been procrastinating (being lazy or complacent)	1	1.5
5. Enrolment through the website is inadequate	1	1.5
6. Should provide hands-on activities & research development	1	1.5
7. Not visible enough	1	1.5
8. Does not expand the role of PR	1	1.5
9. Not attractive	1	1.5
10. No incentives	1	1.5
11. An exclusive club for PR 'wannabes' and clueless about how to enhance the standard of PR practice – internal politicking	1	1.5
12. Does not play adequate role in changing people's perception of PR	1	1.5
13. Should gain credibility	1	1.5
14. Needs a complete revamp to bring true benefits to the profession	1	1.5
15. Should regulate and manage PR practitioners to achieve high standard of professionalism	1	1.5
16. Should give more exposure to PR practitioners	1	1.5
17. Must work harder to get the industry recognised by general public	1	1.5
18. Still 'fledgling' to PR practitioners	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>53.4</b>
<b>POSITIVE STATEMENTS</b>		
1. It is a good PR body and has potential to be one of the most prominent organisations in Malaysia	2	2.9
2. A good platform to address PR issues	1	1.5
3. The body serves its purpose	1	1.5
4. A good foundation for young PR executives	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7.4</b>

**Note: The estimated percentages are based on the frequency with which they were mentioned.**

**Table 5.14b: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of PR Textbooks They Have Read (N = 68)**

<b>Please state the three most important PR texts you have read recently:</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
1. Corporate Communication by Paul Argenti (1997)	5	7.4
2. Effective Public Relations by Cutlip, Broom & Center (2000)	4	5.9
3. Creativity in PR by Andy Green (2001)	2	2.9
4. A Question of Ethics by Peter Foldy (1992)	1	1.5
5. Enhancing Communication***	1	1.5
6. The Power of Public Relations by Leonard Saffir (1999)	1	1.5
7. The Fall of Advertising & the Rise of PR by Al Ries & Laura Ries (2002)	1	1.5
8. Guerrilla PR Wired by Michael Levine (2003)	1	1.5
9. Communicating out of Crisis by Michael Bland (1998)	1	1.5
10. No Nonsense***	1	1.5
11. Public Relations by Richard Varey*	1	1.5
12. The Importance of Public Relations***	1	1.5
13. Evaluation Outcome of Public Relations***	1	1.5
14. Communication Theory***	1	1.5
15. Advanced Public Relations***	1	1.5
16. Crisis Communications: A Casebook Approach by Kathleen Fearn-Banks (2001)	1	1.5
17. Full Frontal PR by Richard Laermer (2004)	1	1.5
18. Harvard Business Review Leadership by Mintzberg et al. (1998)	1	1.5
19. Risk Issues and Crisis Management Michael Regester & Judy Larkin (2001)	1	1.5
20. Corporate Identity in Crisis***	1	1.5
21. The Function of Corporate Communications & Strategic Management by Leif Aberg (1999)	1	1.5
22. Primer: The Guide to the Primary Functions of Corporate Communications (2003)**	1	1.5
23. Strategic Communications for Nonprofit Organizations by Janel M. Radtke (1998)	1	1.5
24. Strategic Visioning***	1	1.5
25. Experience of World Best Practices & Corporate Culture***	1	1.5
26. Leading Change by John Kotter (1996)	1	1.5
27. Strategic Management: What CEOs Must Do to Succeed by John Zinkin (2003)	1	1.5
28. Corporate Reputation & Competitiveness by Gary Davies (2002)	1	1.5
29. Organisational Behaviour by Pamela Shockley-Zalabak (2001)	1	1.5
30. A Branded World: Adventures in Public Relations and the Creation of Superbrands by Michael Levine (2003)	1	1.5
31. Marketing Basics***	1	1.5
32. Advertising Management Rajeev Batra, John G. Myers, David A. Aaker (1995)	1	1.5
33. Brand Spirit: How Cause Related Marketing Builds Brand by Hamish Pringle & Marjorie Thompson (2001)	1	1.5
<b>Total:</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>64.2</b>

**Note: The estimated percentages are based on the frequency with which they were mentioned.**

\*\*\* Author/date not given

\* Date not given

## **5.7 Perceived Importance of a Set of Knowledge and Skills and Personal Competencies**

The findings presented in Table 5.20 and Table 5.21 show that the importance of a set of knowledge and skills and personal competencies to PR practice is one of the key dimensions of PR professionalism. Of the 19 items tested, a huge majority of respondents from all sectors noted the importance of such knowledge, skills and competencies in PR practice. ‘Mastering English because it is the language of global commerce’ (97%), with mean scores of 4.6, was the highest-rated skill, followed by ‘improving customer service’ and ‘ability to be sensitive to cultural differences’, both with mean scores of 4.5. Concerning the value of multiculturalism, respondents highly rated statements such as ‘appreciating cultural diversity’ (4.4) and ‘promoting the benefits of bilingualism’ (4.3). The following four statements also received very high ratings: ‘understanding new media & technologies’ (4.4), ‘ability to apply decision making strategies’ (4.4), ‘acquiring in-depth knowledge of corporate world & uniquely intellectual advantages’ (4.3), and ‘gaining in-depth knowledge of various media’ (4.3).

Clearly, there is an overwhelming perception among PR practitioners of the importance of specialised knowledge and skills relating to management, diversity and communication. This finding supports a study by Sriramesh and Vercic (2003: 510), which stresses the importance of ‘fluency in a foreign language’ and ‘applying cross-cultural sensitivity’ for PR practitioners, and it indicates that today’s PR practitioners should acquire profound knowledge and skills to venture into the changing business environment.

**Table 5.20: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of a Set of Knowledge & Skills in PR Practice According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Statements	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	
1. Gaining in-depth knowledge of various media	0	5 (7.4)	39 (57.4)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
2. Understanding new media & technologies	0	4 (5.9)	40 (58.8)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.4
3. Understanding product or service design	0	4 (5.9)	40 (58.8)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.2
4. Understanding technological creation	2 (2.9)	14 (20.6)	28 (41.2)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	3.9
5. Improving customer service	1 (1.5)	4 (5.9)	39 (57.4)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.5
6. Acquiring in-depth knowledge of corporate world & uniquely intellectual advantages	0	4 (5.9)	40 (58.8)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
7. Mastering English because it is the language of global commerce	0	2 (2.9)	42 (61.8)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.6
8. Ability to apply decision-making strategies	0	3 (4.4)	41 (60.3)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.4
9. Ability to be sensitive to cultural differences	0	2 (2.9)	42 (61.8)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.5
10. Appreciating cultural diversity	0	4 (5.9)	40 (58.8)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.4
11. Promoting the benefits of bilingualism	1 (1.5)	4 (5.9)	39 (57.4)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.3

Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Not important at all' and '5' equalled 'Very important'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of importance of these areas of knowledge/skills to PR practice.



**Table 5.21: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of Personal Competencies in PR Practice According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Statements	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	
1. Possessing creativity	0	0	44 (64.7)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.5
2. Being flexible and permeable	0	4 (5.9)	40 (58.8)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.3
3. Understanding logistics (able to be rational)	2 (2.9)	6 (8.8)	36 (52.9)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.1
4. Requiring personal dedication	0	2 (2.9)	42 (61.8)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.4
5. Possessing initiative & enthusiasm	0	0	44 (64.7)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.5
6. Gaining intellectual leadership	0	3 (4.4)	41 (60.3)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
7. Possessing charisma	0	5 (7.4)	39 (57.4)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.3
8. Being credible	0	0	44 (64.7)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.5

Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Not important at all' and '5' equalled 'Very important'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of the importance of these personal competencies to PR practice.

With particular reference to personal competencies (Table 5.21), across all sectors there were three in the highest rating bracket: 'possessing creativity', 'being credible', and 'possessing initiative & enthusiasm', each with mean scores of 4.5. These were followed by the statement 'requiring personal dedication' (4.4), and respondents also rated highly the statements 'gaining intellectual leadership', 'possessing charisma', and 'being flexible and permeable', with mean scores of 4.3.

### **5.8 Perceived Importance of PR Education and Research Development**

In addition to the findings on knowledge of public relations, practitioners were also asked about the importance of PR education and research development to PR practice. The results (see Table 5.22) show that of the 13 items tested, a large number of respondents across all sectors rated highly the importance of 'focusing on practical implications' (92.7%), 'obtaining professional qualifications' (85.3%), 'advancing continuous professional development' (85.3%), 'publishing more PR books, journals and other publications' (77.9%) and 'focusing on applied research (real world effect)' (73.5%). However, only half responded positively to statements like 'emphasising on comprehensive examination', with less than half regarding 'emphasising academic theses' as being important to PR practice (mean scores of 3.5 and 3.3 respectively). These two statements were rated lower by practitioners in the in-house private sector and consultancy than by those from the in-house public sector. This result implies that there is perceptual distance between scholarship and practice, although the scores for both elements were still fairly high. According to Cornelissen (2000), it is important for PR practitioners to learn and apply academic theories to the practice of public

**Table 5.22: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of PR Education & Research Development According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Statements	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	
1. PR curricula offered by universities	1 (1.5)	13 (19.1)	30 (44.1)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	3.8
2. Obtaining professional qualifications	4 (5.9)	5 (7.4)	35 (51.5)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.1
3. Advancing continuous professional development	1 (1.5)	8 (11.8)	35 (51.5)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.2
4. Conducting systematic and scientific research	3 (4.4)	13 (19.1)	28 (41.2)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	3.8
5. Focusing on applied research (real world effect)	2 (2.9)	12 (17.6)	30 (44.1)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	0	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	4.0
6. PR curriculum is housed in the Media School	2 (2.9)	13 (19.1)	29 (42.7)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	2 (2.9)	3.8
7. PR curriculum is housed in the Business School	1 (1.5)	15 (22.1)	28 (41.2)	0	5 (7.4)	15 (22.1)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	2 (2.9)	3.7
8. Publishing more PR books, journals & other publications	2 (2.9)	8 (11.8)	34 (50.0)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	2 (2.9)	4.0
9. Formulating new & international PR theories	4 (5.9)	14 (20.6)	26 (38.2)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	0	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	3.7
10. Focusing on practical implications	0	5 (7.4)	39 (57.4)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
11. Emphasising on comprehensive examination	4 (5.9)	21 (30.9)	19 (27.9)	0	6 (8.8)	14 (20.6)	2 (2.9)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	3.5
12. Emphasising academic thesis	7 (10.3)	23 (33.8)	14 (20.6)	0	6 (8.8)	14 (20.6)	2 (2.9)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	3.3
13. Integrating with management research	2 (2.9)	11 (16.2)	31 (45.6)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	0	2 (2.9)	2 (2.9)	3.9

Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Not important at all' and '5' equalled 'Very important'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of the importance to PR education and research development.

relations in the real world, which may help PR practitioners to increase their professionalism.

Surprisingly, the result also indicates that there is no significant difference between two different statements: 'PR curriculum is housed in the Media School' (a mean score of 3.8) and 'PR curriculum is housed in the Business School' (a mean score of 3.7) across all sectors. Although all agreed that PR practitioners need to acquire knowledge of business operations (see Table 5.20), it seems clear that the respondents felt that the PR curriculum should be housed in either of these schools. The establishment of a training school for public relations is a crucial part of the process of professionalisation. Further discussion on this aspect will be included in the qualitative analysis, presented in Chapter 7.

## **5.9 Perceived Importance of PR Accreditation and Licensing**

Further to the findings concerning the seven items tested, this study also found that all respondents agreed about the importance of accreditation and licensing to practice in the public relations field, except that respondents in consultancy were less likely to agree with the statement 'obtaining licensing from professional organisation'. Over two-thirds from all sectors reported the importance of 'practising self-regulation' (mean scores of 4.0) and 'abiding by ethical guidelines' (mean score 4.1) to PR practice. This was followed by 'rewarding excellence' (mean score 4.0), whilst over half of the respondents reported that 'obtaining membership of a professional body' and 'acquiring accreditation from professional organisation' were important to PR practice, each with mean scores of 3.7. The data also shows that respondents across

all sectors rated the statement 'getting added value by becoming member of professional association' relatively highly with an overall mean score of 3.6 (see Table 5.23). Although many had not yet become members of any professional body, they perceived that joining such a body was worthwhile. It would seem that the IPRM needs to be more vigorous in promoting the benefits of membership to potential members since this key dimension could increase the standards of PR professionalism with more people being accredited to practise in the public relations sphere. Surprisingly, Australasian countries like Australia and New Zealand are still facing critical issues concerning accreditation status owing to contradictory notions regarding the examination system among senior members of the professional associations (Motion et al., 2003). Thus, these associations must particularly take responsibility for producing a universal accreditation system. As the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management attempts to consolidate all PR professional associations with regard to introducing universal accreditation and licensing, the IPRM would be wise to support this effort.

## **5.10 Perceived Importance of the Strategic Role of Public Relations<sup>1</sup>**

Of the final eight items tested to determine the important role of professional standards in public relations, a huge majority across all sectors rated the following as paramount for PR practitioners: 'public relations as a part of the communication function' (98.5%), with mean scores of 4.5, followed by 'PR as a part of management

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<sup>1</sup> The term 'strategic role' refers to changing the function of public relations from publicity to strategy management. Debates about this issue have been vigorously discussed in a number of PR research projects (see Fleisher, 1998; Bronn, 2001; Steyn et al 2001; Steyn, 2003).

**Table 5.23: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of PR Accreditation & Licensing According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Statements	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	
1. Acquiring accreditation from professional organisations	4 (5.9)	14 (20.6)	26 (38.2)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	2 (2.9)	3.7
2. Obtaining licensing from professional organisations	3 (4.4)	16 (23.5)	25 (36.8)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	2 (2.9)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	3.7
3. Practising self-regulation	2 (2.9)	8 (11.8)	34 (50.0)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.0
4. Abiding by ethical guidelines	2 (2.9)	9 (13.2)	33 (48.5)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.1
5. Obtaining membership of professional organisations	5 (7.4)	19 (27.9)	20 (29.4)	0	2 (2.9)	18 (26.5)	0	0	4 (5.9)	3.7
6. Getting added value by becoming member of professional organisations	4 (5.9)	21 (30.9)	19 (27.9)	0	3 (4.4)	17 (25.0)	1 (1.5)	0	3 (4.4)	3.6
7. Rewarding excellence	3 (4.4)	11 (16.2)	30 (44.1)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.0

Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Not important at all' and '5' equalled 'Very important'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of importance to PR accreditation and licensing.

function' and 'integrating with corporate strategies', each accounting for a positive response of 94.1%, with mean scores of 4.4 respectively. Also highly rated were 'formulating communication strategies' (92.7%) and 'formulating marketing communication strategies' (88.2%), with mean scores of 4.3, while respondents further regarded 'developing management strategies' and 'involving practitioners in policy making' relatively highly in terms of importance, with mean scores of 4.1. Finally, 77.9% of respondents rated highly the statement 'integrating with information technology strategies', with mean scores of 4.0 (see Table 5.24). This finding reveals that both the strategic technical role (communication) and strategic managerial role (strategic management) were seen as extremely important to PR practice. Thus, PR professionals must be responsible not only for organising communication activities like media relations, events management and publicity, but just as importantly for performing strategic management functions (Chay-Nemeth, 2003). These are the key drivers of change to which attention must be paid if there is to be support for the future of professionalised PR work in Malaysia.

### **5.11 Perceived Importance of Specialised Knowledge & Professional Skills**

Throughout the process of answering the open-ended questions, respondents in all sectors also gave their opinions concerning the PR knowledge and skills practitioners should acquire in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This can be divided into two categories: strategic technical skills and strategic managerial skills. Of the 26 technical skills listed by respondents, the highest percentage rated highly 'professional communication skills' (25%), followed by 'knowledge of information technology' (14.7%),

**Table 5.24: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of the Strategic Role of Public Relations According to the Categories of In-house Private Sector, In-house Public Sector and Consultancy**

Statements	THE SECTOR PR PRACTITIONERS WORK FOR (N: 68)									Overall Mean Scores
	In-house Private Sector N: 44			In-house Public Sector N: 20			Consultancy N: 4			
	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	Not Important %	Neutral %	Important %	
1. PR as a part of the management function	0	3 (4.4)	41 (60.3)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.4
2. PR as a part of the communication function	0	1 (1.5)	43 (63.2)	0	0	20 (29.4)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.5
3. Formulating marketing communication strategies	0	7 (10.3)	37 (54.4)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
4. Integrating with IT strategies	0	12 (17.6)	32 (47.1)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	1 (1.5)	1 (1.5)	2 (2.9)	4.0
5. Developing management strategies	1 (1.5)	9 (13.2)	34 (50.0)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.1
6. Formulating communication strategies	1 (1.5)	3 (4.4)	40 (58.8)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.3
7. Involving practitioners in policy making	0	12 (17.6)	32 (47.1)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.1
8. Integrating with corporate strategies	0	3 (4.4)	41 (60.3)	0	1 (1.5)	19 (27.9)	0	0	4 (5.9)	4.4

Mean scores in this table are based on responses to a five-point answer scale where '1' equalled 'Not important at all' and '5' equalled 'Very important'. Consequently, the higher the mean score the greater the degree of the importance of the roles of public relations.



'marketing skills' (10.3%), 'media relations skills' (8.8%), 'writing skills' and 'technological skills' (5.9% each).

Other skills regarded as particularly important were 'sensitivity to the latest issues' (4.4%), 'creativity' (4.4%), 'interpersonal skills' (4.4%), 'intra-personal skills' (2.9%), 'decision making skills' (2.9%), and 'sale and promotion skills' (2.9%) (see Table 5.25a).

As shown in Table 5.25b, respondents listed 15 managerial skills, with the highest percentage rating highly 'knowledge of politics, economics and global issues, including an ability to grasp the macro picture' (17.6%), followed by 'basic management skills' (7.4%) and 'in-depth knowledge of business operations' (5.9%). Other important managerial skills highlighted were 'in-depth and practical knowledge of integrated communication', 'knowledge of strategic management', 'crisis/issue management', 'a combination of legal, financial and business skills' and 'business accounting', each of which was mentioned by 2.9%. Nearly 2% of the respondents also highlighted the importance of the following areas of knowledge: 'strategic counsel', 'strategic thinking', 'evaluation and measurement capability', 'marketing communication', and 'integration with social responsibility'.

These knowledge levels and professional skills highlighted by respondents are at the heart of strategic communication management. They support Kitchen's (1997a) notion of the role of PR practitioners being 'boundary-spanners', with the ability strategically to scan the environment in which they may communicate a company's policies to its internal and external strategic constituencies. However, some of these

**Table 5.25a: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of Unique Knowledge & Professional Skills They Should Acquire (N = 68)**

What kind of knowledge & skills do you think PR practitioners should acquire to gain competitive advantage in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century?	F	%
<b>TECHNICAL SKILLS</b>		
1. Professional communication skills – written & oral	17	25.0
2. Knowledge of information technology (IT)	10	14.7
3. Marketing skill	7	10.3
4. Media relations skill	6	8.8
5. Writing skill	4	5.9
6. Technological skill	4	5.9
7. Sensitivity to current/latest issues	3	4.4
8. Creativity skill	3	4.4
9. Behavioural science psychology	3	4.4
10. Brilliance	3	4.4
11. Interpersonal skill	3	4.4
12. Intra-personal skill	2	2.9
13. Decision-making skill	2	2.9
14. Sales & Promotion skill	2	2.9
15. Flexibility	1	1.5
16. Being credible – no spin doctoring	1	1.5
17. Analytical skill	1	1.5
18. Presentation skill	1	1.5
19. Initiative	1	1.5
20. Mastering various languages	1	1.5
21. Advertising skill	1	1.5
22. Organisational skill	1	1.5
23. Being sensitive towards other cultures	1	1.5
24. Problem solving skill	1	1.5
25. Public speaking	1	1.5
26. Public information skill	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>119.3</b>

**Note:** The estimated percentages are based on the frequency with which they were mentioned.

**Table 5.25b: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of Unique Knowledge & Professional Skills They Should Acquire  
(N = 68)**

What kind of knowledge & skills do you think PR practitioners should acquire to gain competitive advantage in the 21 <sup>st</sup> century?	F	%
<b>MANAGERIAL SKILLS</b>		
1. Knowledge of politics, economics & global issues (macro-picture)	12	17.6
2. Basic management skill	5	7.4
3. In-depth knowledge of business operations	4	5.9
4. In-depth and practical knowledge of integrated communication	2	2.9
5. Knowledge of strategic management	2	2.9
6. Crisis/issue management	2	2.9
7. A combination of legal, financial, and business skills	2	2.9
8. Business accounting	2	2.9
9. Strategic counsel	1	1.5
10. Strategic thinking	1	1.5
11. Evaluation & measurement capability	1	1.5
12. Marketing communication	1	1.5
13. Integration with social responsibility	1	1.5
14. Willingness to try new things	1	1.5
15. Willingness to take risks	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>50.0</b>

**Note: The estimated percentages are based on the frequency with which they were mentioned.**

findings cannot be interpreted as representing an 'exclusive jurisdiction' as described in the theoretical framework of this study, as it is argued that communication skills and business acumen are necessary knowledge and skills for *all* management occupations. This concept will be discussed further in the qualitative findings presented in Chapter 6 and 7.

### **5.12 Perceived Key Drivers for the Improvement of the PR Industry**

Finally, respondents across all sectors were asked about the improvements they would like to see in the PR industry over the next ten years. The highest number, 30.9%, reported that they would like the PR industry 'to be recognised as a true profession', followed by recognition 'by top management or board of directors' (4.4%) and then, reported by 2.9% in each case, 'to be people-friendly', 'integrate with all serious business strategies', 'more rewarding mentally and financially', 'more transparency and integrity', 'more organised professional bodies', 'an industry that is filled by truly qualified PR professionals', and 'achieving global standards' (see Table 5.26). There is, it would seem, a substantial desire to improve the profession at the managerial level, which could thus be vital to underpinning PR as a potentially new, great modern profession in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **5.13 Summary**

The main objectives, as described in Chapter 3, were addressed and the chapter unlocked practitioners' perceptions of the dimensions of PR professionalism and the role of the IPRM. As we can see, the findings of this study confirm the key

**Table 5.26: Distribution of PR Practitioners' Perceptions of Improvement of PR Industry Over the Next Ten Years (N = 68)**

<b>What improvement would you like to see to the PR industry over the next ten years?</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>%</b>
1. To be recognised as a true profession – increased professionalism	21	30.9
2. To be recognised by top management/board of directors	3	4.4
3. To be more people-friendly – customer service	2	2.9
4. Integrate with all serious business strategies	2	2.9
5. More rewarding mentally and financially	2	2.9
6. More transparency & integrity	2	2.9
7. More organised professional bodies	2	2.9
8. An industry that is filled by qualified PR professionals	2	2.9
9. Achieving global standards	2	2.9
10. Role of government in supporting the importance of PR	1	1.5
11. More innovation	1	1.5
12. A clear separation between PR and advertising	1	1.5
13. A clear approach to integrating with marketing functions	1	1.5
14. No exploitation of women	1	1.5
15. More than publicity	1	1.5
16. More locally oriented	1	1.5
17. Improving better schemes in public services	1	1.5
18. Attracting the younger generation to be involved in the PR industry	1	1.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>69.1</b>

**Note:** The estimated percentages are based on the frequency with which they were mentioned.

dimensions of PR professionalism drawn from the theoretical framework. Specifically, although the majority of the respondents agreed that public relations should be regulated by accreditation and licensing, many of them were not impressed with the role of the IPRM as a country's PR professional body in improving the standards of PR professionalism.

Indeed, the postal survey generated a great deal of descriptive data based on the theoretical framework. The presentation of the qualitative data (see Chapter 6 and 7) will thoroughly discuss the key elements of PR professionalism as well as answering more fully all the research questions developed.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **RESULT & FINDINGS**

(PHASE II - IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS 2004)

#### **6.0 Introduction**

As discussed in Chapter 5, the findings of the study drawn from the postal questionnaire presented the profile of PR practitioners and the importance of PR professionalism to PR practitioners who worked for the three following sectors: in-house private sector, in-house public sector and PR firms. In this chapter, the qualitative research method is designed to explore the key themes/issues raised by the results of the questionnaire survey in greater detail rather than to test a particular hypothesis about the perceptions of a group of informants concerning PR professionalism. Using in-depth interviews, phase two of this study was implemented with a number of senior PR practitioners from various business industries and with PR academics from public and private universities. Later, in Chapter 7, more detailed and in-depth data about PR professionalism from the viewpoints of business leaders are presented.

#### **6.1 Phase II - In-depth Interviews with PR Practitioners and Academics**

This study is organised around eight key themes about public relations professionalism: (1) the meaning of public relations and the diversity of the terms; (2)

the maturity of the PR profession: producing qualified PR practitioners; (3) PR education: the status and development of training schools; (4) specialised knowledge and skills of public relations; (5) PR accreditation and licensing: the role of a professional association; (6) continuous professional development; (7) the current functions of public relations; and finally, (8) the future of the PR industry. There are commonalities and distinctions regarding the discussion of these key themes of public relations between PR academics and practitioners. These issues are not exactly the same as those discussed with the senior managers in 2005-2006. The questions were reduced in number and sharpened in focus for the second set of interviews.

## **6.2 The Meaning of Public Relations and the Diversity of the Terms**

One of the objectives of this study is to define the scope and limitations of public relations (an exclusive jurisdiction of public relations). Thus, it is central to ask interviewees about the definition of public relations and the issue of diversity of the terms.

Generally, most informants (four PR academics and ten PR practitioners) understood the typical definition of public relations, which is building mutual understanding between an organisation and its public in order to project a favourable image of an organisation. This notion is similar to the definition initiated by leading US PR scholars, such as Cutlip et al. (2000) and, Grunig and Hunt (1984). As one PR educator from the private university said:

Public relations is about building the image of organisations. Specifically, it is likely to inform the public about what an organisation does. Normally, PR people are more cautious when they make statements about what the organisation does. Importantly, they have to manage their internal and external



publics. Let's refer to Ivy Lee's notion, - about being honest, and trustworthy. They also need to practise PR codes of ethics. In order to project a good image of organisations, PR practitioners should be involved in research development. It should be a dynamic process.

Interestingly, in the United States, European countries and Asian countries (see Sriramesh & Vercic, 2003: 70, 204 & 343), PR practitioners use different terms to describe their function in an organisation. In the wave of globalisation, Malaysia has followed a similar trend. Specifically, Malaysian corporations are more likely to use substitute job titles to describe public relations functions, such as 'corporate communications', 'public affairs', 'information', 'marketing communications', 'corporate public relations', and 'corporate affairs'. However, academic informants made a distinction between 'public relations' and 'corporate communications' by stating that 'public relations' is the old term, whilst 'corporate communications' is a new term, indicating a more demanding and complex environment. However, they preferred to use 'public relations' because, in a broader concept, it includes all corporate communication functions, whilst 'corporate communications' is more geared towards specific corporate-oriented communication. In the process of PR development, this changing trend may also underpin the profession, but it will not change the current functions of public relations. One professor of public relations from the international university argued that:

We have been using a 'public relations' (PR) term for years. But when US PR firms come here, they start using a corporate term such as 'corporate communications'. The changing trends (of public relations) might happen in Malaysia but the function of PR is still same. They just have different names. People talk about the title, but not about the substance. Actually, public relations subsumes all of the functions of corporate communications. It is not a clear-cut unless you have it by accreditation or the chartered status. However, this is an advantage to PR development. Giving a new title for public relations may value the role of public relations. So, we have a research communicator, (or) a corporate communicator but the function is still managing communication.

Commenting on the issue of diversity of PR terms, a PR academic from the oldest university in Malaysia pointed out that:

Actually, the diversity of terms PR practitioners use may confuse society. Although they may have changed the titles, the purpose and function of public relations are still similar. Perhaps, there are slightly changes on the role of public relations in the new era. I think that a 'public relations' term is ok, though some people might think that it is a traditional term. I would prefer to use 'corporate public relations', which is more comprehensive - covering not only government relations but also related to the relationships between corporations and their publics. Importantly, as a PR officer, he/she must be sensitive to current issues and new developments.

Importantly, most informants (academic and practitioners) argued that people, including some PR practitioners, are still confused about what constitutes public relations. Many practitioners prefer to use the terms 'corporate communications' and 'corporate affairs', as the term 'public relations' is linked to negative connotations. As one managing director of a leading PR firm said:

Many do not understand what PR is. In fact, I don't consider myself as a 'PR practitioner' any more. I am a corporate communication specialist. In Malaysia, the word somehow really means something that people tend to look down on. 'Oh! woman's work. Well, pretty face'. I asked someone who is a PR officer, 'Why do you like to be a PRO?. Oh! I like meeting people'. No! It is not just about that. It is about meeting your clients for business here. It is how you may contribute to the management of your client's objectives. They need to think of how PR may support their business.

It seems that there is a contrasting perception of the meaning of public relations between PR educators and practitioners. From a holistic and broader approach, most PR practitioners defined public relations as strategic corporate communications, which incorporates public relations, public affairs, marketing communications, financial communications, and corporate branding. Some PR practitioners argued that public relations focuses only on media relations and event management.

The majority of PR practitioners interviewed argued that the term 'public relations' is used to describe typical functions of communication such as public information, especially dealing with public services and NGOs, whilst the term 'corporate communications' focuses on projecting organisational identity and image.

Indeed, according to a top PR consultant, the scope and responsibility of public relations depend largely on several factors such as the size of organisation, the core business of an organisation, and the corporate strategy development. Some large corporations can afford to develop two divisions of public relations to harness their corporate strategy: they are the division of corporate affairs and the division of corporate communications. Corporate affairs is responsible for formulating strategic planning and communication policies normally setting corporate branding, whilst corporate communications is involved in strategic implementation.

Thus, this study found two reasons why PR practitioners use diverse terms in their practice. First, PR practitioners want to avoid the negative connotation of 'public relations'. Second, there is also diversity of functions in public relations management: 'public relations' is involved in publicity and media relations, 'public affairs' deals with public policy development, and 'corporate affairs' is concerned with the development of communication policies and brand statements (corporate branding). Furthermore, the result is consistent with the conclusions of Varey and White (2000: 10), that there are different meanings in defining managing relationships, as described by the terms 'public relations', 'corporate communications', 'corporate affairs' and 'public affairs'.

Indeed, as described in Chapter 1, public relations is regarded as *a complex and distinctive management discipline* which is comprised of corporate communications, corporate affairs, public affairs, marketing communication, information, and media relations. All of these functions are used 'to influence the behaviour (of various stakeholders), through the management of reputation and relationships' (White & Murray, 2004: 120).

Therefore, it is important to clarify what constitutes public relations and corporate communications, as this may confuse new generations who are interested in joining this growing field. As illustrated in Table 5.15 in Chapter 5, PR practitioners use different titles such as 'corporate communications' (27.9%), 'communications' (22.1%) and 'public relations' (20.6%) to describe their position. The use of such titles may directly and indirectly reflect the development of the PR profession discussed in the following themes.

### **6.3 The Maturity of the Public Relations Profession: Producing Qualified PR Practitioners**

As discussed in Chapter 3, Neal and Morgan (2000: 17) argue that 'the occupation became full-time' ('terminal' occupation) is one of the most important criteria for the process of professionalisation. There is a need to ensure that well-qualified PR practitioners have a clear view what public relations really is and what knowledge and skills are required for them to practise the profession.

Generally, many PR educators and practitioners argued that the profession of public relations has not matured yet, but it is becoming a growing and competitive profession in Malaysia. A top PR practitioner from a major PR firm argued that:

In Malaysia, we need to improve the PR industry. This industry is very young. It is a place where there are people who are not qualified (but are practising public relations). They do not understand what constitutes PR. I think they should call themselves event managers instead because they are only arranging events. They are not real PR practitioners. But I don't mind working with them. The PR industry has not matured yet. We can say it is still developing. But it is better than it was.

Emphasising on the importance of public relations to a corporation, a PR practitioner from a commercial corporation said:

Over the last ten years, public relations is seen as a 'glamorous' career. There were a limited number of PR curricula offered in the local university. But now you see that many realise the importance of PR. The Lim Kok Wing College has now trained hundred PR students. I believe that, in the future, more companies will realise the importance of PR to their business. In fact, the IPRM has addressed the idea to Dato' Khalid Yunus (the Deputy Minister of Education) to attain Charter status for this profession. But I don't think it is easy to get Charter status. We have to work hard to achieve it.

According to a senior PR educator, nowadays, many Malaysian corporations have realised the importance of public relations to their business as compared to the past. In addition, the impact of government policies like '*Dasar Ekonomi Baru*' (New Economy Policy) and the privatisation of government bodies may also bring a great interest in practising this profession. As one of the PR academics from the public university pointed out that:

Public relations was introduced as the PR curriculum in the University of Technology Mara in 1970s. In 1980s, more PR curricula were developed extensively, although at that time, PR was introduced to be a 'counter clerk' or a 'customer relation officer' only. PR was seen as 'pretty face' for ladies only. PR orientation in 1990s was shed the light on due to the impact of government policies such as "*Dasar Ekonomi Baru*" (New Economic Policy) and the privatisation of government bodies. The government of Malaysia has promoted and encouraged more business policies for corporations. So that, many corporations have been set up and that corporations have also affiliated

with foreign consultancies. Thus, corporate leaders are aware of the importance of public relations to their business. You will see that major Malaysian corporations like Telekom Malaysia (a national telecommunication company) and PETRONAS (a national oil company) have become role models to other corporations. From this point, we see that there is a rapid development in the PR industry. Although many PR consultancies have been set up here, their orientation is still event management such as publicity, media relations, and PR launches. But not at the higher level of PR services such as image management and PR research development.

Emphasising the importance of ethics and transparency to corporations, a PR academic from the private university noted that:

The PR industry has now grown in Malaysia, and helps the international corporations operate their business locally. The role of public relations is very, very important in today's corporate world. Let's see what happened to Enron (a major international company) case, which collapsed due to the prosecution of their unethical behaviour. Actually, this is happened because the company did not take care of their PR. I think a SWOT (Strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat) model should be considered when handling issues like this. PR officers should advise management to be more ethical and transparent.

In education, many PR academics believed that more PR graduates have been produced to fill the growing market within the PR industry. However, the practice is still far from the ideal public relations, which would include image management and research development. Currently, the PR orientation in Malaysia almost solely involves event management such as media relations and publicity, due to a lack of PR professionalism among practitioners. Specifically, academics believed that obtaining a proper PR academic qualification is more important for PR practitioners than work experience alone. Nowadays, many practitioners possessing no proper qualification in public relations practise this profession. This result might also be related to the statistical results in Table 5.6 (Professional Qualifications) in Chapter 5, as it indicates that many PR practitioners have come from different educational backgrounds. A senior PR academic from the international university said:

The PR industry has matured and it is more competitive. More PR graduates we produce have filled the job market. However, it has not matured in the field. Importantly, we need to increase PR professionalism as many PR practitioners now practice this profession without proper PR qualification. I think an academic qualification is more important than working experience. However, talking about achieving professional status, public relations in the US has also not yet been accredited due to some issues such as the diversity of the names/titles used by PR practitioners. Other issue is professional associations such as the PRSA, IABC, and many more have different policies in setting universal accreditation for this profession. For example, the IABC supports corporations selling cigarettes. This is an ethical issue we cannot tolerate. These issues may create 'war' in the industry, but not enhance the maturity of this field.

In contrast to the perceptions of PR academics, most PR practitioners in this study argued they are now more sophisticated and they practise two-way symmetrical communication due to the rise of consumerism. Depending on the situation, although they still practise publicity and media relations, they assume that these functions are only PR tools. PR practitioners argued that there is also a clear distinction between public relations, as a reputation management function, and advertising, as a propaganda function (one-way communication only). Importantly, practising public relations is vital for organisations in achieving their desired outcomes, and it also helps to drive a bottom-line strategy in order to develop a company's positive reputation: however, in the future, the function of advertising will decrease to appeal to the strategic constituencies. A senior PR practitioner from the banking institution noted that:

If we trace back the history of public relations, there are some forms practitioners use to practice public relations such as publicity, advertising, PR campaigns and many more. We have to see this as an evolutionary change rather than revolution. So, there is the transition from one-way communication (publicity) to two-way communication (relationship management). However, under certain circumstances, we are still using publicity and corporate advertising. In many cases, we are more sophisticated and likely to use two-way communication such as responding to what customers said about us, as we understand that due to the rise of consumerism, customers are now more brilliant in buying products. In the future, people will focus on public relations, but advertising will go down. In order to survive, we must review

customers' needs, so that, we can market our products. We think that we have successfully utilised public relations to drive a bottom line strategy by enhancing the company's reputation. People like buying products from the company that has a good reputation. In fact, being ethical and responsible to our customers and clients is our top priority. If you see the trend now, most companies have PR tools, which may reach more customers. For example, Starbuck uses PR tools as their primary business campaigns (rather than) using advertising.

Unsurprisingly, most informants, whether academics or practitioners, have rejected the notion that public relations is about a 'dine and drink activity' or has 'Cinderella status'. Instead, they treat this profession as a strategic function of organisational communication. As a PR director from the banking institution said:

Many corporations are now aware of the importance of public relations to their business. In June 2000, KLSE (Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange) proposed a new guideline for companies, which wanted to be listed as public listed companies, and the implementation of this guideline may improve the role of public relations. In order to be listed in the KLSE, a proposal should be managed by three top managers: a managing director, a company secretary and a head of public relations. So that, we do research, then, we set an annual meeting, and finally, we publish annual reports. You see how important PR is to a company. Our unit of PR is one of the top divisions in this organisation. We report to the executive boards. We have two general managers who manage PR functions in our unit.

Indeed, although PR practitioners understand the importance of public relations and their core PR functions, public relations still has low recognition from the top management in Malaysia. As mentioned in Table 5.13a in Chapter 5, nearly 51.5% of respondents wanted to change their career for a number of reasons, including (in Table 5.13b) having difficulty convincing the top management about the value of PR to their organisations. As one PR practitioner from the commercial corporation noted:

Public relations must gain respect as much as other professional occupations such as a doctor, lawyer, or accountant. We have to tell top management how important PR is to our organisation. I think many managers working in other departments do not understand what PR is. They think that PR is only about entertaining clients and arranging press conferences.



One of the key issues that require attention is a shortage of qualified PR practitioners and a lack of expertise, which might hinder the development of public relations. A PR practitioner from the government body said that:

It is important to differentiate between practising PR in the public and private services. Here, we are still practising media relations, whilst, in the private sector, they may have advanced PR functions. In the public services, top management doesn't understand the importance of PR to their organisation. Here, I am the only PRO who runs all of the PR programmes. For big events, we have to hire PR services from local PR firms. Recently, we hire a Lim Kok Wing firm to run our programmes because we don't have manpower and expertise. In fact, here, PR is housed in a Unit of Administration and Finance. Our task is very limited. The problem is we report to the head of unit who doesn't understand PR functions, so our superior always overrules our work. I think that this problem is also happened in the most public services. We needed) to separate a PR division from the management unit to give more authority, so that, we can manage our tasks effectively.

Emphasising that public relations having 'a seat' at the executive board might enhance the value of this profession, one of the heads of public relations from the major corporation noted that:

The understanding about the importance of public relations is very low among top senior managers. They think that PR is not important. It is hard to convince top management how PR may support our business by running PR programmes. So far, we don't have any senior PR director in the executive board due to the low recognition. I hope that top management may create senior PR director position, so that, we have more authority to manage our work professionally. We must understand that public relations is not 'purely' communication. We need to go through a management process such as managing information, preparing proposals, submitting proposals to the committee, managing course of actions, and finally, managing evaluation. We have to follow a strategic plan.

Further concerns about the issue of the low recognition of public relations among top managers is described in Chapter 7, where more detailed data about whether top management really values public relations and how PR can improve their business strategy are thoroughly discussed.

Further, although PR academics and practitioners agreed that the PR industry is still developing in Malaysia and realised the importance of this field in today's competitive business environment, they still have different views on how best public relations can be practised and what knowledge and skills PR practitioners should acquire. Discussing the current status of PR education in Malaysia is the next topic of this study.

#### **6.4 PR Education: the Status and Development of Training Schools**

The system of training for a public relations profession must be refined and formalised based on the global and national practices. There is a need to formalise academic and professional qualifications that are delivered by higher learning institutions (e.g. a University) and the professional association (e.g. CIPR, PRSA and IPRM).

In general, based on the findings of this study, PR education in Malaysia can be interpreted as being at 'an adolescent stage of development' and having a long way to go to achieve excellent public relations practice. Further to the existing PR knowledge in both the public and private university, some PR academics argued that it seems Malaysian PR education has been too much influenced by Western PR education, especially from the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Most academics realised that the curriculum should be set up in accordance with local needs and norms as well as to deal with cultural values and diversity. Importantly, it is true that concerning cultural values and diversity, it is important to develop multicultural public relations, but the structure and context of the PR curriculum must

be developed based on the global and international theory of public relations. Moncur (2006) noted that it is vital that developing theoretical frameworks as learning tools enhance the quality of PR practice.

In fact, this study found that public relations in Malaysia has gone global, as there are also influences from Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Egypt, as well as from Northeast Asian countries such as Japan and Thailand. A professor of communication from the public university argued:

Our curriculum has been influenced by western PR knowledge. For example, we are now using a US PR textbook on *Effective Public Relations* written by Cutlip, Broom and Center. Actually, the influence is not only from the US or Europe, but also from Arab Saudi, Egypt, Turkey, Japan and Thailand. Thus, we have a core value and diversity of PR knowledge. I think that our PR education is up to the standard and should continually be housed in the media school. I don't agree if the PR curriculum is housed in the business school as in that school, you will train students to be business people. However public relations goes beyond making business, it is also about having knowledge of political and social issues such as the role of non-government of organisations.

With great concern about cultural sensitivity among PR practitioners, one PR academic thought that there is a need to have cultural diversity in the PR curriculum.

A PR academic from the private university added that:

Here, we use Australian textbooks to teach public relations. Actually, our PR curriculum has been influenced by the US PR knowledge. Importantly, we should understand Malaysian culture. I think foreigners do not sensitive enough to Malaysian culture, which differs from their culture. Western knowledge should be adapted to our own culture. That's why, we are also offering courses related to diversity and nationality.

Apart from emphasising the importance of adapting Malaysian culture to PR knowledge, most PR academics are also concerned about the shortage of qualified PR scholars in this field. One of the PR academics from the public university pointed out that:

Actually, Malaysian PR education is substantially influenced from the US or Europe as many Malaysian PR academic staff were graduated from those universities. I see that there is a rapid development of public relations in those countries. But Australian and New Zealand PR education have also been influenced from the US and Europe. In fact, the government of Malaysia has sponsored a bunch of academic staff to study in overseas universities every year. But many PR graduates like choosing different careers. You see that there are limited numbers of PR academics working in a local university. That's why knowledge of public relations is still inbreeding within the local universities.

By arguing that local PR academics have only delivered purely Western PR knowledge, a professional informant suggested that there is a need for a Malaysian PR paradigm to practise public relations. A PR practitioner from the commercial corporation argued that:

I believe that every country has its own culture. We cannot simply adopt the Western theories and apply them to our own country. I did a paper on a comparative study between Malaysian Chinese and Chinese in the mainland, China. I found that different nationality has different culture. Many PR academics think that knowledge is universal and simply copy those Western theories and then, apply this to the classroom. But I think it is quite wrong to do like this. We should have our own identity or our own model. In Malaysia, cultural sensitivity among Chinese, Malays and Indians should be considered when we run PR programmes for local community.

Apart from the awareness of international public relations in Malaysia, apparently, there is no agreement regarding the perception of PR education between academics and practitioners. Academics thought that many practitioners do not have proper qualifications in public relations, though they are practising public relations, whilst practitioners questioned the quality of local PR education by arguing that academics solely deliver fundamental knowledge of public relations rather than teach students how best it can be practised in the real world. As a PR head from the major corporation argued:

PR academics only teach basic PR knowledge to their students. (I think) they are not developing that knowledge. They have to teach students how to apply this knowledge to practice. So, we can see the effectiveness of PR

programmes. In fact, students need to be equipped with knowledge of business operation. I think that the PR curriculum should be housed in the business school, and not in the media school, as our work involves directly a management process. Knowing about communication only is not enough. The real PR work is we have to do planning, programming, and managing goal charts. In reality, traditional PR theories don't work. I think we need new paradigms.

Professional informants also emphasised the importance of knowledge of business operation (e.g. basic accounting: budget calculation) to the local PR curriculum. As described in Chapter 5 in Table 5.20, 91.2% of respondents agreed that acquiring knowledge of the corporate world should be prioritised. A PR manager from the automobile company said:

I think, in the public university, PR academics just fix a one linear process to convey PR theories to their students. In reality, we practise different things. I think that the private universities offer better PR curriculum than the public universities. For example, PR students from a Lim Kok Wing College really show their capabilities to manage the tasks that assigned to them during their internship in our company. I think the PR curriculum should be housed in the business school and not in the media school. You must know budget calculation to buy the channel of media. You need (to acquire) business knowledge to manage your work. I have worked as a PR practitioner more than 20 years in this field. PR practitioners don't have a PR qualification, but if they really work into it. They can be more successful than practitioners who hold academic degrees. Practise makes perfect. Today's PR is very different than last 10 years.

Furthermore, most academic and professional informants agreed that PR graduates are largely working within the private sector, rather than the public sector. There are a limited number of PR vacancies in the government sector because no in-house public relations department has yet been established. However, some argued that Malay graduates chose to work within the public sector, whilst Chinese and Indian PR graduates preferred to look for a job in the private sector. This trend might occur due to poor communication skills in English among Malay PR graduates compared to their counterparts. Most private sectors use English as a principal language of

administration, while it is government policy to use the Malay language as an official language. In fact, both academics and practitioners also stressed the importance of mastering the English language and other foreign languages because Malaysian corporations have strong international relations with multinational companies throughout the world. Based on the statistical results in Chapter 5 in Table 5.4, 62 respondents stated the importance of mastering English because it is the global commerce language.

In Malaysia, poor communication skills in English among university graduates has become a key issue of communication competency; hence, it may hinder the business relationships with international clients, as foreign investors are increasingly keeping an eye on the growing market of Asian countries, including Malaysia (e.g. Walter, 2001 & Newell, 2004). One of PR academics from the public university pointed out that:

Due to the language barrier especially mastering English, many Malay graduates choose to work for the public sector, and Chinese and Indian graduates prefer to work for the private sector. Generally, many Chinese and Indians can speak and write well in English as compared to their Malay counterpart. It is frequently happened that the Malay graduates choose other careers, as there are limited numbers of vacancies in public relations in the public sector. However, in the private sector, PR graduates have a lot of opportunities as they may work for corporations or consultancies. An internship aspect is also another issue. Different a University offers different a length of internship for PR students. For example, the private university, the University of Tuanku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) offers one semester for internship, whilst the public university, the University of Malaya offers only 2 months. I think that internship is very important for students, as they are required to have practical experience prior to entering the career world. So that, in the University, they learn theories, then, they may practise them in the real world.

Commenting on the issues of communication competency, one senior PR academic from the international university argued that:

Students should master multi-languages. I understand that English is important for students, if they work for the private sector. However, it always depends on the sector in which students will work for. If you work for local community such as a local government body, you will speak Malay only. If you go to Japan, you speak Japanese, not English. Importantly, you should master linguistic proficiency, so that, you may write and speak well in the languages that demanded by the sector in which you work for.

As part of the issue of competencies among PR graduates, professional informants argued that the PR curriculum should be housed in the business school, rather than in the media and communication school. One of the reasons why they wanted to see the transition from the media school to the business school was PR students should be equipped with in-depth knowledge of business acumen (e.g. corporate strategy, general management and basic accounting) to prepare them to work in the rapidly changing business environment. Unlike in the developed countries, where there are many media and communication schools in privileged universities such as Cardiff University, Stirling University, Bournemouth University, Lancaster University and many more, in Malaysia, of 13 universities, there are only two schools of media/journalism located in the University of Technology Mara and the University of Sciences Malaysia. The rest of the universities in Malaysia have the media department under the school of social sciences or the school of languages and linguistics. Another reason given by informants was, generally, business students are more likely to achieve excellent performance than are media students in Malaysia. In fact, the best possible students who chose to study business and management can be interpreted as 'first-class students'; they also have a good command of English prior to starting their first semester at university.

Besides stressing the need for a transition of the PR curriculum from the media school to the business school, an academic informant also stressed an accredited PR

curriculum should be developed. This is important for the PR industry, as the PR curriculum that is being taught at universities has not yet been accredited by any PR professional body. One of PR academics from the public university pointed out that:

Generally, the PR curriculum that is being taught in the public university and private university is not much different. But the private university is concerned with profit oriented. I see that the private university has designed the PR curriculum based on market demands. But in the public university, we are still having problems to design the proper PR curriculum, as some lecturers wanted some irrelevant courses to be included in the PR curriculum due to their personal interests. Other issue is in the public university, we offer a bachelor's degree of mass communication majoring in public relations, whilst, in the private universities and colleges, they provide a bachelor's degree of public relations. That's why we are having problems in accrediting the PR curriculum in the public universities. I think that the time has come to offer the PR curriculum under the business school, as under the media school, public relations cannot survive anymore. I think that public relations should be integrated with corporate management and corporate strategy to improve the value of public relations.

When asked in which training school the PR curricula should be housed, a PR practitioner from the banking institution noted that:

I think that the PR curriculum should be housed in the business school, as PR practitioners really need to possess knowledge of business acumen. They should know about financial aspects as well. If the PR curriculum is housed in the media school, the University should endorse some business courses to be taken by PR students. On top of that, internship should be extended from six months to one year.

In contrast, a number of academic informants stressed that the PR curriculum should be housed in the Media School, as grasping in-depth knowledge of mass media and cultural studies and journalism enables students to act like activists rather than being profit-oriented business students. However, it is difficult to find a philosophical and cultural studies curriculum in any Media School in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Thus, in the media school, the students are only trained technically to prepare them to become potential journalists and broadcasters, but rarely PR professionals. As one PR educator pointed out, the PR curriculum might be 'varnished' in the media school and



then would be re-developed in the business school, as this would give strong awareness among top business leaders of the importance of the role of public relations in their organisation (Khattab, 2000). Thus, conducting a series of interviews with business leaders in this study (see Chapter 7) is very important in studying the value of public relations from a managerial perspective.

The notion of turning non-professional people into highly skilled professional staff can be daunting. However, the focus lies on how the universities propose programmes of study. There is a need to have a double major or multidisciplinary course to allow PR students to excel. The thought of ‘first-class and second-class students’ may jeopardise the future careers of students regardless of whether they are studying in the business or media school. Importantly, a responsible department which offers a PR curriculum should review and modify the pedagogy of the curriculum based on research development. Coombs and Rybacki (1999) argued that there is a need to improve the pedagogy of public relations, as there are a number of US PR academics lacking competency in delivering an effective PR curriculum.

In fact, it is not enough to say that the media school has only delivered a fundamental knowledge of public relations to students. Indeed, schools and universities have a huge responsibility to educate the students by offering curricula that are more structured, coupled with student development programmes facilitated by professional companies specialising in training and development, such as PricewaterhouseCoopers. As described in Chapter 5 in Table 5.22, the quantitative analysis showed that there is no significant difference between PR curricula housed in media and business schools, with mean scores of 3.8 and 3.7 respectively. Indeed, the best suggestion here is that

the PR curriculum should be housed in its own school. Alternatively, media schools that offer a PR curriculum should collaborate with business and management schools by developing joint programmes; hence, PR students would be able to take appropriate business and management courses such as marketing strategies, strategy management, corporate strategy, investor relations and suchlike. As one PR academic from the private university pointed out:

PR practitioners cannot survive (in a corporate world) if they have knowledge of public relations (publicity) only. They should also know about multi-disciplines such as marketing, advertising, management, and information technology. In an organisational context, PR practitioners need to know about the functions of management particularly management policies. They should liaise their duties with all top managers to achieve organisational objectives.

Commenting on the issues of the knowledge and skills required for PR practitioners, a senior PR practitioner from the petroleum company remarked that:

Perhaps, in the past, PR practitioners may have needed to master merely journalistic skills. Today, mastering knowledge of communication is not enough for competent PR practitioners. We are expected to do beyond arranging events, launches, or media relations. We also need to manage a PR strategy and handle organisational issues. It requires analytical thinking. Today's PR practitioners should also be equipped with knowledge of business operation and also capable of managing a PR strategy to support strategy development of our companies. I think that people who interested in joining this profession, need to think their career seriously.

Surprisingly, many practitioners and academics agreed that the private universities offered better PR curriculum to potential PR practitioners than public universities. This finding is probably due to the changing demands of the PR workforce in the growing Malaysian PR industry. It is claimed that private universities have designed a more structured and interesting PR curriculum, which is more competitive, based on the high market demand. The more PR graduates are employed by major corporations, the more students may study in public relations in their universities, as one of private universities' ultimate goals is profit maximization. For example, a private university

like the University Tunku Abdul Rahman (UTAR) is, it seems, able to afford to offer an undergraduate degree in public relations, while many public universities can only offer a major in public relations as part of an undergraduate degree in mass communications in general. One PR academic from the private university noted that:

I think that undergoing internship is important for students to prepare them to be competent PR practitioners. Students should be exposed to the real situation. (As the private university), we are more structured in setting our curriculum, whilst, in the public university, academics themselves do not clear their responsibility. We always evaluate our performance based on teaching and research. In the public university, the PR curriculum needs to be improved. Regarding the issue of English proficiency, prior to commencing their study, students are required to sit English examination to determine their level of proficiency. Those who don't achieve the certain standards are required to take an intensive language input. Through this process, we believe that we have produced the great output and they are up to the market. As far as I am concerned, many PR graduates have worked for the private sector and very few works in the public sector.

In addition, many public universities which offer a PR curriculum in their mass communication programme need to follow rigid procedures to obtain approval from the senate of the university to remove or modify the curriculum. Thus, these procedures may result in a slow process of updating the curriculum, as it is difficult to propose a revised curriculum to the senate of the university without having concrete reasons. It has frequently happened that the heads of the schools of mass communication who chair the senate meetings are not specialists in public relations. Due to the shortage of PR academics, it is very difficult to defend a revised curriculum in a senate meeting. Therefore, a professional body like the IPRM should play an important role in accrediting the PR curriculum; hence, this association should propose high standards for the PR curriculum to be taught in public universities. The associations proposals, which would be rigorously developed based on PR research, can be discussed with the heads of school and would be presented to the senate of the university to obtain official approval.

The role of the government, particularly the Ministry of Education, seems very important in supporting the development of PR education. My interview with Yusoff Harun, the Director of Education, emphasised that the Malaysian government has always monitored and approved of the enhancement of the level of professionalism in any profession in the higher education institutions. Under the corporatisation of public universities, some educational policies have been improved with regard to the high standards of professionalism in the public services. Strengthening competency training programmes and introducing a newly created employees' competency system, '*Sistem Saraan Malaysia*' (SSM), formerly known as '*Sistem Saraan Baru*', are the top priority policies to improve the '*Penilaian Tahap Kecekapan*' (PTK) (Competency Level Assessment) of employees, including academics (The Department of Public Services, 2004). Yusoff Harun pointed out that:

Malaysian education is now becoming a business sector. But we have a National Education Accreditation, which is a structured benchmarking to control the development of our education. We now adopt an open system. You see that many private universities have been set up here. We train qualified lecturers by sending them to overseas to further their studies. If we don't have local lecturers, then, we may hire foreign lecturers to fulfil our goals. So far, we've got many diverse foreign lecturers. They come from Europe, Indonesia, Arab Saudi, Australia and Singapore. I believe that our education system is very good.

Due to the changing educational development in this country, universities tend to focus on the employees' competencies, especially with regard to self-development; hence, universities may produce highly competent academics. He claimed, however, that there is a general tendency for some educators who still have backward thinking to be complacent and reluctant to strengthen their professional work to the highest standards. He felt that the government would be able to combat this problem by

reinforcing the importance of staff development programmes in their educational policy. As he mentioned:

We understand that people need to be developed. In order to develop people, we do a lot of staff development programmes. Every state must have (this programme) and it should also be compulsory for all staff. They have to undergo the training courses. Every school also needs an MS ISO (quality measurement standards) – we have a Malaysian standard through MAMPU (The Malaysian Administrative Modernisation and Management Planning Unit). It is very structured. We should follow this measurement. The system has very high quality. I believe that we have produced great outputs.

He added a comment on factors that may affect the development of the Malaysian education system:

Developing greater professionalism, we should have a benchmarking standard. Malaysia comes to the stage where we have produced many graduates. If you have good academics, then you will get good outputs. If we can produce qualified academics, we may enhance the level of professionalism. Due to the changing policies in an education system, we receive many complaints. So, issues must be solved effectively. But some policies did not function very well because of our employees' attitude and their core values that refuse to change. Everybody needs to play his role. For example, the issue of English proficiency among graduates. We want teacher to teach in English. When they teach in English, our society also will learn English too. We have expertise to create the PC software, but academics refuse to use it. We need to do a short and long term planning.

Although his comments were not focused on specific elements of PR education, generally, the statement from the representative of the Ministry of Education seemed definitely to support enhanced standards of PR professionalism, as the government are now eagerly producing a knowledge society in order to achieve their vision of the nation by 2020.

Further to this discussion, it is worth noting how PR academics and practitioners view PR publications and research development. Clearly, this key theme is rather lacking, as PR academics have published a limited number of academic publications about public relations. Surprisingly, it seems that practitioners neither value local PR

research nor use academic research as a key reference in performing their duties. Apparently, the perceptual gap between scholarship and practice seems to be increasing, as new generations are more likely to work in professional practice rather than becoming PR academics. In fact, many PR academics are considered busy working as the 'typical teacher' who is responsible for delivering fundamental knowledge to students but not educating them with appropriate and rigorous practical knowledge with which each student may practise in the real world. Moreover, this 'typical academic' may not be interested in producing research articles, particularly in the public relations field. Thus, there is a dire need to improve PR education and research development, as it may directly impact on the standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia. Arising from these findings, it is worth discussing the possibilities to develop an exclusive training school for public relations, which will be undertaken later, in Chapter 7. Indeed, discussion of PR knowledge and skills is essential to unlock the opportunity for excellent public relations practice.

## **6.5 Specialised Knowledge and Professional Skills of Public Relations**

In order to attain greater PR professionalism, it is important for practitioners to identify and justify the knowledge and skills required for public relations. Overall, most informants (academics and practitioners) pointed out confidently the specialised knowledge and the professional skills which practitioners should acquire in order to venture into today's business environment. It seems that most PR practitioners and academics are in complete agreement that public relations is a part of strategic communication management. As a PR manager from the commercial corporation argued:

PR should go beyond traditional function that is media relations and publicity. Today's PR practitioners should master *mass customisation* (marketing), *customer relations management*, *database management* and new technology. A communication strategy is a key for successful PR programmes. I like new PR function, *financial communication*. We must know how to read financial statements and discuss this with other managers. We work here as a team to meet the department objectives. When you know about management aspects, then, people will recognise you as a good manager.

A PR practitioner from the banking institution, emphasising the importance of a PR degree for competent PR practitioners, confidently pointed out:

First, we should develop a body of PR knowledge. The PR degree is very important for PR practitioners. Then, PR practitioners should master core PR skills such as writing skill, presentation skill, research skill and other communication skills. On top of that, practitioners need to be trusted and ethical, which are intangible skills. They should help their organisation to manage trust to the publics. Our skills should be aligned with our cultural diversity.

The key knowledge that informants suggested was:

- a) Knowledge of business operation (corporate strategy, business units, core products/services, and basic accounting)
- b) Knowledge of information technology
- c) Knowledge of government policies
- d) Knowledge of political communication
- e) Total Quality Management
- f) Crisis management
- g) Marketing (customer relations)
- h) Advertising
- i) Journalism (media relations)
- j) Finance (financial communication)

The professional skills that informants pointed out were:

- k) Communication skills
- l) Writing skills
- m) Leadership skills
- n) Being ethical
- o) Research skills
- p) Good personality (personal competencies)
- q) Strategic thinking

Apparently, there is consensus regarding the importance of the public relations knowledge and skills which practitioners should gain to practise public relations. However, there is a perceptual distance between the desired outcomes of the PR knowledge and skills which current practitioners have acquired in the real world and the mode of delivery of PR knowledge and skills which current academics utilise in the academic world. This finding is closely related to the theoretical framework of this study, which needs to match the professional practice that is desirable among PR academics and the professional practice that exists in the real world. Thus, universities and the IPRM should be responsible for providing the knowledge and skills required for PR practitioners.

When asked about the unique knowledge and skills PR practitioners should acquire, a PR academic from the public university said:

PR practitioners are required to master in a wide range of knowledge such as journalism, advertising, business, government policies, and ethics, and also the professional skills such as writing skills, research skills, communication skills, and computer skills. They should also undergo PR professional trainings to master those knowledge and skills.



Indeed, PR practitioners need to master additional complex technical and managerial tasks such as online public relations and crisis management, not only media relations and event management. A PR practitioner from the international PR firm asserted:

Apart from knowing general PR, practitioners should increase their knowledge of new technology. I travel with my laptop wherever I go. I can do my work everywhere I like. The companies, which are aware of this trend, found that it is much easier to run your business. One more thing is the role of public relations is changing very fast. We should go beyond publicity and event management. I think the increasingly role of public relations is issue/crisis management.

Emphasising managing communication in particular PR programmes, a public relations manager from the automobile company added:

We must have leadership to run PR programmes. You should be able to manage your communication. For example, if you want to sell a sport car, perhaps you may advertise in the sport magazine. Actually, you should also advertise your car in the lifestyle magazine, so that, you may reach more potential customers. Here, PR management is crucial to get the work done. PR role goes beyond arranging events. You need to sell your ideas. Developing a strategic plan may help you to manage your work effectively.

In order to standardise the unique knowledge and skills required for PR practice, strengthening PR accreditation would be a key solution for empowering practitioners towards a greater standard of professionalism in public relations.

## **6.6 PR Accreditation and Licensing: the Role of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia**

PR accreditation and licensing is central to the development of professionalisation for the PR profession. Specifically, the role of a professional association is very important in developing accreditation and licensing. The regulatory body is responsible for setting membership for the PR fraternity. Membership is granted to well-qualified PR

practitioners who might then have a higher status and gain more prestige, which might result in higher income/fee earning possibilities (see Neal & Morgan, 2000: 17)

Almost all informants agreed that there is a need to improve the accreditation of public relations; hence, this profession may gain better recognition from the general public. Informants also stressed that having proper accreditation gives many advantages to the PR industry. As mentioned in Chapter 5 in Table 5.23, almost two-thirds of respondents stated the importance of acquiring accreditation from professional associations. Currently, this profession has suffered from having a bad reputation with the general public, as there are still many non-qualified practitioners practising public relations. Therefore, informants felt that offering accredited certificates to practitioners might project a better profile for the PR industry as a whole. Some also emphasised the importance of licensing to improve the value of this growing field by arguing that licensing would legitimise members who had become competent PR professionals. It seems that the role of a professional body such as the IPRM is central to develop better accreditation and licensing for public relations professions. When asked about the effectiveness of the role of the IPRM in developing accreditation and licensing, a top practitioner from the established corporation argued that:

The IPRM is not effective because previously it was led by PR academics. They are not 'true' practitioners. But now, under the new leadership, we can see that 90% of council members are talented and motivated senior practitioners. I am now a council member of IPRM. Give us about 2 or 3 years to re-develop this association. Now, we are working on accreditation aggressively. We would try to achieve professional status for this profession. I think licensing is also important for PR practitioners. But some practitioners felt that licensing may humiliate people when they have to pass certain examinations. To be recognised, we need the professional body like the IPRM to govern accreditation and licensing. I am adhering to the Codes of Athens. But I don't think PR should become traditional professions like medicine or

law. PR should become new profession, which requires multi-knowledge and skills.

Concerning the enforcement of the code of ethics, one PR academic from the private university argued that:

Members of the PR professional body are encouraged to abide by the code of ethics. Failure to abide by this code, they might be penalised. In Malaysia, I think that only minority members are abide by the code developed by the IPRM. That's why this profession is having crisis identity. In fact, many do not understand what PR is. Public relations is about people orientation, (relationship management). Now we see that public relations is not highly recognised as compared to other professions such as medicine, law, accounting, or marketing. People are still questioning the value of public relations. Perhaps, government should pay considerable attentions to how to improve the status of this profession. Public relations should be recognised by top management, as they are responsible for guarding the corporation. PR practitioners should be more honest, transparent, and responsible.

Commenting on the talent and competency of IPRM members, a PR practitioner from the major company argued that:

The local PR body like the IPRM is very mundane. The quality of IPRM members can be questioning. I think that there is internal politicking among members. I don't think that they are seriously developing the image of this profession. I now join the IABC because the international body has supported this association. We need to increase professionalism among PR practitioners especially relating to attaining professional status. Self-regulation is also important but not much practising in Malaysia. We also need more talented and motivated practitioners entering this field, so that, we will gain high recognition.

Emphasising the membership benefits the IPRM offers, a PR practitioner working with the oil and refinery business remarked that:

I don't think they (the IPRM) have done much to improve the PR industry. They are not aggressive enough to promote the benefits of membership to us. It is simply not impressive at all. That's why we do not join them. I think they all are PR academics who don't practise public relations. I think an international PR body offers better than local one. The IPRM should build strategic alliance with international PR bodies. So that, they would be able to improve their services such as revising training courses. I think the IPRM should be totally revamped to gain greater professionalism in this field.

A PR practitioner from the Ministry of Youth and Sport questioned the accreditation developed by the IPRM by noting that:

I don't join the IPRM because they are not impressive enough. As far as I am concerned, anyone can be a member of this association. This is quite wrong. They should have proper accreditation. Long ago, Professor Hamdan Adnan (a former president of the IPRM) had proposed to the Ministry of Education to gain professional status for this profession. But he failed. The problem is everyone can do PR job. So, 'How are you going to say that this is a "profession"?' In fact, a PRO comes from different backgrounds. I think we should change the way we look at PR. We need new thinking in PR.

Although a majority of informants were not impressed with the role of the IPRM in shaping accreditation and licensing, there was no agreement between academics and practitioners regarding the perception of the professional status of PR: some suggested viewing this profession in the same way as 'learned' professions such as medicine, law or engineering, while others suggested that it should become a serious profession focusing on strategic management. In order to realise these aspirations, informants emphasised that professional bodies like the IPRM, PRCAM and IABC should govern a great deal of the efforts to improve the accreditation and licensing. Thus, practitioners should seriously adhere to a code of ethics developed by a professional association such as the IPRM. Informants argued that there are two reasons why the IPRM has not yet established proper accreditation nor made a substantial contribution to the Malaysian PR industry. First, the IPRM is led by PR academics, not by senior PR practitioners who possess higher PR qualifications and substantial practical experience in this field. Second, there seems to be internal politicking around council members of this association. Thus, the membership of this association is open to the public, not to specific practitioners who have proper PR qualifications and practical experience. As described in Chapter 5 in Table 5.19b, the

statistical results showed that the IPRM has not played a major role in shaping the PR industry in Malaysia. As a PR educator from the private university said:

I am a member of the IPRM. Unfortunately, this association is not really dynamic and active. The IPRM doesn't play an effective role (to fight for proper standards of professionalism) unlike other professional organisations. There is no compulsion to get the license. This institute probably can do better by organising seminars, workshops and so on to improve the status of this profession. The IPRM just does a one-off event, not continuous and dynamic activities. Members claim that they are PR experts but they are not educated in the PR field. I think this professional association should urge practitioners to adhere to a code of ethics that is developed to practise better public relations.

In contrast, besides emphasising the importance of achieving professional status for the IPRM, a professor from the international university who is also an advisor to the IPRM noted that the board members have been elected every year. The interviewee mentioned that:

The IPRM 'should be' an effective organisation and 'should achieve' professional status for this profession. However, we must understand that even the PRSA has not yet achieved professional status. But we are still working on it. So far, we have achieved certain development to improve the PR industry. Actually, the boards have been changing every year. Perhaps, the new leadership under Shameem Abdul Jalil will bring a new vision for this industry. Setting proper accreditation and licensing is important. That's why we offer certain certificates and diploma to PR practitioners.

When asked about the role of the IPRM in setting PR accreditation, a PR academic from the public university argued that:

In Malaysia, I think that the IPRM is not a PR professional body, which uphold proper PR regulation and licensing. This association is just an ordinary NGO or a typical social club for those people who are interested in becoming members. Many members are not qualified in public relations. You see that other established professional bodies such as the MMA (Malaysian Medical Association) or CIMA (Chartered Institute of Management Accountants) offering membership to qualified practitioners. I think anyone can join this association. My opinion is the level of PR professionalism in Malaysia is very low. Many PR practitioners who practise public relations don't have a degree in PR. They wanted to join this industry because they wanted to grab some opportunities but they are not really enthusiast to improve their professionalism. Importantly, we should focus on proper PR education. Once

we established this, we then may go for proper accreditation, regulation and licensing.

Compared with established professional occupations such as medicine and engineering, the IPRM may play a unique role to improve the PR industry. A PR academic from the established public university noted that:

In terms of accreditation, the IPRM is supposed to evaluate and accredit the PR curriculum in local universities. But this association is not really effective to increase the memberships and strengthen the accreditation. I think there is internal politicking among council members. In fact, there is no networking between PR academics and practitioners to create better accreditation. I think we should learn from other established professional bodies like the MMA (Malaysian Medical Association) or IEM (Institute of Engineers, Malaysia), they have a 'strong' accreditation for their members. I think the IPRM should consult this matter with the Ministry of Education to gain proper accreditation, as the National Accreditation Board may help this association to tackle this issue seriously. Apart from accreditation, PR practitioners should practise self-regulation when they make decisions to get their work done.

Concerning the international benchmarking standards, a senior PR practitioner in a big food and beverage corporation disclosed that:

The IPRM should get international accreditation. It is only then we can compare if our practitioners are truly world class. Meaning, if we are accredited in Malaysia, we should be able to also work in similar capacity in New York or London. Otherwise, 'How can Malaysian practitioners benchmark themselves?'

Besides reinforcing proper regulation, the importance of self-regulation among academics and practitioners cannot be ignored. As mentioned in Chapter 5 in Table 5.23, 80.9% of respondents acknowledged the importance of practising self-regulation. Sriramesh and Vercic (2003) pointed out that practitioners are urged to regulate themselves in a good manner such as being ethical, being credible and making the right decisions in performing their duties. Practising public relations in the Malaysian context, informants stressed that practitioners should be more sensitive and cautious with Malaysian culture and norms. This sensitivity and caution can be built

up through self-regulation and self-learning. Therefore, to be successful, it is important for practitioners to move away from the notion that their superior is keeping an eye on them when practising public relations and instead to manage their work professionally and with full dedication and commitment. As one managing director of the global PR firm pointed out:

In terms of self-regulation, we should be more ethical. Here, we are no longer working for cigarette companies. But we still have clients from alcohol companies, but as a Muslim, I am not handling this part. We've non-Muslim employees to run that business. We can't say 'no' when our clients asked us to do that. However, here, there is a diversity of working staff consisting the Malay, Chinese and Indian. I am very cautious about the sensitivity of our work. I've got to balance between business and cultural sensitivity. We should respect our culture, as that is our identity. Our culture and religious activities do not hinder the way we manage our work.

In order to see an improvement in increasing the standards of the professionalism of public relations, academics and practitioners should work hand in hand to produce an excellent body of PR knowledge. Besides teaching the PR curriculum, PR academics should be more committed to producing more research focusing on the real-world effect and they should then build appropriate academic theories. At the same time, practitioners should help the universities by actively supporting applied PR research. Practitioners must actively participate in seminars and debates on bridging theory and practice in public relations. In fact, by developing a 'Centre for Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management', a professional body such as the IPRM may provide more room for practitioners to participate in this applied research rather than focusing on arranging social gathering activities. More findings about the role of a professional association (including the viewpoints of the vice president of the IPRM) are discussed in Chapter 7.

Furthermore, senior PR practitioners can be described as managerial strategists, and there should be more enthusiasm among them for conducting applied research regarding national and international PR practices using appropriate academic theories as a key reference in managing the communication policies for their organisations. Through this process, where everyone plays a specific role, the IPRM may propose proper accreditation based on applied PR research projects carried out by practitioners and academics. Therefore, this effort directly and indirectly would improve the profiles of the Malaysian PR industry. This could be followed by developing strategic alliances with the established international PR educational and professional bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations (CIPR), the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA), the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) and the Global Alliance of Public Relations and Communication Management (GA). Next, it is worth discussing the importance of continuous professional development as a part of the strategic role of the professional association.

## **6.7 Continuous Professional Development**

One of the prime purposes of the establishment of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia is to offer a range of professional qualifications, which might differ slightly from the academic qualifications that are taught in a university, to enhance holistic understanding and practical knowledge of public relations. This process is known as continuous professional development.



Most informants are in absolute agreement regarding the importance of continuous professional development among practitioners to practise their knowledge and skills for their career development. Similar results were also found in Chapter 5, in Table 5.22, where 85.3% of respondents stated the importance of advancing continuous professional development to PR practice. Academic informants said that nowadays, many practitioners who work for large corporations value higher education and have also been trained in a multi-disciplinary system. In fact, attending professional training may increase the knowledge practitioners have of public relations by updating them with the latest trends in the PR industry. Professional informants found it extremely important that practitioners should be provided with continuing education for the rest of their life. Besides having a professional degree, participating in seminars, forums and workshops is essential for practitioners and academics. Although many organisations have a staff professional development plan for their employees, continuous professional development, which should be provided by the IPRM, would offer the exclusive knowledge and the skills required in the public relations profession to prepare practitioners to become PR professionals. As a PR academic from the private university said:

To be successful, PR practitioners should undergo professional trainings developed by the PR professional body to polish their knowledge and skills. The IPRM should develop better professional trainings for PR practitioners. So that, PR practitioners are capable to be involved in a decision-making process, and will voice their concerns regarding the PR functions to the top management.

By stressing the importance for practitioners of projecting self-reputation, a senior PR practitioner from the national banking institution noted that:

Continuous professional development is very important for PR practitioners. PR practitioners should have a lifelong education. Apart from a degree they hold, they should participate in professional trainings, seminars, public

forums, and workshops. They need to be forum leaders and also write conference papers. It is important for them to project their personal reputation.

Emphasising acquiring academic and professional qualifications for PR practitioners, a head of public relations from the electricity company pointed out that:

To be top PR practitioners, first, you must hold a first degree. Second, you have to further your study to have a master's degree. Third, you have to participate on-going professional programmes. These three criteria are very important for PR practitioners.

It has been said that the IPRM have offered a number of professional diplomas and certificates in public relations (Raman, 1999). However, some practitioners have argued that the professional certificates and diplomas offered by the IPRM do not follow global benchmarking standards. Therefore, the IPRM, in collaboration with the universities, should strengthen its professional diplomas and certificates to enhance the quality of PR education. This issue will be discussed in greater detail later in Chapter 7 based on interviews with business leaders and the vice president of the IPRM.

## **6.8 The Key Functions of Public Relations**

Further discussion about continuous professional development, identifying the key functions of public relations, is especially significant for the growth of the PR industry. Academics and professional informants reported that two key functions of public relations need to be paid considerable attention when practising public relations. These key functions can be described as the technician role and the managerial role.

The key technician roles are:

- a) Publicity
- b) Media relations
- c) Event management
- d) Organisational publications

At an advanced level, the key managerial roles are:

- a) Image/reputation management
- b) Corporate branding
- c) Financial PR
- d) Issue management
- e) Political communication and legal relations

It seems informants realised that the technical and managerial roles mentioned are important and that they need to be rigorous to manage their work effectively. However, it is arguable whether PR practitioners fulfil the complex and sophisticated technical and managerial tasks, as there is a lack of formal measurement techniques to measure intangible benefits to organisational strategy development. A senior PR practitioner from a leading food and beverage company disclosed that:

We don't have the 'hard evidence' as we don't have a formal measurement system. Our success factors are based on results/outcomes expected from each PR activity/campaign as well as the sustainability of each programme. Most of the PR works we execute don't have 'tangible' outcomes except for media coverage, a number of people attending events, key messages being repeated, etc. We had suspended our corporate image survey a couple of years ago, as the results were positive and hardly changed year after year. We will probably invest in another reputation survey in 2006/2007.

It is understood that public relations always delivers intangible outcomes, but it is useful to seek some benchmarking standards to measure its intangible benefits to organisational business performance. Importantly, the involvement of public relations in policy making requires attention and becomes one of the key modes of easily accessing the boardroom or the top management level. Thus, improving these identified technical and managerial roles can enhance the standards of PR professionalism and may also open new opportunities for future PR strategists. As a PR practitioner from the banking institution pointed out:

PR is a part of management, whilst communication is only a tool. An effective PR programme requires strategic management. We build objectives of the programme. Then, we do action plans based on the budget given by top management. Then, we run the PR programme. Once the programme is done, we evaluate and measure our reputation of organisation to see the outcomes of the PR programme we have implemented.

In the light of becoming a 'true' profession, the future technical and managerial functions of public relations would be more complex and sophisticated. Importantly, Forman and Argenti (2005: 261) argued that corporate communication programmes should be quantifiable using formal measurement techniques and complex strategic PR tools, such as primary stakeholder surveys, media content analysis, readership surveys and focus groups.

## **6.9 The Future of the PR industry.**

Indeed, it is worth trying to predict the future of the PR industry in Malaysia based on what academics and practitioners hope for the survival and growth of this industry. Academic and professional informants agreed that the public relations profession has a bright future and is gradually growing towards the emergence of a real PR industry.

Although, in general, the future of Malaysian public relations is clouded with uncertainty and complexity, the improvement they would like to see can bring new visions and inspiration to this industry.

Furthermore, most academics and practitioners interviewed agreed that the profession needs to be more recognised, respected and appreciated by the general public. It is more likely than that credibility and ethics will be key solutions in trying to reach the highest standard of PR professionalism. Academic informants emphasised the importance of strategic management and new technology in the role of public relations in order to improve the profession as well as to be able to adapt to Malaysian local norms and culture. Practitioners, instead of mastering a single language, are strongly encouraged to master multilingual skills in managing their work professionally. All academics and practitioners interviewed also understand that a professional body, the IPRM, would improve their role and they think that professional status should be the prime goal of this association. One of senior PR academics from the public university said that:

The future of the PR industry is very bright. I believe that our government would continually support the industry's development. We are looking forward to focusing on strategic management, quality management, the role of non-government organisation and new technology based on the Malaysian context. In fact, we see that, in the future, more young generation would have a degree in public relations.

When asked what improvement he would like to see in the PR industry, an academic from the private university pointed out that:

First, we should be more committed to the profession. Second, most practitioners should be more proactive and dynamic, and third, practitioners should abide by the codes of ethics for better practising this profession. The IPRM should develop better strategies to promote their association to the potential members, so that, all practitioners will join this association. Thus, we have a good governing body to take care this profession. On top of that, the

IPRM should have a joint venture with international associations and organise seminars and workshops to promote the good image of this profession. I must stress here that PR should have a very serious image that is well recognised.

Besides stressing the impact of government policies towards the PR profession, a PR academic from the established local university noted that practising crisis communication would be the top PR function. He pointed out that:

Due to the government efforts by implementing new policies such as the privatisation of public services and pro-industrialisation, many corporations have established and grown up. This gives huge opportunities for public relations. In Malaysia, many are educated people. The future PR function would be *crisis communication*. PR practitioners should be able to manage issues, complaints and crises that may be occurred regarding the corporation's products or services. Importantly, practitioners should be able to polish the image of this profession. They should be more ethical and there is a need to gain higher education. At the same time, other skills like self-grooming, personal skills, and protocol are also important for practitioners. Understanding our core cultures needs to be paid attention. I think Eastern culture doesn't hinder us to be practised better PR. I believe that in the future, public relations will grow up.

Concerning the importance of corporate branding as a future PR function, a managing director from the international PR firm pointed out that:

The public relations industry has a bright future as far as we want to see. We've got a long way to go. The future of PR function would be *corporate branding* but not advertising. If you want to improve your brand credibility, you've got to use PR. I also want to see that PR becomes more recognised and respected. In order to achieve this, PR practitioners should have more credibility in doing their work. We also need more males joining this industry. Nowadays, most PR practitioners are ex-journalists like me. Importantly, this profession should become multidisciplinary.

When asked about the future of public relations, a head of PR from the banking institution confidently said:

Of course, PR has a bright future. Now, you see that almost all companies must have a PR department. Normally, many companies have employed not more than five PR people. But here, we have 20 PR practitioners. Even, manufacturing companies also need PR services. In the future, the role of public relations will focus more on strategic management. PR practitioners must act like strategists who have knowledge of strategic thinking, corporate

strategy, finance and suchlike. They also need to know legal and regulatory systems and corporate culture.

A head of public relations from the electricity company hopes that top management will create a higher PR position, that is a 'vice president'. She noted that:

We have a lot of potentials to be explored in this field. An expert said that successful corporations have only 10% to 20% of financial impact; the rest of it depends on intangible PR outcomes such as corporate image and reputation. I hope that in the future we may have greater recognition. There would be a 'vice president' of PR in top organisations. Besides managing information, PR got advantages because we also can communicate effectively.

In addition to this PR role, professional informants also stressed that it is important for PR practitioners to participate in policy making in the boardroom. Today's key PR role should be viewed beyond transmitting information to publics. In fact, respondents felt that the profession should be more diverse, more multi-disciplinary and that more males need to join this industry. Importantly, beyond typical PR functions like arranging events, launches and media relations, practitioners should become generalist and strategist by grasping wider knowledge of politics, the economy, social issues, legislation and regulation as well as mastering strategic thinking in managing their work effectively.

Thus, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM), the national PR professional association, once fully established, will represent the industry's voice in Malaysia and will serve to dispel the bad image of the industry, which is it is dying. The truth is there is an urgent need to propose a radical change to its leadership and management, and then this association might empower its members to focus strategically on high professional management. Thus, under the new leadership of Shameem Abdul Jalil, it

is hoped that the revolutionary momentum of her team will improve the emergence of this industry.

In conclusion, fostering the role of the IPRM, enhancing the quality of PR education, as well as developing the body of rigorous PR knowledge should be prime goals amongst PR academics and practitioners. As part of this aim, focusing on the strategic management process and appreciating diversity and multicultural values would be key benchmarks toward higher standards of professionalism in public relations in Malaysia. Thus, the future of public relations lies in the innovative role of the current generation of public relations practitioners who may become new talented PR professionals.

## **6.10 Summary**

While Chapter 5 provided a snapshot of the current practice of public relations, this chapter seeks to offer an in-depth and thorough exploratory study with regard to the professional and educational standards of public relations. Both professional and educational development are important to produce key PR leaders to improve the industry. Briefly, the findings of interviews are consistent with the questionnaire survey concerning almost all of the issues discussed. Indeed, although most academics and practitioners agreed that public relations should be regulated with emphasis on two key elements, accreditation (registration) and licensing, and training and qualifications, there is no agreement on the desired knowledge and skills the 'real' PR practitioners require.



However, some of the data gathered relating to the knowledge and skills (e.g. management, marketing, finance, and journalism) required for public relations (section 6.5) are rather disappointing, as they are neither unique nor even distinctive. Thus, it is difficult to determine the scope and limitation of public relations. It seems that there is no perception of a clear exclusive jurisdiction of public relations among the PR practitioners and academics interviewed. Therefore, data that are more in-depth and coherent, especially relating to the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations from the business leaders' perspective, were gathered, as these business leaders are major clients and/or 'supervisors' of senior PR practitioners. The findings of this study are presented in Chapter 7.

## CHAPTER 7

### RESULT & FINDINGS

(PHASE III - IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS 2006 & DOCUMENT REVIEW)

#### 7.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present in detail the exploratory results describing the professionalisation of public relations in Malaysia. These results have been drawn from a multi-perspective study – the sociology of the profession, strategic management and multiculturalism. As discussed in Chapter 6, the results of the study presented underlying issues concerning PR professionalism in Malaysia. Specifically, it discussed issues concerning knowledge and skills, training and qualifications, accreditation and licensing, and the key functions of public relations.

Further to the key issues concerning PR professionalism raised by PR practitioners and academics, there is a serious need to study PR professionalism from the viewpoint of business leaders, as they are the main clients/stakeholders who determine the survival and growth of the PR industry. Using in-depth interviews, phase three of this study was implemented with a number of CEOs/senior directors from various business industries between mid-November 2005 and mid-February 2006 (between mid-November and December 2005: scheduling appointments, and between January and mid-February, 2006: visiting and interviewing informants).

Additionally, in order to strengthen the data of this study, an interview with the vice president of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia was conducted in February 2006 at the IPRM office. The main focus of discussion was the 'professional project' the institute has produced.

Apart from interviewing members of the senior management of large corporations, the researcher also gathered, reviewed and analysed a wide range of collected information from companies' websites, annual reports, newsletters, and reported news as well as PR educational material, including course outlines, journals, monographs, and other academic publications. Also included in this study were IPRM materials such as strategic plans, annual reports, accreditation programmes, newsletters, and reported news. Thus, this chapter explores data collected from three different sources:

- a) In-depth interviews with business leaders
- b) In-depth interviews with the vice president of the PR professional institute (IPRM)
- c) A review of organisational and academic documents

### **7.1 Phase III: In-depth Interviews with Business Leaders**

This study is organised around six key themes of public relations professionalism: (1) the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations: distinct domains of PR expertise; (2) PR education: the establishment of exclusive training schools; (3) accreditation and licensing: voluntary accreditation versus mandatory accreditation; (4) the importance of a code of ethics; (5) cultural diversity management; and (6) the effective role of the professional institute of public relations (IPRM). Specifically, the findings from these

interviews tell us a good deal about the exploratory results. These findings are explored in subsequent sections.

### 7.1.1 The Exclusive Jurisdiction of Public Relations

As discussed in the literature review (Chapter 3), it is very important that public relations must define its exclusive jurisdiction (its scope and limitation) if it is to become a 'true' profession. Ten top senior management personnel in large Malaysian corporations (four CEOs, three chairmen, one deputy chairman and two senior managers) were interviewed and agreed that public relations is a 'true' profession to some extent but that it is not exactly a 'learned profession' such as medicine, law or accountancy. When asked whether public relations should be a profession like medicine or accountancy, the chairman of one of Malaysia's largest container ports in the maritime industry argued that:

Yes, but it would be varied from medicine or accountancy as these two fields involve actual applications whereas here it would involve *situational reasoning*, from case to case basis. There is no one solution which can be applied across the board.

Situational reasoning here can be interpreted as an ability to exercise the practitioner's judgement, decisiveness, and creativity in solving varying problems/issues where one issue is different from another. This ability requires strategic thinking in making strategic plans and in the implementation of public relations.

Indeed, public relations deals with external stakeholders within an external business environment (strategic external function). The chairman of the second biggest of

Malaysia's banking institutions, who was awarded 'Best CEO in Malaysia 2004' and 'Most PR Savvy CEO 2004', emphasised that:

Yes, it should be a profession. It involves a management and strategic function to support business and organisations; social, economic and political development and global relations.

Regarding the domain of expertise, there are four key areas of expertise that CEOs and chairmen highlighted. Ten interviewees were in complete agreement that *stakeholder relations* (mentioned 109<sup>1</sup>) must be top of the agenda for public relations, followed by the importance of *reputation management* and *organisational branding* (mentioned 39 and 22 respectively), providing a strong link to the corporate objectives, goals and strategy of organisations (mentioned 69). *Corporate social responsibility* and *community relations* (mentioned 34) were also mentioned as crucial functions of public relations. It is essential for senior PR practitioners to get involved in *advising and coaching CEOs/chairmen* (mentioned 32), especially with regard to the situational issues in the external environment.

### Stakeholder Relations

Stakeholders can be defined as various groups who are interested directly and indirectly in a particular company and are impacted by a company's business activities. This definition draws from the data gathered from interviews with business leaders. When asked what public relations is, all informants stressed the importance of stakeholder relations in determining business success in a complex and highly competitive business environment. The CEO of the country's largest solid waste

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<sup>1</sup> This figure shows the frequency of the number of concepts/phrases mentioned by interviewees. Also see subsequent usage in this chapter.

management company said that 'in today's business, any corporation must interact with their stakeholders directly and indirectly'. 'Managing relationships with various stakeholders such as customers, NGOs, investors, regulatory bodies, pressure groups and employees is a crucial function of public relations' stressed one interviewee from a leading telecommunication company. Specifically, concerning social and environmental issues, the CEO of one of the top global players in the petroleum industry, listed on the Kuala Lumpur Stock Exchange in 1960, argued that:

You must be able to manage your external stakeholders (e.g. community residents) strategically especially making your stakeholders understand what kind of business you are running. Different stakeholders have different interests. I see PR is a necessary part of business strategy in conveying values this business brings to community. It is crucial to handle issues such as what it is so noisy around your factory and why it is flaring a lot of gas.

In addition, the CEO of the leading distributor of motor vehicles in Malaysia, who was awarded the 'Most PR Savvy CEO 2003' award, disclosed that 'PR can improve your business strategy by communicating your corporate policies to your stakeholders especially influencing potential investors. If managed strategically, it can be a major contribution to corporate governance'.

Indeed, it is a company's responsibility to shape the stakeholder engagement that affects positively its 'license to operate' and positions the company as a good corporate citizen. The CEO who is involved in oil and refinery services disclosed that:

We are running a global business, where everything is more complex. People are now more educated (and) more conscious. They see what happen around the world – e.g. news travels very fast – printed and electronic, It comes to the point that show me what it is and how to do it. Some of them who are interested would join (our business activities). If you are able to demonstrate to them that you have a safe (and) clean operation, you might be able to manage your external stakeholders. We have *license to operate* – if we violate our license, it may jeopardise our business.

It is clear enough from the viewpoints of senior management in large corporations that public relations is one of the most important strategic external functions of organisational strategy development, especially in dealing with various external stakeholders: it is definitely seen as improving business performance and profitability. Most interviewees were aware that public relations is an essential part of strategic management that leads to business success because it delivers trust, transparency and great values about a reputable company to their various stakeholders. Therefore, the reputation of organisations must be managed in a strategic way, which is discussed in the following section.

### Reputation Management and Organisational Branding

If we emphasise the visibility and transparency of corporations, reputation and brand are the two most important terms describing what public relations really is. These two terms describe how public relations is involved in corporate personality development, which must be consistent with all corporate management aspects such as corporate values and objectives. These two terms also control the way stakeholders view the developed corporate personality. One interviewee from Malaysia's national petroleum corporation stressed that:

Our corporate affairs unit is responsible as *custodian of organisational image and reputation* that represents our organisation. They must understand how to manifest real value and this must be consistent with the total organisational strategy development. It must be very strategic in all angle of corporate management.

He confidently added that 'with regard to projecting a company's reputation, we must know its values and heritages that represent the unique character and personality of the organisation'. This shows that public relations is responsible for creating what

corporations have become – by creating a unique and distinctive personality that differs from other corporations. ‘I see PR should focus on reputation management and corporate branding which are wider scopes of PR rather than polishing an image through publicity’. This was argued by the CEO of a top performer in the automobile industry. It seems that he gives a clear-cut answer about the key role of public relations. In addition, an adviser to the CEO of the leading telecommunications corporation said that:

Our corporate affairs department drives a good image building for a company that is strong, responsible, caring and profitable. This positive image created by PR unit will endear a company to promote better products and services to our stakeholders’.

Emphasising the importance of corporate reputation, the deputy chairman of one of Malaysia's foremost, well-diversified conglomerates disclosed that:

PR is existed in our company to add value in terms of enhancing image and reputation of organisation. It can definitely improve our business strategy. It helps *creating our corporate personality* and *managing the perceptions of stakeholders* on this company. If your company has a bad image and reputation, no matter how good your (corporate) strategy is, it won't improve your business performance.

At the corporate level, the senior manager of a services business emphasised the importance of corporate branding as a key managerial PR strategy. He remarked that:

Understanding corporate branding is quite important. (We needed to understand about what our competitive edge is, and who our differentiators are. For example, there are three different petrol stations: (Petronas, Shell and BP). They all sell petrol to motorists. People may have lot choices. So how you manifest the petrol station that you are going to use. The Petronas's twin tower and the *Mesra* shop – all these things reflect the whole organisation wherever we are. When you interact there, you feel that this is Petronas. (You will see) different values, different logo, different corporate colour. It is about delivering the experience itself. We call it brand management.

It is crucial to note that reputation and brand are two essential elements that are closely linked to improved business performance. Top executives want reputation



management and corporate branding to become key managerial tasks for public relations.

### Corporate Social Responsibility and Community Relations

Apart from discussing the importance of reputation management and corporate branding, it is crucial to note that corporate social responsibility is also central to managerial public relations tasks. Out of ten interviewees, eight emphasised the importance of corporate social responsibility and community relations as strategic public relations functions in building a favourable relationship between the organisations and their stakeholders. A business leader in the petroleum industry stressed that:

There is a need (for PR practitioners) to focus on CSR (corporate social responsibility) especially corporate philanthropy. We have developed *a social performance plan*. Recently, we sponsor school programs – debate among students how to improve their English competency.

Corporate social responsibility here had also emerged from a sense of responsibility as a unique national company and their engagement with regulatory bodies. The concept of ‘giving back to society’ here, in a wider scope, can be interpreted as not only adding value to their business entity but also being responsible for dominant legislation, regulatory bodies and Malaysian society by protecting their nation’s values and heritages. One interviewee from a top performer in the automobile industry disclosed that:

In 1974, as a result of petroleum legislation and development act, the country’s source of oil in onshore and offshore actually belongs to the state of federal government. They transfer it to us. We have been given these resources because they wanted us to manage them properly. We are set up as business that being given these resources and then we have to report directly to Prime Minister. But we are not a government body. The government trust us because

they are concerned about other foreign established oil companies like (Company X and Y) which monopolise the market. So that, the government thinks that we need to start our own resources. You can see *the sense of responsibility* to manage all these resources until today's success. This is a unique national oil company as these resources not only can add value to a business entity but also contribute to the country – we pay taxes and royalty, in 31 years – we have *given back to the government* (society) over RM200 billion excluding our profit. Our profit we retain and sustain to add values to our business. In 1990s, we then expand our business in overseas – venturing global business.

In addition, business leaders also emphasised that the term 'corporate social responsibility' must be described beyond gaining publicity per se. A top senior manager of one of the leading petroleum corporations, who had been appointed as a group general counsel and plays an active role in the boardroom, emphasised that:

We are doing CSR such as sponsorship. We are doing it because our responsibility as *education and capacity building*. It must have a meaning for the long term planning. It is highly responsible for us to do community relations. We don't 'shout' to the people like showing off a big mock cheque RM5000 to get publicity. That's a typical PR activity. Unlike foreign competitors, they are doing CSR because of their existence, but we are doing CSR because we are a part of us.

The chairman of one of the Malaysia's largest and most dynamic investment holding companies gave a straight answer concerning one of the main responsibilities of public relations by arguing that 'good PR must focus on corporate social responsibility. PR person must look for charity that company can help. You must do the right things'. With great emphasis on the triple bottom lines that develop a good balance between the company's profitability and the societal environment, a business leader of a waste management company disclosed that:

This company focuses on *triple bottom lines* that are profit, corporate social responsibility and environment protection. These three pillars of corporate objectives must go hand in hand. I see that based on these, it may improve company profitability. (We have) good corporate social work and corporate governance. PR is used to support those triple bottom lines I mentioned. So, it delivers positive results for our company – 'better profit, better branding, better market shares and better image'.

### Advising and Coaching CEOs/Chairmen

The final managerial task that was mentioned in detail by business leaders is advising and coaching the CEOs/chairmen. Seven interviewees showed great concern over advising and coaching CEOs/chairmen as a critical and strategic role of public relations. The CEO of the leading waste management company emphasised that:

Unlike multinational companies which are taking a great concern over public relations as they have gone up and down, but some Malaysian companies have not really exposed to high competition and being having good at all time. Malaysian CEOs must be more agile and competitive. Communication is very important for a company to be appeared as the best company. This can be done by communicating and engaging your business with external stakeholders. That's why we invest in PR to be seen by our stakeholders. A real PR practitioner must be able to influence CEO's thinking and judgement. Here, PR is a part of top management committee.

Many managing directors also stressed that a PR professional must be act as *an advisor* and *internal consultant* rather than a communicator. The CEO advisor of the leading telecommunications company stressed that real PR professionals must be able to convince their CEOs concerning making decisions about engaging with society (community relations), such as the funding of aid following the tsunami in Aceh, Indonesia and the earthquake in Pakistan: their contributions to the victims reflected their corporate personality as a caring and responsible corporation, which enhanced the company's reputation.

Possessing a strong personality and talent, especially being articulate, charismatic and confident, is a 'must have' set of personal abilities for the PR professional who is responsible for projecting the personality of the organisation and the CEO. One interviewee from a large petroleum corporation stressed that:

At the advanced level of communication, there is a need (for PR practitioners) to project corporate personality and the character of the organisation. This must be started from projecting the CEO's personality. There must be someone who is being articulate and confident, can carry this responsibility.

Projecting the CEO's personality is a crucial managerial task of public relations, as the CEO is *a company spokesperson*, as remarked by the deputy chairman of a leading service organisation. According to the chairman of an investment holding company, real PR professionals must be able to justify their strategies in the boardroom, as senior directors do not like hidden agendas. He thought that the best communication is face to face in convincing other senior directors.

Many interviewees agreed that PR practitioners must see CEOs/chairmen as their main stakeholders. Two business leaders of the leading service corporations noted that most CEOs always depend on their own judgement in making decisions about corporate issues in the boardroom, but in some cases they need someone who can assist them by providing facts and figures. This is especially so when dealing with external stakeholders, such as criticism from pressure groups, environmentalists, and related NGOs. The managing director of the leading petroleum corporation disclosed that:

It is always PR responsibility to work closely with me – may be influencing CEO's judgement about certain issues. In that sense, they are expected to be an advisor who I have one in the field. We are engaging with external stakeholders – once a year we do *a community dialog*. We communicate with external stakeholders who affect our business indirectly. They are MPs, polices, fire brigades, local council, and local communities. He (PR person) helps me a lot about strategic implementation. His role is played by a CEO that is what I do. Being PR professionals, you must have good communication and negotiation skills - to influence behaviour of your stakeholders. (You needed) good attitudes such as being humble and not arrogant. PR person must have good personality that is '*more warm*' than others.

## Public Relations is a Complex and Distinctive Management Function

Apart from discussing the key areas of expertise from the viewpoints of senior management personnel of large corporations, it is also important to highlight the value and status of public relations in their organisations. CEOs/chairmen were asked whether there is a distinctive and complex function of public relations.

In order to become a profession, public relations must be seen as a complex and distinctive management function in organisations rather than supporting marketing activities or polishing images through the mass media. Most interviewees really valued the public relations functions in their large corporations and see public relations as a distinctive function like other management functions such as marketing, human resources, accounting and suchlike. When asked the real value of public relations to his business, the chairman of one of the Malaysia's largest container ports disclosed that:

Public relations is *a catalyst* not a direct factor to impose business strategy. It depends on the nature of the business and the degree the business' exposure to the public, as they are able to facilitate or impede a company's ability to achieve its objective.

Many CEOs of the big companies remarked that any organisation must have a public relations function, as all organisations must deal with internal and external stakeholders. The CEO of a large waste management company remarked that:

Last time, our PR people report to Human Resources, but now they report (direct) to me as I can see PR may improve our business strategy. Today's business is about building relationships with your stakeholders. It must be personalised. There is no more 'Dear Customer'. Those days are gone. The focus now is one-to-one relationship. We must listen and analyse customers' needs and demands rather than forcing them to accept our offers. Customers want choices. For example, PR is used to influence behaviour by increasing

recycling awareness. We call it PREP – *Public Relations and Education Program*.

Most CEOs agreed that there is a need to have a distinctive function of public relations which is clearly separated from other management functions such as marketing or advertising. Therefore, there must be an exclusive division of public relations. However, all these functions such as PR, marketing and advertising are integrated as a total communication system that drives effective organisational strategy development. An interviewee from a big petroleum organisation emphasised:

There is a need to have an exclusive division of corporate communication to safeguard a company's reputation. It cannot be under marketing or human resources because it will be compromised. But all of them work together to promote core businesses of organisation. For example, communication is about corporate branding that involves long term planning and delivers intangible benefits, whilst marketing is about brand promotion that delivers short-term results.

Having an exclusive division of corporate communication (PR) enables PR practitioners to practise more than the typical PR function. The deputy chairman of a big conglomerate corporation remarked that:

20 years ago, when I started my business, it is hardly to find PR in any service organisation. (At that time) I worked with a banking institution. We don't see people as people come to us and make saving. (At that time) it is a nature of banking services. Today's banking services, you don't wait for customers to come in. You must look for customers. (You needed to) build relationships with them. Last time, we just have a typical PR function which organising events. Now, we have a big division of corporate communication which adds values in terms enhancing our image and reputation.

However, some of those interviewed remarked that public relations must not rely too greatly on mass media per se, as this reliance may diminish the value of public relations. With great concern about the issues concerning the spin doctoring that is being practised by some PR practitioners, the chairman of a leading investment holding company stressed that:

I see PR (PR media) like 'badminton rackets' between image builders and newspapers – they all are doing spin doctoring that damages business. To be a valued profession, you must look beyond this. You must know the facts about the products and services. Here, our corporate communication focuses on organising charity programs for community relations. (They needed to) communicate the truth and transparency about business operation. There must be 'good profit of company, good corporate governance, good risk management, and good accountant records'. All you need to do is to bring all these facts to press to tell your stakeholders. You don't need it to spin it when corporate records are bad.

It is worth noting that the role of PR must be expanded from press relations, as its main responsibility is a real strategic communication management function which focuses on the higher level of corporate activities such as corporate social responsibility, reputation management and corporate branding. This can be done by highlighting the importance of understanding of business operation (mentioned 69), especially with regard to corporate strategy, objectives and goals, and the core business of an organisation. An interviewee from the leading petroleum organisation disclosed that:

Polishing image through media per se can be dangerous because you wanted your corporation to look 'good' all the time. (This can be interpreted as) 'window dressing'. Whatever you tell press must be aligned with what is really happening affecting your business. Importantly, you have to manage your reputation by connecting facts and figures to corporate management aspects such as quality of products and services and quality of delivery services. If customers are not really satisfied with the products and services, tell them what strategies you are going to use to fix this.

However, an advisor to the CEO of a big telecommunication company disagreed that PR ignores the importance of media relations by emphasising that:

PR media can be a '*Trojan horse*' to a company. Media can be used or can be abused. It depends on how you are going to utilise them. (If managed effectively,) media can be your *sounding board* that portrays visibility and transparency of the organisation. Using media, PR can reach more potential stakeholders by projecting your corporate image. So people know that our company are steady, reliable, profitable, progressive and innovative. People see PR media as spin doctoring because the talent of some PR practitioners are really questionable.

It is clear that media relations is seen as a functional strategy which if managed effectively, can reach a large number of stakeholders to inform them about certain issues. However, the media can be 'abused' because there is a lack of competencies among the PR practitioners who manage media relations. Nevertheless, the majority of interviewees wanted to argue that the practice of public relations goes beyond publicity and media relations. Therefore, developing an exclusive degree and training school is important to nurture PR practitioners, which is discussed in the following section.

#### **7.1.2 PR Education: the Establishment of Exclusive Training Schools**

One of the key dimensions of PR professionalisation is the establishment of exclusive training schools where training and qualifications are designed to develop well-qualified PR practitioners. CEOs/chairmen were asked about the calibre of PR practitioners in the corporate and public sectors. Although many of them emphasised the importance of public relations to their companies, most of them were not really impressed with the talent and competencies of PR practitioners. The CEO of a top performer in the automobile industry argued critically that some PR practitioners have a narrow perspective of how to perform their duties. He also stressed that these people need to undergo proper training and obtain qualifications in PR. Therefore, it was very important to ask the interviewees about training schools where professional knowledge and the precision of public relations could be developed for PR professionals.



Six business leaders have indicated their preference for public relations having an exclusive training school or being housed in business schools. Only two recommended that public relations should be housed in schools of journalism, while the rest did not highlight their preferences. When asked whether there is a need to set up an exclusive PR training school, a CEO in a commercial vehicle business remarked that 'you should have your own school because you can define the right scope and limitation of public relations. It must involve aspects of communication and management that serve the corporate and public sectors'. An interviewee who is involved in the petroleum industry argued that:

'I'd rather go by an exclusive school provided that a strong link to business and management. Knowledge of corporate branding must be in place. You may educate PR practitioners how to find key distinctive values for your organisation rather than copying other's concepts. Otherwise, your business doesn't last longer'.

Out of ten interviewees, eight agreed completely that public relations must have exclusive academic and professional qualifications as a knowledge base for the profession. However, many CEOs/chairmen remarked that to be real PR professionals, exposure and experience are considered the best criteria. The chairman of a shipping company disclosed that 'the domain of the field lies largely in the experience and exposure of that person. It is very much situational, which varies from business to business. Hence the qualification is perhaps more useful as a knowledge base for the profession'. The CEO in a real estate business emphasised that 'there is a need to have an exclusive degree in PR that shows the rigorous body of knowledge'. The chairman of a leading banking institution remarked that 'in today's world, a basic degree is seen as a starting point of any career'.

With regard to the calibre of PR practitioners, understanding business operations, especially knowing about the core businesses that a company runs, is one of the most important criteria. A CEO from the petroleum industry disclosed that:

A PR person who doesn't know about business operation and straightaway doing PR, will have problems. Once he knows about the business, getting outside is not difficult. In Shell, I have taken one of our heads of environmental technologies to become a head of PR. In job valuation, I see that there would be environmental issues in the future operation. We need an environmental person who can explain in great detail about the process and scope of environment.

Of even greater concern is the talent and competencies among PR practitioners: the CEO advisor of a big telecommunication company stressed that:

There are good PR practitioners and those are 'ugly' one. Generally, those are being employed by big companies, they tend to know what they are doing. They are good PR people. But those are 'ugly' – these people have no training. They claim to be 'PR practitioners' but (these people) damage the industry. We have to differentiate between qualified and unqualified PR practitioners. I would say that qualified PR practitioners must have a formal training and right qualification. It is important for you to have a formal degree so that you know the process of public relations practice. After that, you must experience it.

Three interviewees wanted a formal measurement matrix to be taught in a relevant school. 'I think many (CEOs) understand the value of PR but I would be more convinced if there is ROI (return on investment) measurement in public relations that delivers intangible benefits to organisations', said a CEO who is involved in the recycling business. A senior manager in the oil and refinery business disclosed that 'we are moving to the ideas of measuring communication matrix to see the value of PR to our corporate strategy. (For example) brand equity'. Based on the viewpoints of senior management personnel, it is worth noting that it would be very useful to teach a formal measurement matrix in an exclusive training school. Concerning training and

qualification, it might be useful to discuss accreditation and licensing set by a regulatory body.

### **7.1.3 Accreditation and Licensing: Voluntary or Mandatory Accreditation**

Two forms of accreditation could be set up to develop the professionalisation of public relations: they are voluntary and mandatory accreditation. There was a need to ask CEOs/chairmen whether public relations needs to be regulated by implementing voluntary or mandatory accreditation.

Voluntary accreditation is described as a set of standardised guidelines that are set up voluntarily in the interest of the fraternity of practitioners to enhance the status and standards of professionalism. It is based totally on the voluntary registration of members and on self-regulation. In contrast, mandatory accreditation requires licensing and it is mandatory for all practitioners to register and be bound by the legislation and regulations set by a regulatory body: if they fail to comply, registered practitioners will be penalised. These concepts have emerged as a result of analysing interviews with the vice president of the IPRM and also reviewing IPRM documents regarding accreditation and legislation. More detail about the interviews will be given later in this chapter.

There are varying perceptions about whether public relations should be regulated. Nine business leaders agreed that public relations should be regulated based on voluntary accreditation and one top executive did not agree with any accreditation, though he is really concerned about the quality of PR practitioners' work and the

precision of their practice. However, only five of the business leaders agreed that public relations should be regulated and licensed by a mandatory accreditation system. The CEO adviser of a large telecommunications company stressed that:

There must be some forms of accreditation to nurture PR practitioners and protect their clients. (There is a need) to maintain the dignity and uniformity of PR fraternity. Otherwise, everybody can claim that I can be a PR manager. For example, you wanted to run PR consultancy offering PR services to their clients. So how come clients may know that you are qualified PR practitioners who may give better services. Unless, you can show that you are IPRM qualified/accredited PR practitioners. You have undergone some courses (CPD) developed by IPRM. So there are some benchmarking standards.

The CEO of a leading property development company who was educated in law emphasised that ‘accreditation and licensing are very important for the PR industry as there are many incompetent PR practitioners practising PR in this industry. Legislation is a way to improve PR professionalism’. A business figure in the maritime industry stressed that ‘there should be a regulatory body to ensure that morality, ethical behaviour and sensitivity are adhered to at all times’. The CEO of a big automotive company remarked that ‘PR should be regulated by setting proper accreditation and licensing. There must be a regulatory body such as IPRM which governs this practice’.

When asked what are the advantages for business from establishing accreditation and licensing for public relations, the chairman of a leading shipping company remarked that ‘there will be better clout for exposure, better access and better reach’. In addition, the benefit that a company gains when hiring accredited PR practitioners enhances a company’s credibility, as the CEO adviser of the telecommunications company said:

Hiring accredited PR practitioners may enhance our business credibility. If you are qualified PR practitioners who can do excellent job for clients, the

tendency you will deliver high quality services are guarantee, genuine and reliable. You are being acknowledged and respected. It shows that you have a strong track record. It is also better chances for you (accredited PR consultants) to gain more business.

It seems that in today's highly complex and competitive business environment, accreditation is one way of managing trust, transparency and honesty to ensure that clients are always served and protected.

With regard to client importance, protecting clients by hiring well-qualified PR practitioners is crucial. A CEO involved in the environmental industry emphasised that:

You can differentiate between qualified and unqualified practitioners by having examinations and certificates like other established professional associations have. Accreditation and licensing is very important for qualified PR practitioners. This may protect your clients as well. It is important to have *professional credentials, intellectual knowledge* and the *school of training*. (This may) show your competencies. There must be a grading system like medicine or accounting. So, you know what level you are. Otherwise, you will see some (unqualified) PR practitioners can do 'hollow' talk without proper training and experience. These people are spin doctors – lack of substance behind.

In this statement, he described that by having accreditation, continuous professional development can be expanded to suit practitioners' competencies which can be measured through a grading system to show the level of competencies that practitioners have.

Having stressed the importance of accreditation and licensing, some business leaders did not agree that public relations should be legally practised in the sense of imposing mandatory accreditation because it may result in bureaucracy that diminishes the value of public relations, especially in expanding new areas of expertise. Two top

executives in the service industry argued that the enforcement of law in public relations might cause problems because there is no clear scope and limitation in this field. Specifically, they also argued that technical and managerial expertise in PR is currently inadequate. Some of them felt that PR practitioners were not working in a complex or sophisticated way. Therefore, they believed the focus should be more on improving the quality and precision of public relations practice rather than on imposing mandatory accreditation.

Based on the comments on accreditation and licensing, it can be concluded that many CEOs/chairmen confirmed that voluntary accreditation would be a starting point for the public relations profession. According to the majority of CEOs/chairmen, all PR practitioners, whether good or bad, should register with a PR professional body based on voluntary accreditation. Junior PR practitioners may benefit from undergoing a range of exclusive professional training and qualifications, whilst senior PR practitioners may share their knowledge and competencies by becoming training tutors or coordinators. Senior PR practitioners may also undergo exclusive training at the corporate and managerial level conducted by top PR and business figures. Indeed, to become members of a regulatory body such as the IPRM, members must attest to adherence to the code of ethics and also comply with clear standards set by the regulatory body in order to demonstrate their professional credentials.

#### **7.1.4 The Importance of A Code of Ethics**

It is worth noting that a code of ethics is the fourth key dimension of PR professionalisation that PR practitioners must abide by. All interviewees confirmed

that their PR practitioners operate according to the code of ethics set by their own company but they were not aware and could not confirm whether their PR practitioners would also operate according to the code of ethics set exclusively by PR professional associations such as the IPRM. The chairman of a large shipping company remarked ‘Yes, most definitely the PR practitioners of our organisation will always adhere to the code of ethics set by the company’. The CEO of a leading oil and refinery company emphasised that:

We have our own code of ethics to which every employees must adhere to and being governed. We call it *Shell General Business Principles* which focus on sharing a set of core values – honesty, integrity and respect. But there is always temptation to have problems such as bribe and corruption. We don’t do it because we uphold to the code of ethics. That’s kind of ethics is quite important for business success.

When asked whether there is a need to enforce the code of ethics if practitioners are exposed to problems such as bribery or corruption, seven of them agreed that enforcement is one way to penalise those involved, but only two interviewees agreed that PR professional associations should enforce and monitor this matter. Five top executives noted that the organisation which employed them must be responsible for and monitor such issues.

There is a strong argument about how the code of ethics can legally be practised by PR practitioners. The adviser to the CEO of a leading telecommunications corporation emphasised that:

We are concerned about a code of ethics. We wanted a code of ethics to be practical. Everybody can claim they adhere to a code of ethics. There must be a regulatory body, which can monitor, enforce and police it. The code of ethics means nothing if there is no enforcement.

Although all companies have their own codes of ethics, it is important for PR practitioners to practise a code of ethics set by their PR professional associations. This can be done if all PR practitioners become members of a PR professional association. It is also one of the key reasons why PR practitioners must become members of this association. Therefore, it is useful to discuss the effective role of the IPRM in terms of their main responsibility to safeguard the PR industry in Malaysia.

### **7.1.5 The Effective Role of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia**

The Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM) was born in 1962. It is a voluntary professional association that aims to enhance the standards and status of the professionalisation of public relations. The professional association is mainly responsible for:

- 1) Developing a strategic plan
- 2) Providing a continuous professional development scheme
- 3) Achieving state recognition – Royal Charter
- 4) Providing membership benefits

All of these elements must be aligned with universal and global benchmarking standards. Therefore, it is worth asking CEOs/chairmen of companies what they think about the effective role of this professional institute after over 40 years of operation as support for the PR fraternity in Malaysia.

Although most business leaders interviewed agreed on the important role of a professional body like the IPRM in nurturing PR practitioners, none of the senior



management personnel of the large corporations interviewed were impressed with the policy development and achievement of this professional institute. They saw the IPRM as an ordinary non-government organisation rather than an independent and distinct professional association that would fight for the establishment of PR professionalisation.

The main goal of the IPRM is developing a vision and strategic plan. Eight interviewees expressed their concern over the vision and strategic plan set by the IPRM. In establishing a professional project for public relations, setting the vision and strategic plan of the professional organisation is the most important element: it demonstrates what the organisation wants to achieve within certain periods and it is the way the organisation demonstrates its values, goals and objectives to the PR fraternity. The leadership of the organisation is considered one of the most important factors in determining the vision and strategic plan of the organisation. A top business leader from a leading conglomerate company remarked that 'setting the vision and strategic plan (of IPRM) is not easy. It always depends on the leadership of the organisation. You must have a bright person who can manifest your objectives and goals in a strategic manner'. A CEO from a property development company argued that 'I think this association (IPRM) is not united and not well organised. Their strategic plan should be aligned with global benchmarking standards'. Apart from noting the importance of leadership, they also wanted the vision and strategic plan to be aligned with global benchmarking standards to encourage active participation from their existing and potential members.

In order to improve practitioners' competencies, the institute is expected to develop better continuous professional development schemes. As discussed earlier in this chapter, some business leaders stressed that a grading system should be developed to gauge the level of practitioners' competencies. This level of competencies is based on exclusively technical and managerial tasks of public relations that are offered systematically in a proper professional development scheme rather than having one-off training courses. Indeed, continuous professional development schemes must be aligned with global benchmarking standards.

In addition, seven top executives agreed that state recognition (a Royal Charter) would be a very important achievement to demonstrate the highest level of standards of PR professionalism. Two business leaders partly agreed with this issue. One informant did not agree. A business leader noted that although achieving professional status can add value to public relations firms (PR consultants) operating in this country, it may require more than chartered status for PR practitioners working in bigger organisations where in-house public relations departments are set up. When asked whether having state recognition would make public relations a more respected profession, the chairman of a leading shipping company remarked that 'it depends, if it is for a public relations firm then perhaps it will make a difference, but if a part of a bigger organisation then it may not have much effect'. It is important to note that the IPRM was awarded two royal patronages. In 1967, the first patronage of the institute was received from the first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman Putra Al-Haj. Then, in 2003, Raja Nazrin, the Regent of Perak (the king of state), awarded royal patronage to the IPRM. Attaining chartered status has helped to add value to the profession.

Importantly, membership benefits are key criteria to encourage people to become members of professional institutes. Six informants interviewed emphasised that focusing on membership benefits could attract more potential members and retain existing members, as these benefits could be a major factor in why they might join the institute. The CEO of a property development corporation declared that membership benefits should be more explicitly described, so that every member is entitled to gain privileges and benefits. Networking opportunities among members, accessing more exclusive and valued information and materials about the PR industry, and encouraging knowledge sharing among members are key criteria of membership benefits described by some business leaders. Importantly, top business figures also stressed that additional global issues should be fed into local PR practitioners' thinking as more Malaysian corporations are eagerly involved in global business.

Indeed, all of the top business leaders interviewed emphasised that there is an extremely urgent need for setting and developing global and international benchmarking standards for public relations. Without this, professional associations may lose advantages and support from potential members and business leaders. The deputy chairman of one of Malaysia's foremost well-diversified conglomerate corporations remarked that although the IPRM has been awarded Royal Patron, the professional organisation lacks key global/international benchmarking standards. Developing networking and global alliances with other established international professional bodies should be greatly encouraged according to these interviewees.

Indeed, it is worth noting that developing a strategic plan, providing the continuous professional development scheme, achieving state recognition – Royal Charter - and providing membership benefits were considered to be the issues that would determine the effective role of the IPRM in representing the country's PR professional association. Having discussed the importance of the effective role of a professional institute from the viewpoints of the business leaders, the next topic of discussion is cultural diversity management.

#### **7.1.6 Cultural Diversity Management**

As mentioned earlier, most CEOs/chairmen agreed that public relations is a profession that involves managing stakeholders, especially in an external business environment. It is worth discussing how public relations can contribute substantially to organisations by managing cultural diversity and reducing any complexities that affect business performance.

There was complete agreement among the ten top business leaders interviewed that managing cultural diversity is quite important in determining business success. Malaysia is a multi-ethnic country where multicultural facets can affect organisational strategy development directly and indirectly. It is important to explore the role PR practitioners can play to improve PR business strategy and reduce any complexities in understanding multi-cultural issues among the three major ethnic groups, the Malay, Chinese and Indian groups, as well as other ethnicities, including expatriates.

The ten top executives disclosed that *understanding cultural sensitivity* among all ethnic groups is very important in formulating and conducting their business strategy, as all corporations studied are manned by diverse employees, especially in corporate communication departments. The chairman of one of the most dynamic banking institutions remarked that:

Organisations in Malaysia are born and bred out of multiculturalism. So it comes quite naturally with Public Bank being born and bred here to uphold excellent multicultural values. Our employees come from multiethnic backgrounds. The working culture encourages a strong spirit of teamwork, sharing and caring amongst all races. We have a deliberate policy of observing all festive occasions and observance of respect and appreciation of each other's cultures in the organisation. Observing sensitivities in cross culture communication is part of our communication policy. Public Bank is a colourful organisation indeed.

They also emphasised that in global business practice, business and multicultural facets cannot be separated, as understanding different cultures may benefit their organisational strategy development. Therefore, managing their business services using a PR strategy which takes account of multicultural sensitivities is vital for business success. Specifically, the chairman of a big shipping company remarked that:

The approach to PR has to be Malaysian based and one that enhances the harmonious working relationship within and outside the business. For example, Westport has its musical fusion of featuring Indian, Malay and Chinese in two-minute video clip of a 40-piece band playing various instruments.

One of their organisational strategies in adapting their business interests to fit the country's culture and norms is *nurturing local PR employees* who fully understand the multi-cultural issues in the country in which the organisation invests. The CEO adviser of the leading telecommunications company disclosed that:

We think diversity will add value to our company. It makes you more prepared and more rounded and more comprehensive. (For example), we wanted to purchase a telecommunications company in India and we are now waiting for an approval from an Indian government. So, we look for a good PR

consultancy in India to help us to manage our relationships with regulatory bodies. We wanted to appoint local employees to build our relationships with an Indian government in interest of buying the telecom company. So they understand their own market and can organise it.

Nurturing local PR employees here is about encouraging global and local firms to employ diverse local employees in order to understand cultural sensitivities such as taboos, religious values, and norms that have been practised over the decades in the particular country. This element is aligned with the slogan 'Think locally, act globally'. The chairman of the main multi-purpose gateway port said 'to be aware of cultural sensitivity – "Think locally, act globally" but in acceptance of the norms and customs of the locality'. The chairman of one of the top banking institutions remarked that '(We need to) promote appreciation of local culture, local brands to the world. (We) have to promote a balance between Western and Eastern values. Contributing to global harmony remains their challenge'. Additionally, 'we must become a *cultural exporter* to the other part of the world', stressed one informant in the oil and refinery business. It is a great challenge for PR practitioners to be *cultural diversity experts* who can adapt their PR strategy to the country's cultural values and norms in order to harmonise the relationships between the organisation and its stakeholders. Teambuilding, dialogue sessions and management briefings are several key cultural diversity management tools identified as a result of interviewing one business leader in the service business.

When asked whether the organisation provides a cultural diversity policy that is practised by their diverse employees, five interviewees confirmed that their cultural diversity policy could add value to the harmonisation among different ethnic groups.

The CEO of a top global oil company disclosed that:

We have a written agenda that is called *diversity and inclusiveness*. We say 'inclusiveness' as we value the inputs that our employees contribute. We really value diversity and the different ethnic groups and gender diversity among our employees. Being a multinational company, we must share values as differentiators.

Business leaders were also asked whether they see any difference in multicultural public relations in the country where they operate their business. They see that every country has a unique multiculturalism but they are all the same in terms of understanding cultural sensitivity, as there is diversity of major races such as Chinese and Indian being employed by global corporations and being located in both Western and Eastern worlds. There is a need for PR practitioners to understand the dominant religions such as Islam, Christianity and Hinduism that are practised all over the world. Importantly, global PR practitioners must play a substantial role in informing and advising top management about cultural issues in the country in which they want to invest. With great concern about cultural sensitivity with regard to taboos and superstitions, the Chinese believe that their life is influenced by numbers. The CEO of a service corporation disclosed that:

Being multi-national companies, you must understand any culture in this world. You must be sensitive with cultural issues. (For example), Alpha Romeo launches a car 164, but no '4' is very bad for Chinese (unlucky number). When this new product, a car was brought to Malaysia, China and Taiwan, Chinese won't buy. The sale didn't pick up. After the disaster happened, they changed the number to 'Alpha Romeo 166'. Look! how cultural sensitivity may affect your business. I think competent PR practitioners must consult with their CEOs and senior management teams about this matter. Because they are the one who should know about situational issues within an external environment. That's why PR becomes very important. CEOs don't like surprise. The small mistake may result in a big loss.

Concerning cultural sensitivity in the Muslim world with regard to food/meat production, the chairman of a leading conglomerate company stressed that ‘*Halal*<sup>2</sup> products are very important for Muslim world. We can also market it to non-Muslim as *Halal* (can be described as) a guarantee “certificate” of health. It is very hygiene indeed’. In this case, he wanted PR practitioners to have a holistic view, especially knowing the facts about the quality of products and services whose values can be shared among different ethnic groups.

In relation to cultural sensitivity in operating their business with respect to the terms/names they use for their products, the CEO of a top automotive corporation remarked that:

I think that most countries have multicultural issues. Understanding cultural sensitivity is quite important, otherwise, you may offence other parties. For example, when we launch *Proton Iswara* that is a Hindu term. (The term) ‘iswara’ also means butterfly. It has a great value to our Malaysian people. We also used to sell *Proton Saga* (the first edition). For Malaysian people, ‘saga’ is a type of fruit which is red and bright. But when we export our cars to Europe, we cannot use *Proton Saga* because ‘saga’ has bad connotation for European culture. Then, we used *Proton Persona*, because ‘persona’ is about impression or personality. We are always concerned about cultural diversity when doing business in a particular country. I think it is PR responsibility to do research and consult with us about this matter.

Cultural sensitivity is also considered in creating their company brand statement. As a company with a ‘human touch’, the senior general manager of a petroleum organisation emphasised that:

I see a human entity has a universal value. It cuts all culture or religious issues. Our brand statement essence: ‘Energy receive and energy return – aspiring people everywhere’. So, based on our brand statement, when we do business in other countries like Sudan or Europe, we always bound to this statement. As a national company, we are part of Malaysian society. We touch the heart of other people. So, it is a part of our responsibilities to protect our own heritage and culture. In Sudan, the main problems are education, health,

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<sup>2</sup> The meaning of ‘Halal’ is already described in Chapter 2 page: 39.



and hygiene. This country is left far behind. In Vietnam, it is about the same things. (Therefore), it is our role to inject the education and capacity building.

Six informants interviewed also voiced their concern about the lack of understanding about cultural sensitivity among Western expatriates, including PR expatriates, who operate their business in a multi-cultural country like Malaysia. Informants expected that a greater understanding about cultural diversity would be a key to relationship management between global corporations and their stakeholders all around the world.

The deputy chairman of a leading conglomerate organisation remarked that:

Many years ago, I was asked to attend some professional courses. It was held by London Worldwide almost every year. They have 300 senior officers from all over the world. But they wanted to do one managerial course over *Eid al-Fitr* (a major Islamic festival) dates. In Malaysia and the Middle East, we have been celebrating *Eid al-Fitr* for more than hundred years. I was upset because they didn't consider *Eid al-Fitr* celebration is very important for Muslim delegates. There were many senior officers from Malaysia, Jordan, Arab Saudi and Indonesia attended the courses as well. To me, they didn't really sensitive to others' cultures. Then, they realise that they should not have courses during religious celebration. Now it has been better and people are more aware of it.

From the point of view of business leaders, the importance of cultural diversity management is a crucial and significant part of global public relations practice.

## **7.2 In-depth Interviews with the Vice President of the IPRM**

Having discussed the perceptions of business leaders, PR practitioners and PR academics, it is worth noting the viewpoints of the vice president of the IPRM on the 'professional project' they have undertaken. There are several key topics that emerged from the in-depth interview: strategic plan; accreditation and licensing; benchmarking standards; international relations; continuous professional development; and training and qualification. Apart from the in-depth interview with the vice president, IPRM

documents were reviewed to gain a clear view of the professional project of the organisation.

As mentioned in the literature review (Chapter 3), a profession requires a theory of professional development system (Abbott, 1988). In order to develop the professionalisation of public relations, the PR professional body, the IPRM, must develop some form of accreditation, either voluntary accreditation or mandatory accreditation (see section 7.1.3). In discussing the form of accreditation that the professional association has developed, the vice president of the IPRM remarked that:

On 14 Feb 1999, we had a dialog. (We presented) 48 resolutions to the Ministry of Information. This dialog was facilitated by Prof. Syed Arabi Idid. The minister said that let us try (developing) voluntary accreditation for three years. My personal view is that we must have legislation. Looking at the market here, nobody cares about accreditation. We wanted to make this as mandatory accreditation. Under this dialog, the PRCAM (Public Relations Consultant's Association Malaysia) also agreed that we should go for voluntary accreditation but rejecting mandatory accreditation. But some unqualified PR practitioners are still around. They have a lack of competencies especially in communication skills.

The PR professional institute has developed voluntary accreditation eagerly but due to low awareness and the ignorance of PR practitioners, mandatory accreditation seems more desirable. The IPRM is very concerned about the core competencies that are still lacking among PR practitioners. The IPRM argued that public relations should be regulated and licensed according to the vision of Dato' Mohd Soviee, the first president of the IPRM in 1962. This would mean that every PR practitioner must register and get a license from the IPRM prior to practising public relations. If PR practitioners were registered, it might improve their credibility with clients. However, it seems that the PRCAM did not agree that public relations should be legally regulated. Voluntary accreditation was seen as acceptable as a starting point.

It is imperative to note that with great support from the Ministry of Information (MOI) and Raja Nazrin, the Regent of Perak, on 30 June 2004, the IPRM launched the first group of accredited PR practitioners, comprising 46 well-qualified and highly experienced PR professionals, based on voluntary accreditation (IPRM, 2005). In the UK, the ministry that championed the CIPR accreditation and chartered status is the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). However, in Malaysia, the Ministry of Information was approached to produce the first group of accredited PR practitioners and it was claimed that this would make significant progress toward achieving chartered status from the Privy Council. When asked the reason for locating accreditation with the Ministry of Information, the vice president of the association disclosed that:

The IPRM had approached the Ministry of Information because it is tradition. You must understand that since 1962, the IPRM was founded by a top leader of the Ministry of Information. The IPRM is operating based on a Malaysian model of public information. Personally, I think we should work with MITI but majority of council members have decided (that the IPRM must work with the MOI)

It seems that there is a lack of understanding about what public relations really is and which ministry should implement the accreditation process for the IPRM. It is vital for council members to understand that public relations is a part of strategic management and that stakeholder relations and reputation management are core areas of PR expertise. At the national and global level, the contribution of public relations is clearly described as a strategic internal and external function of an organisation in the public and private sectors. Therefore, it is more relevant for the IPRM to carry out the accreditation with the Ministry of International Trade and Industry rather than working with the Ministry of Information. Thus, it is essential to emphasise that

IPRM accreditation must be aligned with global standards if public relations is to become a 'true' profession.

Regarding the vision and strategic plan of the IPRM, it is the president's responsibility to decide what the organisation wants to achieve and where it is heading. According to the vice president of the IPRM, every president who has led the IPRM has produced strategic plan. Ironically, based on the documentation gathered, only one strategic plan was found, written by the current president (2003 – current). The IPRM's five-year strategic plan (*Kertas Bunga Raya*) presented several key objectives: becoming a stronger fraternity body; revamping the IPRM's outdated constitution; attaining legislation and Royal Charter status; organising a series of programmes and equipping PR practitioners with appropriate knowledge and skills.

In the light of international relations, the plan also described the IPRM as a member of the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management based in Canada. However, no significant project in collaboration with the GA has been carried out yet. The IPRM also becomes chair of the Federation of ASEAN Public Relations Organizations (FAPRO) in 2006. Strengthening global relations and networking with professional associations in Singapore, Jakarta and Italy was achieved between late 2003 and mid-2005 (16/12/03, 13/10/04, 17/7/04, 5/8/04 and 23/6/05). When asked whether the IPRM is following a global standard in developing their professional project for public relations, the vice president of the IPRM disclosed that:

Yes we did. We have been in touch with Colin Farrington from the UK and Jean Valin from the Global Alliance. We also work with professional institutes in India and Beijing. (We also work with) K. Bhavani from Singapore. Dr Kiran brought back the PRIA (Public Relations Institute of Australia)

accreditation for colleges. The UITM (University of Technology Mara) under Dr Kiran focused on communication competencies which have been spelled out in the PRSA and the IABC. We also look at the globalised trends in Brazil, Panama and Nigeria but it is hard to have a check and balance. Basically, I think we have followed global standard.

It can be concluded that there are few official documents to be found describing the strategic plan and international relations before 2003. Although the IPRM has shown their enthusiasm and perseverance in international relations, the strategic plan has been narrowly focused on event management, on awarding accreditation accolades and on polishing the image of the association through publicity/media per se. There is no current project of any significance to align their strategic plan with global benchmarking standards. There is a need to thoroughly review and analyse better benchmarking standards set by established PR professional associations such as the Chartered Institute of Public Relations, UK (CIPR) and the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA).

Having discussed the importance of meeting global benchmarking standards, it is important to highlight that there is a need to have accredited PR qualifications in collaboration with appointed universities and colleges. The vice president of the IPRM remarked that:

Rasila and I have done many accreditation programmes. We go to all universities and colleges in the Klang Valley – giving ‘talk’ about reviewing their syllabus and student internship. (We give) ‘talk’ about changing focus from purely academic (theories) to include practitioners’ inputs. Theories are foundations but practice makes you really PR professionals. There are also 35 pages-documents about accreditation. We have plan this strategically. Last October, we started with the UTAR (Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman) and then the UUM (Universiti Utara Malaysia). We have been working on (accreditation programmes) with public universities first. We’ve got a whole package. Most of them are cooperative.

Although the institute has actively promoted IPRM membership and accreditation to communication students by delivering guest lectures in many universities, there is no clear plan to develop an exclusive training school or an exclusive PR degree. However, the vice president of the institute made her preferences clear, that public relations should be housed in exclusive schools or business schools rather than in media schools.

According to the vice president of the IPRM, well-qualified PR practitioners should be equipped with several key capabilities such as general management, communication/journalistic skills, the analytical skills of management consultants and financial acumen. Today's PR practitioners require more than having journalistic knowledge and skills. The vice president agreed that possessing communication skills is very important for PR practitioners but it is arguable whether these skills have exclusivity because every manager in the field of management science (marketing, advertising, accounting, and finance) needs communication skills in performing their duties.

In defining the scope and limitation of public relations, she disclosed that reputation management and corporate branding are the main focus. Another key area of expertise in public relations is investor relations, which requires financial acumen to build relationships with investors. In addition, today's PR practitioners must also work together with a financial controller to produce annual reports for their public listed company. Thus, they must be well balanced in financial performance and corporate social responsibility, thus reflecting the overall business performance of the organisation to appeal to their existing and potential investors.

With regard to continuous professional development (CPD), the institute has arranged a series of training courses for PR practitioners, including fresh PR graduates from public and private universities. Although the vice president of the institute has appraised the talent and competencies of PR graduates from private colleges and universities, the institute is concerned about PR graduates from public universities who lack core competencies to suit the current PR market. Thus, IPRM members are required to attend training courses to gain cumulative points. The grading system has been developed to gauge the levels of competencies among PR practitioners. There are nine sets of core competencies set by the IPRM in order to earn their points. Through this system, the PR practitioners can increase their membership grades, such as associate member, member, and fellow. In addition, each grade of membership is defined by criteria based on the level of experience and qualification in public relations. The council member of the IPRM stressed that:

(There is) a *membership screening programme* to ensure the criteria are met. The criteria may include educational qualifications, working experience, understanding the professional code of ethics, professional characteristics, personal capabilities and other relevant skills.

Ironically, the current 'continuous professional development' that is offered by the institute has turned to typical training courses for the short term. There is less evidence describing whether the IPRM has systematically provided a rigorous continuous professional development scheme that really gauges the levels of competencies of their members. This current system is not aligned with global benchmarking standards, as it offers very general communication courses such as public speaking, presentation skills and suchlike.

In the light of training and qualifications, professional certificates and diplomas have been offered since 1971 but there has not been constant progress in offering these qualifications to the PR fraternity due to reasons such as a shortage of lecturers, low pass rates in examinations, and the stringent regulations of the Ministry of Education. In March 1971, the IPRM offered certificates which were known as the *Introductory Public Relations Programme* and in 1976, the institute started offering the *Intermediate Public Relations Programme*. Then, as a result of the success of the two programmes, in March 1981, the CAM/IPRM diploma course was offered in collaboration with the Communication, Advertising and Marketing Foundation (CAM Foundation). In 1990, the IPRM also offered certificates and a diploma in partnership with a number of private colleges such as the Institute of Business and Management Studies (IBMS) in Kuching, the Institute of Advertising, Communication and Training (IACT) in Petaling Jaya and Stamford College in Petaling Jaya and Kuala Lumpur (Idid, 2005: 80-83). When asked whether the IPRM has continuously offered professional certificates and diplomas in public relations to nurture the PR fraternity, the vice president of the IPRM replied that:

IPRM has offered these qualifications since 1970s, however, this institute has faced a serious issue when the Ministry of Education through National Accreditation Board (LAN) has stopped the IPRM offering any certificate and diploma in public relations as under new regulation, Education Act 2001, the IPRM was asked to choose to be an educational institution or a private company limited.

The vice president also disclosed the long-term strategies of the IPRM involving several ministries such as the Ministry of Information (MOI), the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), the Ministry of Human Resources (MOHR), the Ministry of Finance (MOF), and the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI). She noted that:



We have to approach MOHE to get an approval for our diploma courses. Then, we have to deal with MOHR because they could draw out the job scope of PR and offer the promotional career path to PR practitioners. So that, PR person is able to reach the rank at the highest order. Prof Hamdan Adnan will pursue this. Then, we will work with MOI because PR involves disseminating information to public. (We needed to) encourage dialogues and forums. Then, we have to work out with MOF about the importance of investor relations. There must be a regulatory body which governs the operating procedure within a company. Finally, we have to link our work with MITI. There must be an economic significance in PR function.

Indeed, although the IPRM has made significant progress toward achieving full accreditation and chartered status from the Privy Council, it has a long way to go to produce a solid record of achievement that is unique and distinctive universally and globally.

### **7.3 A Review of Organisational & Academic Documents**

Apart from conducting the in-depth interviews, the researcher also gathered, reviewed and analysed documents/written sources of data regarding the work of practitioners and academics. Arguments comparing the scholarship and practice of public relations are analysed in this section, and arguments are supported by the relevant PR literature. Reviewing the sources of data is important to re-evaluate what academic and professional informants say about their practice. DeSanto and Moss (2004) argued that:

If you ask a manager what he does, he will most likely tell you that he plans, organises, co-ordinates, and controls. Then, watch what he does. Don't be surprised if you can't relate what you see to these four words (2004: 179).

In order to analyse the differences in the conceptual frameworks of these two different worlds, academia and practice, it is important to identify what has been produced and

how academics and practitioners have managed their work professionally. Daymon and Holloway (2002) noted that:

Documents which have been produced by other people can be a rich source of supplementary or primary evidence in research, indicating the way an organisation or industry views its past and present actions, achievements and people (2002: 216).

Note that the sources were collected from the selected Malaysian corporations and the academic institutions in the Klang Valley, the same sites from which the in-depth interviews were completed. Thus, there were two types of sources/data analysed to identify the key dimensions of PR professionalism in Malaysia.

A. Academic Sources/Materials

1. Course outlines
2. Meeting minutes
3. Formal letters
4. Conference papers
5. Research papers in publication
6. Online information about the department offering the PR curriculum
7. Personal emails

B. Organisational Sources/Materials

1. Strategic planning and corporate communication policies
2. Key Performance Indicators (KPI)/targets
3. Online information about corporate offices and their PR activities
4. Annual reports - operations
5. Company newsletters

6. Brochures
7. Press releases
8. Formal letters
9. Meeting minutes
10. Personal emails

In terms of the accessibility of information from the selected organisations, the researcher decided to access the information identified as being about the organisations' involvement in public relations. However, it would be impossible to access and record all of the abovementioned information from all selected corporations and academic institutions, as some official documents are treated as highly confidential. Website materials, annual reports and company newsletters were the easiest to access, whilst business plans, Key Performance Indicators (KPI), and formal letters were the most difficult. It was also hard to contact the selected informants via email, as they still prefer to use conventional technology such as the telephone or facsimile. With regard to the detailed academic and corporate sources, identifying key dimensions of PR professionalism is important for achieving the purposes of this study.

Although the printed materials were collected between March and May 2004, limited data was gathered due to a poor response from the corporations studied. In early 2006, in a second attempt to seek more printed materials from the selected large corporations, many corporations studied were not fully cooperative in sharing their organisational documents for this research. Thus, the findings of this study are presented largely based on publicly available sources.

### **7.3.1 The Current Practice of Public Relations in Malaysian Corporations**

Based on evidence obtained from the commercial publications that were collected, in general, Malaysian corporations have eagerly promoted their organisations to become world-class with strong foundations of corporate governance, corporate ethics, strategic alliances and corporate reputation. In order to implement these goals, strong management teams in every division of an organisation, including public relations, are ideally needed. However, not much evidence was found noting a significant role of public relations or corporate communications at the managerial level. It was difficult to find a strategic plan or corporate communication policies in PR practitioners' work. Many were involved in technical functions such as publicity, media relations and editorial publication. Thus, this study found that there are two roles of PR practice: (a) best practice PR management, focusing on reputation management and corporate branding, and (b) common PR practice, focusing on publicity and media relations.

#### **(a) Best Practice Public Relations Management**

Only two large service corporations have clear strategic plans and modes of implementation that link to reputation management and corporate branding. These companies shared detailed documents about the structure and role of public relations in their corporations.

The structure and role of their corporate affairs is quite important. The first corporation asserted that their corporate affairs (CA) unit comprises nine key

functions: CA policy and planning; corporate brand; corporate communications; external relations; internal relations; media relations; 'motor sports'; gallery PETRONAS; and performing arts. The role of the CA units focuses on three key drivers of reputation management: providing brand positioning; projecting the PETRONAS brand and supporting global expansion; and projecting corporate identity and corporate social responsibility. The CA unit, acting as 'the key representative and flag bearer of PETRONAS', is responsible for positioning a strong brand presence and projecting a positive corporate image and also serving their key stakeholders by coordinating PR and corporate communications needs that are consistent across all PETRONAS operating units, subsidiaries and regional/overseas country offices. The CA unit indicated its major role as offering consultative and corporate advisory services in its working relationships with all regional/overseas offices to ensure consistency with their corporate philosophy and reputation management policies. The CA unit reports directly to the chairman of PETRONAS.

The second company highlighted their Key Performance Indicators (KPI), targets and corresponding activities being operated by their key business units. Corporate communications policy and strategy, crisis communications, corporate identity and image are central to the managerial functions of their corporate communications unit. It is clear that the corporate communications unit utilises strategic tools of public relations management such as stakeholder surveys, readership surveys, internal and external communication surveys, media perception surveys, and message development, group policy, guidelines and communication plans. Forman and Argenti (2005) asserted that there is a need for a division of corporate communications to use

strategic PR tools that are more complex such as primary stakeholder surveys, media content analysis, readership surveys and focus groups.

**(b) Common Public Relations Practice**

Surprisingly, many of the large corporations studied have no clear strategic plans or corporate communications policies in their practice. Specifically, some of the companies studied have 'soft' strategic plans not explicitly consistent with or linked to their organisational strategy development. Although they have developed the structure and role of corporate communications units, their main activities are event management and editorial publications. All of the programmes are based on the calendar of events highlighted in their work, focusing on launches, dinners, anniversaries, family days and other social activities, and editorial publications such as newsletters, bulletins, corporate brochures and related materials. Although social responsibility and community relations such as charity programmes are actively practised, many of their programmes are not clearly consistent with corporate management aspects such as corporate strategy. This role can be considered as polishing the image of corporations (representation/depiction) rather than managing organisational reputation. At the strategic implementation level, little or no strategic tools such as stakeholder surveys, media content analysis or other complex measurement analyses are used in their practice. Press releases, media conferences, and media clipping are typical PR tools used in their practice. However, some organisations asserted that managing website development is also part of their main responsibility. The corporate communications and/or corporate affairs units studied

report directly to top business executives such as CEO advisers, executive vice presidents, CEOs, or the Chairman.

### **7.3.2 Diversity of PR Terms**

Apart from highlighting the managerial and functional strategies of the corporations studied, generally, most Malaysian corporations did not use the term 'public relations' to describe their management divisions. Many corporations are more likely to give a new title to their communication department, such as 'corporate communications', 'corporate affairs', 'public affairs', 'communications' or 'information'. For example, due to the privatisation in early 1990s of Telekom Malaysia, the national telecommunication company, the organisation has re-named the 'department of public relations' the 'department of corporate affairs' to emphasise management effects: from a broader perspective, the department not only disseminates organisational information to publics, but is also involved in complex corporate communication functions such as handling crisis communication and projecting reputation management. However, some PR departments are housed in the marketing or administration division, as their work mainly involves publicity and administrative function alone.

In addition, Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), a national energy corporation, has used the term 'Corporate Relations' to describe the division of public relations. Arab Malaysian Development Berhad Group (AMDB) has the 'Division of Public Affairs' at the top management level. In Petroleum National Berhad (PETRONAS), there is the 'Division of Corporate Affairs' practising public relations management activities.

Under this division, there are several units, such as the 'External Relations Department' and the 'Media Relations & Information Department'. In the banking industry, the Bank Simpanan Nasional (BSN), a national bank, has the 'Division of Corporate Communications', which is divided into three departments: 'Internal Marketing Communications', 'Sponsorship and Media Relations', and 'Publication, Production and Multimedia'. All of these divisions probably play important roles in contributing to the organisation's strategic corporate communication functions in order to appeal to strategic constituencies in the rapidly changing business environment (Annual Report 2003 of AMDB; Annual Report 2003 of PETRONAS; Annual Report 2003 of BSN; Annual Report 2003 of TNB).

However, many of the top managers or heads of PR divisions practising in this field came from different educational and professional backgrounds, particularly business and management. According to the profile of the board of directors, there were two top directors of EON possessing educational and practical backgrounds in public relations: first, Maznah Abdul Jalil, who holds a bachelor's and master's degree in business administration (finance) and works as the Director of Corporate Affairs for Master-Carriage (Malaysia) Sdn Bhd; second, Wan Mat Wan Sulaiman, who possesses a bachelor's (honours) degree in economics from the University of Malaya and a Master of Public Affairs from the Southern Illinois University, America (Annual Report 2003 of EON).

Unsurprisingly, practising tactical activities like publicity, event management and media relations was still the major role of the corporate communications division. As mentioned in Chapter 5 (A Postal Questionnaire), public information and media



relations/publicity were among the top priority in their duties. Besides playing this tactical role, the division also undertook advanced public relations functions like projecting the corporate image and the identity of the organisation, following best practice and the highest standard of corporate governance, and building strategic alliances (relationship management). Some structural divisions of corporate communications performed both managerial and tactical roles, as Malaysian corporations have frequently had international relations with foreign corporations, particularly with all the countries in the Asian region. This may be due to the political stability and rapid economic development of this nation. Hence, Malaysia, a vigorous and wealthy country, can be considered one of the world's globalised countries (Sriramesh and Vercic, 2004).

Moreover, most corporations are very concerned about their strategic constituencies, such as customers, employees, communities and shareholders, in undertaking their business. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, focusing on stakeholders' demands is vital for the long-term success of corporations, as stakeholders have become more sophisticated (Kitchen & Schultz, 2001). Thus, Malaysian corporations suggest that stakeholders are nowadays more intelligent and sophisticated. Emphasising this concept is vital if Malaysian corporations are to develop relationship management between the organisation and the public rather than executing one-way propaganda or publicity. Tim Traverse-Healy (in Cutlip et al., 2000: 482) emphasised the role of public relations as a part of corporate social responsibility. He asserted that:

A company will see nothing unusual in being quizzed and in responding fully and quickly on matters such as, its employment record and practises; its environmental policies; the quality of its products; the safety of its products; and the effectiveness of their services. Discussion and debate will be encouraged, rather than feared; sought rather than avoided. One measure of a corporation's

social acceptance will be the professionalism of its two-way communications and the degree of genuine dialogue it encourages and entertains.

### **7.3.3 Rewarding Excellence**

Another underlying trend to which Malaysian corporations have paid much attention is the rewarding of excellence, as these rewards reflect on the performance of their corporations. Being respected and appreciated is important to boost the image of corporations. Thus, public relations plays a major role to ensure that corporations achieve the awards they desire to increase their credibility and professionalism in the corporate world. Specifically, it seems that many Malaysian corporations are determined to acquire accolades awarded by accredited institutions to demonstrate the high credibility and reliability of their organisation in managing their work professionally. Being accredited is quite important to enhance the corporate transparency of Malaysian corporations: as a result of this accreditation, corporations may attract more investors to invest in their corporations.

Surprisingly, the IPRM is not a completely ineffective association as described in the findings of the survey research. This exploratory study revealed that this association has successfully managed to accredit the excellent Malaysian corporations. For example, the Edaran Otomobil Nasional Berhad (EON), the national automotive corporation and Malaysia's leading company, was awarded the 'Most PR Savvy CEO' award, dedicated to the Managing Director, Tan Sri Adzmi Abdul Wahab, by the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM). In fact, this established corporation had won the overall coveted 'IPRM Crystal Award' and the 'IPRM Best Consumer Relations Practice Award'. Consequently, this effort is not only contributing to the

increased professionalism of this profession, but will also improve the competitiveness of this industry.

In terms of measuring the quality standards of management, many corporations were awarded MS ISO 9001:2000 certification by the Standards and Industrial Research Institute of Malaysia (SIRIM) and the United Kingdom Accreditation System (UKAS). Besides this, since 1993, the Arab Malaysian Development Berhad has been awarded more than 20 accolades<sup>3</sup>, such as the MAS Diamond Award, SIRIM Quality Scheme MS ISO 9001:2000, KLM Royal Dutch Appreciation, Certificate of Excellence and many more (Annual Report 2003 of EON; Annual Report 2003 of AMDB). The link between the quality management model (an excellence model) and public relations practice is fruitful for corporations, as quality management is considered a new, emerging function of public relations (Rensburg & Ferreira, 2004).

#### **7.3.4 The Importance of Corporate Social Responsibility**

Further to the discussion of the accreditation and appreciation of the Malaysian corporations, it is essential to note that most Malaysian corporations generously contribute to the community as a part of their corporate social responsibility functions. The areas of community activities that corporations have contributed to are charities, education, national sport, and youth development through sponsorship and community relations. A specialised department - the 'Sponsorship and Media

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<sup>3</sup> Diamond Award from Malaysia Airlines to Harpers Travel (a subsidiary of AMDB) for its outstanding sales achievements through 2001/2002. SIRIM Quality Scheme: recognition from SIRIM to AMDB Textile for successfully participating in the Quality Certification Scheme complying with MS ISO 9001:2000. KLM Royal Dutch Appreciation: a sincere appreciation from KLM Dutch Airlines to Harpers Travel for its valuable support through 2000. Certification of Excellence is awarded for the company successfully listing in Malaysia 1000 in the Malaysian Corporate Directory.

Relations Department' in the division of corporate communications, the National Savings Bank of Malaysia - was assigned to implement this harmonious effort. It seems that there is a need to balance the corporation's aspirations and community relations in order to create better relationship management, which is a pivotal role of public relations. Indeed, community relations should be at the heart of corporate social responsibility, an emerging function of public relations in today's changing business environment (Theaker, 2001; Ledingham & Bruning, 2001).

Besides discussing the community relations of organisations, it is worth noting the underlying role of public service organisations as new, emerging national corporations. Under the policy of privatisation initiated by the Government of Malaysia, one of the aspirations of national organisations has become the transformation of public service organisations into fully private corporations. One of the statements describing the new leadership of public services is as follows:

The President and a CEO of Kuala Lumpur-based Tenaga Nasional Berhad (TNB), explains how the company's vision has helped in its transformation from a nationalized electricity provider into one of Malaysia's foremost private corporations (Sukro, 2004).

Communicating the company's policy is the major role for the division of corporate communications, which organises dialogue and two-way communication with strategic publics, and should not disseminate the company's policy through one-way communication.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to improve the public services to be served efficiently and also to reduce bureaucracy. Thus, the newly created modern national corporations should play a dual-role: providing excellent public services and

becoming fairly competitive corporations. This new, innovative aspiration would enhance the harmonization of the Malaysian economy and importantly, the key success for Malaysian corporations is to secure the Malaysian spirit and values at the heart of their corporate governance, hence making them more distinctive and unique around the Asian region.

### **7.3.5 The Role of PR Agencies**

The harmonisation of the Malaysian PR industry also depends on the increasing number of PR expatriates who come to Malaysia from all over the world to practise public relations. Many run consultancy services offering a wide range of public relations services. One of them is Paddy Bowie, a fellow of the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, who runs her own consultancy as the Managing Director of Paddy Schubert Sdn Bhd, and who has contributed substantially to the PR industry for over 20 years. In addition, David Allan, a Scot, works as the Managing Director of GCI Malaysia, specialising in a new, innovative PR function, corporate branding, and has contributed to the PR economy in Malaysia (Economist Corporate Network, 2004; Sya, 2004). However, arising from the in-depth interviews, some interviewees argued that it is questionable whether PR expatriates deliver PR services based on local orientation, which requires sensitivity to local norms.

Furthermore, realising the huge opportunities in an Asian market and particularly in Malaysia, an increasing number of foreign PR agencies, such as Hill & Knowlton, GCI Malaysia and many more, are setting up their branches in Malaysia and playing a big role in fostering rapid economic development precisely by investing in the PR

industry (Annual Report 2002 & 2003 of WPP). Many PR agencies offer a wide range of public relations and corporate communication management activities, such as corporate image, corporate identity, corporate advertising, marketing communications, sales and many more, as practising public relations (PR media) alone is not enough to survive and grow in a complex business environment. However, the degree to which foreign PR agencies and expatriates are concerned about Malaysian cultural sensitivities and local norms may be questionable and may cause unresolved issues. Reddi (2004) argued that foreign PR agencies need to understand that developing strategic PR programmes need to be adapted to local cultural norms, as they will then work well for the agencies and also benefit the local community as a whole.

Further to the discussion of the practice of Malaysian public relations and its achievements, it is worth noting the status and development of public relations education, which has now become a growing discipline in Malaysia.

### **7.3.6 The Status and Development of Malaysian Public Relations Education**

In general, public relations education in Malaysia has long been established in the schools of media and communication of several established universities such as the National University of Malaysia (UKM), the University of Putra Malaysia (UPM), the University of Malaya (UM), and the University of Sciences Malaysia (USM). The PR curriculum has also been offered under the Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Mass Communication in the University of Technology Mara (UITM) (see Appendix:

Table A, B and C). However, some PR curricula offered by universities have not yet been updated based on global standards.

Unsurprisingly, since the 1960s, Malaysian PR education has been predominantly influenced by Western PR knowledge, and the same phenomenon can be observed in several other countries. In Brazil, for example, the PR curriculum was housed in schools of journalism but then changed to schools of communication due to the increasing notion of social communication (Molleda et al., 2003). In contrast, in Chile, public relations education was established in schools of journalism, but then changed to schools of public relations as well as being housed in professional institutes such as 'IPEVE' (Professional Teaching Institute) and the 'Instituto del Pacifico' and 'DUOC' (University Department for Farmers and Workers). This transition occurred because of the heightened awareness among PR academics and practitioners of the need to implement new legislation for this profession. Consequently, the school/institute may produce a substantial number of PR professionals who are ready to practise their knowledge and skills in the field of strategic organisational communication: however, it would not encourage them to become scholars who may considerably contribute to the body of PR knowledge (Ferrari, 2003).

Indeed, in early the 1990s there were a growing number of universities and colleges who offered the PR curriculum, including undergraduate and postgraduate courses in the Klang Valley, Malaysia (see Appendix: Table A, B, and C). Therefore, the public relations curriculum, as one of the most popular social sciences courses, is being offered by universities and colleges due to the increasing demands in the market.

The undergraduate syllabus has been purposely designed to equip students with administrative and vocational skills, including mastering tactical skills such as PR writing, PR techniques, publicity media and methods, PR campaigns and so forth; the postgraduate syllabus was ideally developed to provide students with managerial knowledge and skills, including mastering strategic planning, such as advanced public relations, the theories and practice of corporate communications, and many more subjects.

In this analysis, although universities have offered a master's degree in public relations and organisational communication, none of those universities or colleges can afford to offer a bachelor's degree in public relations. Instead, universities and colleges have offered a bachelor's degree in mass communication with specific focus on conventional public relations, as PR graduates need to be equipped with holistic knowledge of mass media and professional communication skills. However, no research has been done to study the effectiveness of this curriculum among PR students. To a certain extent, the US education system has been adopted for the local PR education, as many local PR scholars have graduated from US universities (Khattab, 2000).

As in some European countries where the public relations curriculum is also offered in business schools, in Malaysia, only private colleges, for example, the Olympia Business School and the Metropolitan College, offer the public relations curriculum in business schools (see Appendix: Table A and B). Khattab (2000) worried about the transition of the PR curriculum from the school of communication to the school of



business, arguing that this trend may result in a loss of status for the profession among PR academics and practitioners since the scope of public relations has become smaller, restricting the use of public relations theories. Ironically, to be a 'true' profession, it is arguable that public relations must be able to establish an exclusive school rather than be housed in schools of journalism or business.

Indeed, the time has come for Malaysian PR scholars to focus more on the integration of public relations and strategic management models. If public relations wants to survive and claim a higher professional status from society, local PR scholars should think 'out of the box' by integrating the public relations discipline with other social science disciplines, such as business management, psychology, philosophy, political science, and many more, to enrich the specialised knowledge of public relations and communication management. Indeed, PR scholars must not rely only on the old PR theories such as press agency and propaganda, as Cutlip et al. (2000) argued, as the classic notion of public relations only aimed to retain the supremacy of elite communities with regard to their political campaigns.

Importantly, the integration of public relations and strategic management, as well as the public sphere in the context of organisational development, is paramount if we are to expand the scope of public relations and challenge the changing business environment in the era of globalisation. Thus, public relations is a modern profession, referring to strategic communication management (White & Mazur, 1995) that benefits society as a whole. Indeed, White and Vercic (2001: 198-199) disclosed that current senior managers have not been prepared regarding the subject of 'business environment', as they were possibly educated in a 'traditional' MBA programme

which was less likely to include 'relationship management' subjects. Thus, updating the content of executive development programmes, with an emphasis on reputation management and corporate social responsibility, might encourage corporations to interact with the organisation's environment.

Moreover, numerous PR textbooks have been used for teaching and research in universities and colleges since the early 1960s. Most of these books were written and published by Western PR scholars, especially those from the USA and the United Kingdom: unfortunately, only 12 PR books have been published by local PR scholars. The most popular PR textbook used for teaching and research is 'Effective Public Relations' by Cutlip, Broom and Center, published in 2000 (see Appendix: Table E).

Little research has been carried out since the 1990s due to the shortage of PR scholars. Some research on public relations has been published in a number of academic publications edited and published by universities themselves (see Appendix: Table D). No evidence was found in this study that PR research has been published in journals of business and management. However, PR practitioners have published their articles in business publications such as in *Akauntan Nasional* (Abdullah, G. 2002). Khattab (2000) pointed out that there is an extreme shortage of scholars in this discipline, which is probably due to the best PR graduates preferring to venture their career in the professional world rather than becoming academics: the salary that is offered by corporations is perhaps much better than at universities.

Indeed, it seems that the future of public relations education depends very much on the research competencies and expertises of PR scholars, and on the progress of the

research projects they undertake. Universities and the government have always supported the development of this curriculum and placed importance on research development, including research funding (Idid, 2000), as a university's vision is to become a world-class university in order to prepare for the challenges of globalisation.

#### **7.4 Summary**

In this chapter, the findings of the study from the viewpoints of business leaders were extensive and comprehensive. These findings can be considered 'hard evidence' for a study on PR professionalism. Briefly, the researcher has presented a clear exclusive jurisdiction of public relations from the viewpoints of CEOs/senior directors, as discussed in section 7.1.1. It is concluded that public relations can be regulated through voluntary accreditation rather than imposing mandatory accreditation. Importantly, an emphasis on training and qualifications, specifically on the quality and precision of PR practice, is very much needed by the PR fraternity. The next chapter offers some conclusions and recommendations based on the findings of this study, as described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

## CHAPTER 8

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

#### 8.0 Introduction

The final chapter of this study discusses the overall findings of this thesis by summarising the whole picture of the status and standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia. The theoretical framework of the study is thoroughly discussed. The limitations of this study are also described. In addition, some recommendations are suggested to improve the standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia.

The purpose of this study has been to explore how the status and standards of public relations as a profession are perceived in Malaysia. The study is undertaken from several perspectives, focusing on the sociology of the profession, the issue of strategic management and the question of multiculturalism – as well as PR as communications. Here, it is appropriate to re-visit the objectives of this study:

#### Objective 1:

This study aims to determine the profile of public relations practitioners and the core functions of public relations in major Malaysian corporations.

### Objective 2:

This study also focuses on how (1) chief executive officers/senior directors, (2) PR practitioners, and (3) PR academics perceive the standards of professionalism within public relations management in Malaysia. Four dimensions of PR professionalism - (1) knowledge base and personal competencies, (2) research and education (an exclusive training school), (3) a code of ethics, and (4) accreditation and licensing - are developed as the theoretical framework of this study.

### Objective 3:

This study examines the role of the Malaysian public relations professional association, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, in improving the standards of PR professionalism in Malaysia.

### Objective 4:

This study investigates how multinational corporations are adapting their PR business strategy in the multicultural environment in Malaysia.

## **8.1 Revisiting the Theoretical Framework**

This study was designed to seek out a conceptual and theoretical framework of PR professionalism from multiple perspectives - the sociology of the profession, strategic management, and multiculturalism. Apart from studying public relations theories, core management concepts are applied to draw the framework of this study. Interestingly, this study also reflected on previous studies developed in USA, Europe and Asia to articulate international perspectives.

This study has adapted the four pillars of professional development initiated by Neal and Morgan (2000: 12, originally adapted from Wilensky, 1964: 142-146).

1. Profession must become a 'terminal' occupation (full time), which means that it is vital to define a clear exclusive jurisdiction of public relations.
2. There is a need to develop an exclusive training school (approved by a professional association).
3. Accreditation (registration) and licensing is vital for PR practitioners. Qualifying examinations should be offered to evaluate the level of a practitioner's competencies. Continuous Professional Development (CPD) should be mandatory for all members to expand their knowledge and skills. The profession is also seen as 'lifelong learning'.
4. Practising a code of ethics requires enforcement from a professional body. If guilty of unethical behaviour, members of a professional body should be penalised.

The use of the system theory of public relations initiated by Cutlip et al. (2000) and the core competency strategy developed by Mintzberg and Quinn (1996) helped this study to determine the different dimensions of PR professionalism.

The findings of this research disclosed that public relations has not yet become a profession because it has not met all of the criteria initiated by Neal & Morgan (2000). Although all of the respondents agreed on the importance of the four pillars of professional development, some of the business leaders and PR practitioners did not think that public relations should be legally regulated by imposing mandatory

accreditation. Importantly, it was perceived that setting global benchmarking standards for PR professionalism is an urgent necessity. In fact, performing complex and sophisticated technical and managerial tasks is a 'must have' capability for real PR professionals.

Indeed, the model of boundary-spanning initiated by Warnaby and Moss (in Kitchen, 1997) helped this study to determine the distinctive role of public relations in an organisation. In order to become 'professional', PR practitioners are required to play a distinctive role, one which is difficult for others to imitate. It is argued that the common practice of public relations does not have a distinctive role because people can practise this occupation without proper academic or professional training. The findings of this study indicated that public relations has been practised by non-professionals who actually act as event managers and press officers. Having knowledge of journalistic skills and managing events is not enough to become a PR professional. Today's PR professionals must be equipped with holistic knowledge of business acumen and environmental scanning, as described in Chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In order to be an accepted (and respected) profession, public relations should be viewed as a contemporary profession, and not as a traditional profession. Kultgen (1988) referred to two different professions: a learned profession such as medicine or law, which involves mastering highly technical skills, and a modern profession such as academia, accounting, or business, which not only involves mastering distinctive knowledge and skills but also upholding professional ethics. Cutlip et al. (2000: 174) emphasised that 'ethics without competence is meaningless; competence without ethics is directionless'. This study also showed that, apart from upholding a code of

ethics developed by PR professional associations, practising applied ethics is important for PR professionals to protect their profession. Those ethics can be applied by using self-regulation. Cutlip et al. (2000) argued that applied ethics, which are also known as upholding moral values, bring great honour from their publics, instead of enhancing the power of practitioners.

## **8.2 Review of the Findings**

This conclusion reviews the quantitative results (Phase 1) with regard to several key topics such as the profile of PR practitioners, the importance of current PR practice and the essence of the standards of PR professionalism. Further to this, the qualitative results of interviews with PR practitioners and academics (Phase 2) explored the importance of the standard of PR professionalism to the same topics raised by the quantitative analysis. Importantly, the qualitative results of interviews with business leaders (Phase 3) revealed how the professionalisation of public relations could be accomplished in relation to the four identified dimensions.

While the quantitative results provided a snapshot of the PR industry in Malaysia from the practitioners' viewpoint, the qualitative results disclosed various perceptions, needs, expectations and aspirations from different groups in the PR industry – business leaders, PR practitioners, and PR academics. Both quantitative and qualitative research methods attempted to answer the question of whether public relations is a 'true' profession like medicine, law and accountancy. The definition of 'profession' was established in relation to sociological studies of profession, as outlined in the literature review and section 8.1 (pp. 320).



Based on the quantitative and qualitative results of this study, it is concluded that public relations is a fast growing and modern management discipline but has not yet become a 'true' profession like medicine, law and accountancy. Not surprisingly, public relations has been highly valued and recognised at the corporate level, as today's corporations must be able to interact with various internal and external stakeholders. PR roles and responsibilities assist in these interactions. There are growing needs and demands in public relations especially for service corporations in a complex and competitive business environment. However, the talents and competencies of current PR practitioners are still expected to be at a low level. Current PR practice (with regard to performance and the tools used) is neither complex nor sophisticated. This finding supports a study by Van der Jagt (2005: 182) arguing that CEOs of the large Dutch corporations were not impressed with the quality and competency of PR practitioners in Amsterdam.

The serious issue of the talents and competencies among the current PR practitioners studied raises the critical question of whether public relations needs to be regulated. The findings of this study revealed that accreditation (registration) would be a very important requirement in the professionalisation of PR practice. This accreditation should be based on a voluntary rather than an imposed mandatory system (more detail about this issue is discussed in section 8.3). There is a need to develop a universal professional body in public relations to regulate and serve the PR fraternity. The main focus should be on providing technical and managerial knowledge and skills that are more complex and more sophisticated.

In the light of the exclusive jurisdiction of public relations, public relations is seen as an exclusive strategic external function of organisations, which is in line with other management science disciplines such as marketing, human resources, finance and suchlike. In the overall organisational system, public relations is integrated with other management disciplines, especially marketing, and these have a strategic external function to grab opportunities in the marketplace and harness the core business of organisations. Public relations also plays a major role in safeguarding and sustaining the organisational reputation and image in a strategic way for the long term. The results of this study confirmed that for business leaders, the core functions and responsibilities of public relations are stakeholder relations, reputation management, corporate branding, corporate social responsibility and community relations.

As described in Chapter 7, public relations is also involved in ‘situational reasoning’ – analysing and solving different issues affecting the company image. This role delivers long-term benefits through safeguarding the organisational reputation and image. This flexibility makes public relations more exclusive and different from other management functions such as marketing or advertising, as both these disciplines focus on immediate benefits in their practice.

Because of the main responsibilities of public relations, it is ranked at the top of the agenda of organisational strategy development. At the corporate level, *consultative and corporate advisory services* are key functions of public relations. Some business leaders expected that PR professionals would be able to influence the thinking and judgement of CEOs about how to communicate corporate policies strategically to their internal and external stakeholders. Thus, real PR professionals become ‘the key

representative and flag bearer of corporations' in their critical mission to safeguard and sustain the organisational reputation.

Concerning the quality of the competencies of PR practitioners, nurturing PR professionals is vital to meet the growing needs and demands of the PR industry, which requires the establishment of an exclusive qualification and training school. Although experience and exposure to this field are considered very important criteria, possessing the right academic and professional qualifications as a knowledge base is what will enable practitioners to practice the profession professionally. It is understood that public relations delivers intangible results to corporations, but some business leaders expected that PR professionals must nevertheless be trained using distinctive and formal measurement techniques such as key performance indicators, return on investment, and suchlike. The intangible will need to be measured.

Importantly, adhering to a code of ethics is very, very important to PR professionals. Although many corporations have their own code of ethics that is practised by all employees including PR practitioners, practising an exclusive code of ethics set by a professional body is seen as being vital to gain professional credibility. PR practitioners must protect the public interest. However, litigation can only be accomplished if PR practitioners become members of the professional body. Indeed, managing trust, transparency and good governance are among the most difficult things for every organisation to gain credibility from their stakeholders. Thus, PR professionals acting as corporate guardians must protect and sustain the reputation of organisations.

### **8.3 The Institute of Public Relations Malaysia: Status and Challenges**

It seems that the professional body is responsible for developing 'the professional project' in setting the highest standards of professionalism. The results of this study disclosed that the national PR professional body, the IPRM, has played an ineffective role in setting the standards for PR professionalism. It seems that the main agenda of the institute has been the licensing and legislation of public relations but professionalisation has not materialised for a number of reasons. First, there is no clear scope for, or limitation of, public relations set by the institute. Second, there is no exclusive qualification and training school accredited by the institute. Third, there is low awareness and understanding among the PR fraternity about the need for an exclusive code of ethics which could be set by the institute. In addition, the institute itself has faced serious internal problems, such as low resources and budgets, a shortage of workforce, and internal politicking among council members.

It is claimed that under the old leadership of the IPRM, this institute focused on rhetorical approaches only, attracted little support from private corporations, and insufficiently developed its international contacts and partnerships. According to Idid (in Sriramesh, 2004), it has been claimed that the IPRM successfully recruited PR practitioners from the public sector, principally because those at senior levels of government have strongly supported this association. However, this positive perception has not yet been developed in the private sector. Due to the negative perceptions of PR practitioners from the private sector towards this association, the IPRM has had difficulties attracting these PR practitioners. Notably, they have not been impressed by the privileges of membership awarded by this association.

Therefore, although attaining chartered status for public relations is seen as desirable among the PR fraternity and some of their clients (business leaders), it is too early to impose legislation to solve the critical issues of the professionalism of public relations. Instead, the main focus of the IPRM's role and responsibilities must be: strategic plans; universal accreditation (registration); benchmarking standards; international relations; continuous professional development schemes; membership benefits; and training and qualifications. All of these elements must be aligned with the structures and contents of global standards offered by other established professional bodies from all over the world. In other words, PR professionals who work in Malaysia must have the standardised capability and expertise required by other established professional bodies in the Western and Eastern worlds. If these criteria are met, public relations can become a 'terminal' occupation for the PR fraternity. Then, the legislation of public relations under mandatory accreditation can possibly be implemented.

#### **8.4 The Status of PR Professionalism and Education**

The Malaysian PR industry has been improved only slightly in this decade and has a bright future. In the future, the improvement of this industry will largely depend on the core competencies PR practitioners and scholars possess to increase their professionalism. The findings of this study (as described in the postal survey, Chapter 5) indicated that generally Malaysian PR practitioners are well educated and professional in planning and executing their tasks in departments of public relations or communications, where they operate largely at the strategic technical level. As

described in Chapter 5, some have also practised public relations partly at the managerial level, where gaining knowledge of strategic communication management should be prioritised (see White & Mazur, 1995: 4-5).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the way corporations carry out their business has changed. Corporations have come particularly to value public opinion, compared to the last few decades. This trend requires two-way communication (counsel management) rather than one-way communication (publicity). In addition, the role of PR practitioners has also changed from handling publicity in the production line to being involved in policy making in the dominant coalition within an organisation. These changing trends need to be understood by PR practitioners and academics. Thus, the changing role of public relations has become important to build a favourable relationship between an organisation and its public. However, the challenge depends on higher educational preparation developed by a university and continuing education organised by a PR professional body. This study has shown that the distinctive knowledge and skills demanded by the Malaysian PR industry do not match the PR curriculum offered by local universities and the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia.

It is worth noting that possessing professional privileges rather than having a high salary alone is an imperative. Cutlip et al. (2000) argued that rewarding practitioners is not only about having a great deal of remuneration. Importantly, practitioners should master appropriate knowledge and skills to gain such professional privileges. Evidence from the questionnaire survey revealed that most PR practitioners now enjoy high salaries and other rewards, but evidence from interviews showed that they are not yet entirely respected and recognised by society as professionals. To be so

recognised, PR practitioners should possess not only distinctive knowledge focusing on managerial competency, but also personal competencies such as leadership and charisma. Having this knowledge and these personal competencies, PR professionals will be able to play a pivotal role, along with other top managers, in the dominant coalition of an organisation (DeSanto & Moss, 2004). In addition, Cutlip et al. (2000: 59) noted that 'public relations people, if they are to be truly respected by management colleagues, must merit "a seat at the management table" (as the public relations strategist)'.

The result of this study (as described in the qualitative analysis) argued that the Malaysian public relations industry has faced a crisis because there are a considerable number of non-qualified PR practitioners who, while practising public relations, may jeopardise the image of this profession. In fact, focusing too much on media relations and publicity, which are now becoming the top PR functions, may not enhance PR professionalism. PR practitioners should be capable of practising counsel management (Grunig & Grunig, 2003) as one of the higher PR functions within the dominant coalition of organisations. Similar findings have also hampered the US PR industry. Grunig and Grunig (2003) argued that although US PR practitioners are well educated, they still practise one-way communication (such as press agency and propaganda) at the technical level. Additionally, ethics and social responsibility are not being fully upheld in their practice. Therefore, there is a need to propose a new way of thinking concerning PR professionalism among Malaysian PR academics and practitioners based on research development especially focusing on global PR scenarios.

In relation to the capabilities of PR scholars in Malaysia, this study showed that Malaysian PR scholarship is still far from excellent in educating and researching theories of public relations. Although some Malaysian PR scholars have articulated the need to develop a serious body of PR knowledge, there is little evidence of new theories or of research on public relations and communication management in public relations practice in Malaysia. There is no clear evidence on which to develop new thinking in public relations in Malaysia. Somewhat regressively, some Malaysian PR scholars are still articulating the same PR or communication theories to describe even current public relations practice (with regard to press agency or publicity). One of the possible reasons is the extreme shortage of PR academics in this field. Each local university may have only one or two PR scholars<sup>1</sup>, and many of these perceive public relations as part of media studies. This shortcoming is one of the reasons for the serious need for a global standard to be adapted to Malaysian public relations education, which would be in line with the aspirations of universities to achieve world-class status in the future.

Indeed, it is arguable here whether PR scholars are always aware of the transition of public relations from media studies/communications to strategic communication management. It is understood that journalists need to possess a wide range of knowledge of the media and cultural studies because they may serve media or broadcasting companies. Unlike journalists, PR practitioners working for various Malaysian corporations or institutions such as banks, airline companies, computer companies, central government bodies, ministries and many related organisations need to master not only journalistic skills but are also required to possess a wide range

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<sup>1</sup> For example, an active Malaysian PR scholar, Associate Professor Umi Malika Al Khattab, who has moved to Australia and is now teaching at the University of Melbourne, Australia.



of holistic knowledge and skills such as reputation management, strategy development, corporate strategies, corporate marketing communication, and financial communication. These arguments are based on the evidence in this thesis from the questionnaire survey and the in-depth interviews.

The findings of this study indicate that the PR curriculum has not been updated to meet the essential requirements of corporate employers in Malaysia. Thus, the PR curriculum needs to be revamped in order to equip PR practitioners with the specific knowledge and skills required. In addition, media schools which offer the PR curriculum should develop more collaboration with schools of business and economics in providing knowledge of business management. Therefore, a Bachelor of Public Relations and Communication Management degree should be introduced for future PR students, rather than merely allowing the Bachelor of Mass Communication students to major in public relations.

Specifically, the findings of this study support the study by Leuven (1999) noting the importance of four conceptual pillars of knowledge for the undergraduate PR curriculum: Grunig's two way symmetrical communication; integrated marketing communication; organisational communication and communication technologies; and core management concepts such as organisational structure, strategic planning, leadership, management styles and decision-making skills. It is important to note that this wide range of knowledge and skills and, additionally, diversity management would enable a Malaysian university to offer an accredited bachelor's degree in Public Relations and Communication Management.

## 8.5 The Importance of Cultural Diversity

The last objective of this study was to establish whether cultural diversity has a significant effect on practising PR business strategy in a multicultural environment. The results of this study disclosed that in the global picture, where public relations is practised by various ethnic groups from Eastern and Western worlds, cultural sensitivity is central to good PR practice. Cultural diversity should not be seen as a barrier to business performance but should be recognised as an opportunity for organisations to develop better relationships with their stakeholders. As mentioned earlier, the role and functions of public relations have a strategic external function, and mastering knowledge of cultural diversity opens a new window of expertise for PR practitioners. Thus, PR practitioners act as cultural exporters and should be able to adapt their work to different structures of environments, which would definitely add value to the expertise of PR practitioners.

Specifically, as described in the survey research in this thesis, almost all business leaders, PR practitioners and academics noted the importance of Malaysian organisational cultures and local norms in their practice. They all also agreed that mastering English as a global language of commerce is an essential skill for competent PR practitioners, but they did not deny that the Malay language needs to be used to maintain the identity of Malaysia. Indeed, Malaysian PR practitioners and PR expatriates should be more sensitive to the local norms and organisational cultures in order to yield a favourable relationship between an organisation and its environment. In a multicultural country, understanding diversity management and cultural values may increase the productivity of an organisation and also create harmonization

between an organisation and the local society, especially in Malaysia among the three main races, Malay, Chinese and Indian.

Indeed, cultural diversity here is seen as a universal concept, as every country has different religious and tribal groups. Public relations has been practised according to various ethnic groups with different religions and tribes. Thus, building mutual relationships between organisations and external stakeholders requires an understanding of cultural differences to reduce any complexities that may affect business performance.

## **8.6 Limitations of This Study**

It is worth discussing the problems or issues encountered during the development of this study. Some important issues that may have hindered the process and development of this study are:

1. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Malaysia is a constitutional monarchy ruled by a head of state (Singh, 2001). Thus, there are stringent regulations set by the government for national and foreign corporations running their businesses in Malaysia. This might be one of the possible reasons why some corporations are not willing to publicise their current activities or share their experiences for this research.
2. There are limited numbers of local PR research papers regarding the role and professionalism of this field. In Malaysia, public relations is seen as a sub-

discipline of mass communications. Malaysian mass communications scholars consider that people studying journalism may also understand the role and development of public relations. They see the core functions of public relations as media relations and publicity per se.

3. There are shortages of PR scholars in this field. Idid (2004) asserted that there are only 20 PR academics who possess at least a master's degree teaching public relations at local universities such as the University of Science Malaysia (Penang), University of Technology Mara, National University of Malaysia, University Putra Malaysia, University of Malaya and the International Islamic University Malaysia. Only four of them hold PhDs. Many are not involved in research development, because, for instance, they suffer from heavy teaching workloads.
4. The diversity of job titles for public relations personnel may have confused PR practitioners who were supposed to answer the questionnaire survey. It is difficult to differentiate between real PR practitioners and events managers. However, the researcher sent the questionnaires to the department of public relations or corporate communications which has responsibility for managing PR functions.
5. Due to the sensitivity of the Malaysian organisational culture and political issues, respondents often refused to thoroughly criticise the effectiveness of the role of the Malaysian PR professional bodies, especially the IPRM and its education policies.

6. In relation to the sampling context, no PR directory is produced by any research association, which may have hindered contacting the appropriate population for this study, as public relations departments do not exist in some major corporations (for example, manufacturing companies). As described in the statistical results, public relations has been mainly practised by major corporations with an orientation towards consumer products or services. Under certain circumstances, it is predictable that the PR function is combined with the marketing department because some organisations have departments of marketing communication which include PR functions in their practice.

## **8.7 Outline Recommendations**

There are three sets of recommendations drawn from the findings of this study to advance the survival and growth of the public relations industry in the new global economy:

- 1) Recommendations for public relations practice
- 2) Recommendations for the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia
- 3) Recommendations for CEOs and chairmen

### **8.7.1 Recommendations for Public Relations Practice**

1. PR practitioners and academics should be more dynamic and proactive to enhance their professionalism. An annual meeting, seminar or conference for

both parties needs to be held to discuss the industry's issues, especially in the interest of bridging theory and practice.

2. PR practitioners must see public relations as a 'terminal' occupation where their career progression is monitored by a PR professional body. They must have a clear view of the knowledge and skills required prior to practising public relations.
3. PR practitioners, regardless of their rank or status in the organisation, should undergo training and qualification under the continuous professional development scheme set by a PR professional body or continuing education offered by a university. Knowledge sharing among the PR fraternity should be greatly encouraged. It is believed that training and qualification can add value to enhance reputation and produce a solid record of achievement in this field.
4. It is crucial for PR practitioners to become members of a PR professional association that fights for the real PR fraternity. Members must adhere to an exclusive code of ethics set by the institute, which could increase both professional credentials and morality among the PR fraternity.
5. Importantly, as mentioned earlier, public relations is highly valued by the majority of business leaders studied. Consultative and corporate advisory services should be key managerial tasks for PR professionals and are key drivers in improving an organisation to become a 'listening organisation'.

6. In respecting cultural diversity, understanding cultural differences is vital for diverse PR practitioners. There is a need to develop a cultural diversity policy and case studies describing how multicultural issues may affect PR business strategy and organisational strategy development. In respect of the richness of multiculturalism in a multicultural country such as Malaysia, there is great scope for Western and Asian companies to learn from each other.

### **8.7.2 Recommendations for the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia**

1. The IPRM should become an independent professional body with a unique mission and vision, and not merely a non-governmental organisation. This association needs to totally revamp its policy development and guidelines based on global benchmarking standards. The organisation should be organised by senior PR practitioners and academics. The meaning of 'senior' refers to someone who is well educated and has made considerable contributions to the body of PR knowledge, not just selected from among highly experienced people.
2. There is a need to develop an exclusive training school and a degree in public relations which comprises key elements such as stakeholder relations, reputation management, corporate branding, corporate social responsibility and community relations. Formal measurement techniques that are more complex and sophisticated should be included in the PR curriculum. Then, the IPRM, in collaboration with the public and private universities, should accredit the revised PR curriculum that is being taught at various local

universities. This study suggests that the accreditation can be given to the undergraduate and postgraduate curricula. Importantly, accreditation needs to be applied to people who have a bachelor's and/or master's degree and/or at least five years' working experience in this field and/or have demonstrably made solid contributions to the PR industry. Further to awarding accreditation to undergraduate and/or postgraduate courses, the curriculum needs to be reviewed and strengthened with additional coherent managerial competency courses, such as strategic thinking, strategic planning, corporate strategies, strategic political communication and other such appropriate courses, which would widen the critical skills necessary to heighten the standards of the profession.

3. The institute should manage a special forum for CEOs and chairmen to discuss corporate issues concerning mergers, stakeholder relations, reputation management, and corporate social responsibility. Through this forum, huge opportunities would be provided for PR practitioners to understand their responsibility to serve their 'bosses' or clients.
4. The institute should provide additional research funding to advance public relations knowledge. Moreover, a series of applied research projects regarding the current practice of public relations and its future direction needs to be conducted scientifically, focusing on the required core expertise of public relations such as stakeholder relations, reputation management, corporate branding, corporate social responsibility and community relations.



5. The institute should also develop better Continuous Professional Development (CPD) schemes for junior and senior PR practitioners, not typical training courses. Although a grading system is currently practised to gauge the level of competencies, the structure and content of CPD schemes need to be improved and aligned with global standards.
6. The IPRM should vigorously promote the benefits of membership to potential members. New strategic campaigns need to be planned and implemented. The study showed that 78.1% of respondents have not yet joined a professional association.
7. The IPRM should also improve their services regarding career development for current and potential PR practitioners. The study indicated that 51.5% of respondents wanted to change their career, whilst 48.5% of respondents wished to stay. Job opportunities should be advertised on the website of the IPRM. Additionally, this institute should recommend internships for PR students. Thus, PR graduates would benefit from these services.

### **8.7.3 Recommendations for CEOs and Chairmen**

1. Reputation management makes an organisation more visible and transparent to its internal and external stakeholders. Organisational reputation must be aligned with corporate strategy and the core business the company operates. There is a strong link between organisational reputation and the character and personality of the CEO. Corporate communication directors, who act as

corporate guardians, need to project the profile of CEOs and chairmen to be seen by their stakeholders. The appearance of CEOs and chairmen to their stakeholders may influence new and existing investors to invest in what they perceive to be a reputable organisation, which may result in better business performance. This finding is supported by Hill & Knowlton's annual global survey, which argues that: 'CEO reputation and management team is the most important driver to improve corporate reputation in the marketplace' (Hill & Knowlton, 2004: 8).

2. Every organisation must interact with their stakeholders. CEOs and chairmen need to act beyond being 'rubber stamp' managers. There is an urgent need for CEOs and chairmen to actively participate and engage their business with its various stakeholders, especially external stakeholders such as critics, pressure groups, local councils, NGOs and the community. In relation to stakeholder relations, corporate communication directors will play a major role in strategic planning and implementation to build favourable relationships with their stakeholders.
3. The concept of 'license to operate' implies total commitment from CEOs and chairmen to operate their business responsibly. This study found that corporate social responsibility and community relations must be one of the top agendas in the boardroom. Corporate communication directors, who act as boundary spanners, help CEOs and chairmen to shape good corporate philanthropy and make their organisations act as responsible corporate citizens.

4. Having discussed the importance of communication to organisational strategy development, CEOs and chairmen need to support a PR professional body to attain the highest standards of PR professionalism. Producing well-qualified PR practitioners with a strong, solid record of achievement is an ultimate goal of a PR professional institute. Participating personally in a forum for CEOs set up by the institute, encouraging their corporate communication directors to participate actively in institute programmes, and sponsoring the institute's research projects should be greatly encouraged.

## **8.8 Directions for Future Research**

At the national level, it is important to note that future research into PR professionalism should be extended to a large-scale survey incorporating all 13 states in Malaysia, as this study only reflected on experiences in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. A similar study with some modifications should be conducted regularly every year so comparisons can be made to ascertain how effective the IPRM has been and reflect more thoroughly on the practice of public relations in the light of PR professionalism in Malaysia.

With regard to international relations, this study should also be extended to other countries in the region such as Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines and Brunei, to ensure their standards of PR professionalism from a real strategic management perspective.

Globally, a comparative study should be conducted to develop better global benchmarking standards concerning PR professionalisation in terms of setting a universal professional project, including: strategic plans; accreditation and licensing; international relations; continuous professional development schemes; a code of ethics; membership benefits; and training and qualification between Eastern (e.g. Malaysia, China and India) and Western worlds (e.g. the United Kingdom and the United States).

## **8.9 Conclusion and Contributions to the Body of PR Knowledge**

This thesis is among the first to study the views of CEOs/senior directors, PR practitioners and PR academics on the standards of PR professionalism drawing from multiple perspectives – the sociology of the profession, strategic management, and multiculturalism. Many studies (as described in Chapter 3) on the standard of PR professionalism have been produced based only on the viewpoints of practitioners and academics.

This thesis contributes to the understanding of how public relations should become a ‘true’ profession based on the four pillars of professional development described. However, none of these pillars have yet been achieved. A lack of talent and competency among PR practitioners in the public and private sectors is considered one of the most critical issues. Unsurprisingly, Neal and Morgan (2000: 15), in their study ‘The Professionalisation of Everyone?’, did not include public relations in the 19 professions (see Appendix: Table 1 & 2) listed from the highest (lawyers –

compliance: 100%) to the lowest rank (chartered insurance brokers – compliance: 28%).

This thesis also disclosed that forming an independent professional association for public relations is vital, provided that it follows global standards in terms of several key elements of the professional project: strategic plans; universal accreditation (registration); global benchmarking standards; international relations; continuous professional development; a code of ethics; membership benefits; and training and qualification. It is arguable whether, even if all/the majority of PR professional associations in the world developed and practised global standards of professionalism under ‘one profession and one voice’, as quoted by the Global Alliance for Public Relations and Communication Management (Global Alliance, 2006: 1), public relations would be recognised as a profession.

In order to realise this vision, developing the universal body of PR knowledge is the top priority towards the professionalisation of this field. Once this body is developed and the role of the IPRM has been improved, public relations would be able to claim a Royal Charter from the Privy Council of Malaysia. Competent PR practitioners need to be accredited to differentiate between real PR practitioners and the non-qualified practitioners who are practising in Malaysia. However, some business leaders think that attaining a Royal Charter is just a starting point for a public relations profession and not necessarily the highest standard of PR professionalism. Thus, it will be a long process to nurture real PR professionals and especially to enhance levels of competencies among the PR fraternity.

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## **APPENDICES**

Table 1. *The process of professionalization in the United Kingdom*

Profession	Full-time	Articles	Nat. assoc.	Exams	Charter	Academic	CPD	Educatn.	Self-reg.	No. of deviations		Compliance (%)	
										Tbtal	excl. CPD	Tbtal	Excl. CPD
1. Chartered accountant	19th c.	Yes	1870	1872	1880	1902	1978	Yes	Yes	0	0	100	100
2. Chartered surveyor	18th c.	Yes	1868	1881	1881	1904	1981	Yes	Yes	0	0	100	100
3. Veterinary surgeon	Early 19th c.	Yes	1844	1844	1844	1903	None	Yes	Yes	1	0	89	100
4. Chartered patent agent	Early 19th c.	Yes	1882	1889	1891	1985	None	Yes	Yes	1	0	89	100
5. Solicitor	Middle ages	Yes	1825	1846	1831	1877	1985	Yes	Yes	0.5	0.5	94	94
6. Surgeon	Middle ages	Yes	1800	1800	1800	1884	None	Yes	Largely	1.5	0.5	83	94
7. Dispensing pharmacist	Late 18th c.	Yes	1841	1848	1843	1926	None	Yes	Largely	1.5	0.5	83	94
8. Chartered physiotherapist	Late 19th c.	No	1894	1895	1920	1976	None	Yes	Yes	2	1	78	88
9. Dentist	Early 19th c.	Yes	1856	1858	None	1901	Non	Yes <sup>a</sup>	Yes <sup>a</sup>	2	1	78	88
10. Barrister	13th/14th c.	Yes	13th/14th c.	1872	None	1872	1996	Yes	Yes	1	1	89	88
11. Chartered structural engineer	Early 19th c.	No	1908	1920	1934	1969	1996	Yes	Yes	1	1	89	88
12. Chartered actuary	Early 19th c.	No	1848	1850	1848	1972	1986	Yes	Yes	2	1	89	88
13. Chartered naval architect	Mid-19th c.	Yes	1860	1947	1910	1970	None	Yes	Yes	2	1	78	88
14. Optometrist	Mid-19th c.	Yes	1895	1896	1995	1967	None	Yes	Partly	2.5	1.5	72	81
15. Chartered town planner	Early 20th c.	No	1914	1920	1976	1932	1992	Yes	Yes	2	2	78	75
16. General practitioner	Middle ages	Yes	1832	1858	1972	Middle ages	1989	Partly	Partly	1	2	78	75
17. Chartered psychologist	Late 19th c.	No	1901	1950s	1965	1901	None	Yes	Yes	3	2	67	75
18. Chartered insurance practitioner	19th c.	No	1897	1899	1912	None	1995	Yes	Largely	2	2.5	78	69
19. Chartered architect	17th c.	Yes	1834	1882	1837	1902	1993	Partly	No	2.5	2.5	72	69
Averages										1.5	1.1	83.4	87.1

MARK NEAL AND JOHN MORGAN

<sup>a</sup>Until 1956.

The explanations of the column-heading abbreviations are as follows: 'Full-time': date became a full-time occupation; 'Articles': date articles system originally used; 'Nat. assoc.': date national professional association formed; 'Exams': date professional exams became mandatory; 'Charter': date Royal Charter granted; 'Academic': date academic route introduced; 'CPD': date CPD became mandatory; 'Educatn.': date professional association became responsible for education; 'Self-reg.': date the profession became self-regulating.

Table 2.

Profession	Full-time	License	Degree	Prof. assoc.	Chambers	Educate.n.?	Stage-reg.?	No. of deviations	Compliance (%)
1. Lawyer	Middle ages	Middle ages	Middle ages	1871	1875	Yes	Yes	0	100
2. General practitioner	Middle ages	Middle ages	Middle ages	1872	1935/1955	Yes	Yes	0	100
3. Surgeon	Middle ages	Middle ages	1726	1872	1970	Yes	Yes	0	100
4. Architect	Mid-19th c.	1831	1879	1903	1933/1969	Yes	Yes	0	100
5. Veterinary surgeon	Late 18th c.	1811	1830	1841	1936/1965	Yes	Yes	0	100
6. Dispensing pharmacist	Middle ages	Middle ages	1808	1872	1933/1960	Yes	Yes	1	86
7. Land surveyor	Early 18th c.	1704	1803	1871	1938 <sup>a</sup>	Yes	Yes	1	86
8. Auditor	Late 19th c.	1863/1900	1900 <sup>b</sup>	1896	1943/1961	Yes	Yes	0.5	86
9. Dentist	Early 19th c.	1825	1889	1859	1933/1952	Yes	Yes	1	86
10. Patent lawyer	Late 19th c.	None	1933	1880	1933/1952	Yes	Yes	1	86
11. Building engineer	19th c.	1831	1879	1871	1965/1987	Yes	Yes	1	86
12. Tax adviser	1920s	1937	1961 <sup>b</sup>	1922	1961	Partly	Yes	1.5	79
13. Controlling engineer	19th c.	1926	1879	1876	None	Yes	Yes	2	71
14. Psychologist	Late 19th c.	None	1941	1946	None	Yes	No	3	57
15. Optometrist	19th c.	None	1982	1905/1951	None	Yes	Yes	3	57
16. Sworn valuer	19th c.	Mid-19th c.	None	1961	None	Yes	No	3	57
17. Actuary	Early 20th c.	None	1942	1934	None	Yes	No	3	57
18. Physiotherapist	Late 19th c.	None	None	1948	None	Yes	Yes	3	57
19. Insurance broker	18th c.	None	None	1918	None	No	No	5	28
Averages								1.5	77.8

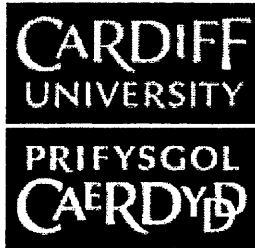
<sup>a</sup>Now abolished.

<sup>b</sup>Non-graduate entry is also possible.

The explanations of the column-heading abbreviations are as follows: 'Full-time': date became a full-time occupation; 'License': date local licensing introduced; 'Degree': date academic degrees introduced; 'Prof. assoc.': date national professional association formed; 'Chambers': date national system of chambers instituted; 'Educate.n.?': is the state responsible for education/admittance; 'Stage-reg.?': is the profession largely state regulated?



## APPENDIX



**Dear Practitioner of Public Relations & Corporate Communications,**

First of all, I would like to express my warmest gratitude for considering taking part in this survey. This survey is very important for it will serve to collect data for my doctoral thesis project. This research is also very vital as it provides the latest findings on "*Towards PR Professionalisation in Malaysia: Perception Management & Strategy Development*" and thus helps to enrich the body of PR knowledge. This study aims to determine the standard of professionalism of public relations in view of strategic management perspective in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

The questionnaire will take no longer than **15 minutes**.

Finally, I would like to guarantee that all the information given will be assured confidentiality and no names of individuals will be written in the report, or revealed to other persons except myself. The findings shall be used only for the purpose of PR education. With that, I thank you very much for your kind co-operation and may God bless you.

Yours sincerely,

ZULHAMRI ABDULLAH

A Doctoral Student, Cardiff University, United Kingdom

An Affiliate Student Member, Institute of Public Relations, United Kingdom

Email: [abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk) or [zulhamri@hotmail.com](mailto:zulhamri@hotmail.com)

**Please complete this questionnaire and return in the pre-addressed envelope provided.**

## APPENDIX

### SECTION A: Details about you

**1. Gender**

Male

Female

**2. Age**

19-25 years

26-45 years

46 years and over

**3. Ethnic Origin**

Malay

Indian

Chinese

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**4. Which is the highest qualification you have obtained?**

Certificate/diploma

Bachelor's degree

Master's degree

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Which professional qualification do you have? (Please tick all that apply)**

Certificate or diploma

Mass Communication degree (Journalism)

Mass Communication degree (Public Relations)

Business studies degree

Postgraduate PR/communication degree

MBA

Others: \_\_\_\_\_

**6. Of which professional bodies are you a member?**

(Please tick all that apply)

IPRM

IABC

CIM

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

PRCAM

None of the above

**7. Which languages do you speak professionally?**

(Please tick all that apply)

English

Tamil

Malay

Other: \_\_\_\_\_

Chinese

## APPENDIX

### SECTION B: About your job

#### 1. Where do you work?

- In-house private sector
- In-house public sector
- Consultancy

#### 2. Which job title best describes your job?

- Director/head
- General Manager
- Manager
- Senior Executive/officer
- Executive/officer
- Freelance/solo practitioner

#### 3. What is the main industry sector that you work in?

(Please tick all that apply)

- Consumer products/services
- Industrial products
- Media/broadcasting
- Technology/Telecommunication
- Government subsidiaries
- Banking/financial institution
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

#### 4. Into which range does your annual income fall?

- |                          |                   |                          |                   |
|--------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> | Under RM14,999    | <input type="checkbox"/> | RM41,000-RM45,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | RM15,000-RM20,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | RM46,000-RM50,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | RM21,000-RM25,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | RM51,000-RM55,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | RM26,000-RM30,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | RM56,000-RM60,999 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | RM31,000-RM35,999 | <input type="checkbox"/> | RM61,000 or over  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> | RM36,000-RM40,999 |                          |                   |

#### 5. How frequently do you have a salary review?

- Every six months
- No regular salary review
- Every year

## APPENDIX

**6. What benefits does your position include?**

- Petrol or business mileage allowances
- Company car
- Mobile phone
- Profit share
- Maternity leave
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

### SECTION C: Perception of Public Relations/Corporate Communication Profession

**1. How would you describe your position? (Please tick ONE only)**

- Public relations
- Corporate communications
- Public Affairs
- Corporate Affairs
- Information/Communication
- Marketing communication

**2. Please indicate the level of involvement of your organization in each of these functions.**

	Very low	Low	Neutral	High	Very High
1. Media relations/Publicity	1	2	3	4	5
2. Public information	1	2	3	4	5
3. Corporate branding	1	2	3	4	5
4. Sponsorship	1	2	3	4	5
5. Crisis/issue management	1	2	3	4	5
6. Financial & Investor relations	1	2	3	4	5
7. Strategic communication management	1	2	3	4	5
8. Marketing Communication	1	2	3	4	5
9. Political Communication	1	2	3	4	5
10. Corporate communications / Reputation management	1	2	3	4	5
11. Other, please specify:	1	2	3	4	5

**3. Which publications do you read regularly? (Please tick all that apply)**

- Berita IPRM
- Business Week
- The Economist
- Harvard Business Review
- PR Journal/Review, Please state: \_\_\_\_\_
- Marketing Journal/Review, Please state: \_\_\_\_\_
- Other: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX

**4. Please state the THREE most important PR texts you have read recently?**

- i) \_\_\_\_\_  
 ii) \_\_\_\_\_  
 iii) \_\_\_\_\_

**5. Would you like to change your current career over the next three years?**

- Yes  
 No

**If YES: What is wrong with your current career? What potential career would you like to become involved in?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**If NO: Why not?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**6. What improvements would you like to see to our PR industry over the next 10 years?**

\_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

**7. In the future will public relations:**

- become more integrated with strategic management       Yes  No
- become more distinct from strategic management       Yes  No

**8. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements regarding the professional standards of public relations?**

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. I believe that a professional is someone who is proficient or expert.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I believe that a profession is more highly valued than an occupation.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I view my job as a profession.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I have specific personal expertise.	1	2	3	4	5
5. My work requires professional skills.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I have had substantial training in professional skills.	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX

8. In your personal opinion, what kind of professional skills do you think PR practitioners should acquire in order to gain competitive advantage in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century?

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9. Do you know about the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM)?

Yes      If Yes, please answer the following questions

No        If No, please proceed to Section D

10. How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statement regarding the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM)?

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neutral	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree
1. IPRM plays important roles in shaping the emergent PR industry.	1	2	3	4	5
2. IPRM offers members good services.	1	2	3	4	5
3. IPRM is effective and efficient.	1	2	3	4	5
4. IPRM exists to support PR professionals and non-professionals.	1	2	3	4	5
5. IPRM offers a range of qualification and training programmes for members.	1	2	3	4	5

11. In your personal opinion, what do you think about the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM)?

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### INSTRUCTION FOR SECTION D TO G:

Please read the list of statements and indicate your opinion by circling the appropriate number:

Please indicate how important these knowledge and skills are to PR practice.

### SECTION D: A Set of Knowledge & Skills

		Not important at all			Very important	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Gaining in-depth knowledge of various media	1	2	3	4	5
2	Understanding new media & technologies	1	2	3	4	5
3	Understanding product or service design	1	2	3	4	5
4	Understanding technological creation	1	2	3	4	5
5	Improving customer service	1	2	3	4	5
6	Understanding logistics – able to be rational	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX

7	Being flexible and permeable	1	2	3	4	5
8	Possessing creativity	1	2	3	4	5
9	Requiring personal dedication	1	2	3	4	5
10	Possessing initiative and enthusiasm	1	2	3	4	5
11	Acquiring in-depth knowledge of corporate world and uniquely intellectual advantages	1	2	3	4	5
12	Mastering English because it is the language of global commerce	1	2	3	4	5
13	Gaining intellectual leadership	1	2	3	4	5
14	Possessing charisma	1	2	3	4	5
15	Being credible	1	2	3	4	5
16	Ability to apply decision making strategies	1	2	3	4	5
17	Ability to be sensitive to cultural differences (religion, language and ethnic origin)	1	2	3	4	5
18	Appreciating cultural diversity	1	2	3	4	5
19	Promoting the benefit of bilingualism (English and National language)	1	2	3	4	5

### SECTION E: Education & Research Development

		Not important at all			Very important	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	PR curricular offered by universities	1	2	3	4	5
2	Obtaining professional qualifications	1	2	3	4	5
3	Advancing continuous professional development	1	2	3	4	5
4	Conducting systematic and scientific research	1	2	3	4	5
5	Focusing on applied research (real world effect)	1	2	3	4	5
6	PR curriculum is housed in the Media School	1	2	3	4	5
7	PR curriculum is housed in the Business School	1	2	3	4	5
8	Publishing more PR books, journals and other publications	1	2	3	4	5
9	Formulating new and international PR/CC theories	1	2	3	4	5
10	Focusing on practical implications	1	2	3	4	5
11	Emphasising on comprehensive examination	1	2	3	4	5
12	Emphasising on academic thesis	1	2	3	4	5
13	Integrating with management research	1	2	3	4	5

### SECTION F: Accreditation & Licensing

		Not important at all			Very important	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	Acquiring accreditation from professional organisations	1	2	3	4	5
2	Obtaining licensing from professional organisations	1	2	3	4	5
3	Practising self-regulation	1	2	3	4	5
4	Abiding by ethical guidelines	1	2	3	4	5
5	Obtaining membership of professional organisations	1	2	3	4	5
6	Getting added value by becoming member of professional organisations	1	2	3	4	5
7	Rewarding excellence	1	2	3	4	5

## APPENDIX

### SECTION G: Public Relations Roles

		Not important at all			Very important	
		1	2	3	4	5
1	PR as a part of the management function	1	2	3	4	5
2	PR as a part of the communication function	1	2	3	4	5
3	Formulating marketing communication strategies	1	2	3	4	5
4	Integrating with IT strategies	1	2	3	4	5
5	Developing management strategies	1	2	3	4	5
6	Formulating communication strategies	1	2	3	4	5
7	Involving practitioners in policy making	1	2	3	4	5
8	Integrating with corporate strategies	1	2	3	4	5

If you wish to receive a summary of the result of this study, please leave your email address below.

Your email address: \_\_\_\_\_

Your name: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for your help in completing this questionnaire.



## APPENDIX

### Letter of Introduction and Interview Schedule (PR Academics and PR Practitioners)

<Mr/Mrs>  
<Job Designation>  
<Company>  
<Address>  
<Postcode>  
<Town>  
<State>

#### **RE: Permission to conduct an interview: PR/CC Professionalism**

Dear Sir/madam,

Regarding the abovementioned matter, I would like to conduct an interview with you in March or April 2004. This interview is very important for it will serve to collect data for my doctoral thesis project. This research is also very vital as it provides the latest findings on "*Towards Professionalisation of Public Relations/Corporate Communications: Perception Management & Strategy Development*" and thus helps to enrich the body of PR/CC knowledge. Thus, this study aims to determine the standard of professionalism of PR/CC in view of strategic management perspective in Klang Valley, Malaysia.

Therefore, I would like to seek some information about (1) the detail of yourself, your job and your department/division you are currently working (CV would be highly appreciated). (2) your opinions on educational and professional standard of PR/CC. (3) the outlook of Malaysian PR industry. The interview will last about one hour.

Finally, I would like to guarantee that all the information given will be assured confidentiality and no names of individuals will be written in the report, or revealed to other persons except myself. The findings shall be used only for the purpose of PR/CC education.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Many thanks for your kind indulgence.

Yours truly,

.....  
ZULHAMRI ABDULLAH

A Doctoral student,  
PhD Suite, Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies,  
Cardiff University, The Bute Building, King Edwards VII Avenue,  
Cardiff CF10 3NB, United Kingdom

Email: [abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk) or [zulhamri@hotmail.com](mailto:zulhamri@hotmail.com)

## APPENDIX

### Interview Schedule

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

### Background Information:

Name of Informant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Current position: \_\_\_\_\_

Years listed: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years experienced: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Professional Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX

### Interviews with PR Academics in Malaysia

#### A. General Questions

1. What subjects do you teach?
2. What are your areas of specialization?
3. What is the meaning of PR in today's highly competitive business environment?
4. Is there any difference between PR and CC? If yes, what is it?
5. Is PR industry mature? (also more competitive?)
6. How important is PR professionalism to you?
7. What can the Malaysia learn from the US and Europe boom in the context of PR professionalism?
8. What do you think of changing PR term in enhancing the standards of PR professionalism? Please verify any terms that you admired the most?

#### B. Specific Questions

##### Educational Standard

1. Do you think of PR is largely a part of communication or management?
2. What do you think of PR curricular that being taught in public and private universities? How differences are they?
3. Should PR curricular be housed in the Media School or in the Business School?
4. Is that possible to integrate PR concepts with strategic management and corporate strategy in PR education?
5. How do we encourage PR scholars to publish more publications (eg. books, journals etc) to enrich the body of PR knowledge? How do you distinguish between academic and commercial publications?
6. How important is English proficiency to PR students?
7. How do we adopt US, Europe or Australian PR education to Malaysia due to cultural differences (e.g. languages, religions & ethnics)?
8. Which sector do PR graduates usually work? : Private or public sectors? How competences are they?

##### Professional Standard

1. What kind of knowledge and skills PR professionals should acquire to gain competitive advantage?
2. How important is continuous professional development to PR practitioners?
3. How professionally are they in managing their task?
4. Do you think that PR roles have been changing over the last few years?
5. What PR functions most excite you these days?
6. What kind of accreditations will be vital to improving the quality of PR professionalism?

## APPENDIX

7. Do you think that self-regulation (e.g. being responsible for what you have done) can be adapted to our PR society that is multi-ethnic and multi-religious?
8. What do you think of IPRM and PRCAM roles in shaping the emergent PR industry?

### C. Questions on the outlook of the PR industry in Malaysia.

1. How bright is the future of the PR industry?
  2. What kind of PR functions will be key in the future?
  3. What improvements would you like to see to our PR industry over the next 10 years?
- 

### **Interviews with PR Practitioners in Malaysia**

#### A. General Questions

1. What is your job description? (Particularly the important tasks that assigned to you)
2. Are you satisfied with your career? If YES, how satisfied are you? If NOT, why not?
3. What is the meaning of PR in today's highly competitive business environment?
4. Is there any difference between PR and CC?
5. Is PR industry mature?
6. How important is PR professionalism to you? (e.g. setting accreditations, regulation etc.)
7. What can the Malaysia learn from US and Europe boom in the context of PR professionalism?
8. What do you think of changing PR term in enhancing the standards of PR professionalism? Please verify any terms that you admired the most?

#### B. Specific Questions

##### Educational Standard

1. Do you think of PR is largely a part of communication or management?
2. What do you think of PR curricular that being taught in public and private universities? How differences are they?
3. Should PR curricular be housed in the Media School or in the Business School?
4. Is that possible to integrate PR concepts with strategic management and corporate strategy in PR education?
5. How do we encourage PR scholars to publish more publications (eg. books, journals etc) to enrich the body of PR knowledge? How do you distinguish etween academic and commercial publications?
6. How important is English proficiency to PR students?

## APPENDIX

7. How do we adopt US, Europe or Australian PR education to Malaysia due to cultural differences (e.g. languages, religions & ethnics)?
8. Which sector do PR graduates usually work? : Private or public sectors? How competences are they?

### Professional Standard

1. What kind of knowledge and skills PR professionals should acquire to gain competitive advantage?
2. How important is continuous professional development to PR practitioners?
3. How professionally are they in managing their task?
4. Do you think that PR roles have been changing over the last few years?
5. What PR functions most excite you these days?
6. What kind of accreditations will be vital to improving the quality of PR professionalism?
7. Do you think that self-regulation (e.g. being responsible for what you have done) can be adapted to our PR society that is multi-ethnic and multi-religious?
8. What do you think of IPRM and PRCAM roles in shaping the emergent PR industry?

### C. Questions on the outlook of the PR industry in Malaysia.

1. How bright is the future of the PR industry?
  2. What kind of PR functions will be key in the future?
  3. What improvements would you like to see to the PR industry over the next 10 years?
-

## APPENDIX

### Letter of Introduction and Interview Schedule (CEOs/Senior Directors)

<Tun/Tan Sri/Dato>

<Job Designation>

<Company>

<Address>

<Postcode>

<Town>

<State>

<Date>

#### **Doctoral Research Project:**

#### **Towards the Professionalisation of Public Relations/Corporate Communications in Malaysia: Perception Management & Strategy Development**

RE: Permission To Conduct An Interview with Business Leaders

Dear Sir/madam,

Regarding the abovementioned matter, we would like to conduct an interview with you in January 2006. By participating in this project, you will help to determine the contribution that public relations and communication management make to the success of an organisation. You also will help to determine what and how 'professional project' can be developed to produce real PR professionals.

This is a second phase of collecting data which is specially designed for CEOs or Senior Directors who have a view of the real value of public relations/corporate communication. The first phase was conducted in April 2004, with senior public relations/corporate communication staff about public relations practice especially their contribution to organisational strategy development.

This interview is very, very important for it will serve to collect data for our research project. Enclosed is interview schedule for CEOs or Senior Directors. The interview will last about one hour only. In return, we will send copies of articles, papers resulting from our work.

We are looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Many thanks for your kind indulgence.

## APPENDIX

Yours sincerely,

.....  
ZULHAMRI ABDULLAH

A Doctoral student,

Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies,

Cardiff University, The Bute Building, King Edwards VII Avenue,

Cardiff CF10 3NB, United Kingdom Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 4509 HP: +44

07756242923

Fax: +44(0)29 2023 8832

Email: [abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk) or [zulhamri@hotmail.com](mailto:zulhamri@hotmail.com)

---

### Interview Schedule

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

### Background Information:

Name of Informant: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of organisation: \_\_\_\_\_

Current position: \_\_\_\_\_

Years listed: \_\_\_\_\_

Number of years experienced: \_\_\_\_\_ years

Professional Affiliation: \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX

### Interview Schedule for CEOs or Senior Directors in Malaysia

January 2006

Introduction: We are examining realistic expectation of business leaders – what, of value, do you expect to gain from making use of public relations services, and how public relations professionalism may benefit Malaysian corporations and global PR firms in Malaysia. Do you agree or disagree with the development of accreditation and licensing organised by a PR body?

#### General questions

1. What is your opinion of good public relations practice?
2. What are the drivers of good public relations practice?
3. What is your view of the real value of public relations? Is it really able to improve business strategy?
4. In academic development, we see public relations as being beyond communication practice. It is now viewed as influencing behaviour in relationship and improving organisational reputation. Do you see public relations in this way?
5. Is public relations a necessary part of strategic management?
6. What contribution does the practice of public relations make to organisational business strategy and its goals?
7. How do you rate the calibre of people in public relations practice?
8. Do you see current PR practitioners as an advisor rather than a communicator? (e.g. management of decision-making)

#### Specific questions about professionalism

1. Is public relations a profession?
2. Should public relations be viewed as a profession like medicine, law or accountancy? If yes, what is the domain of their expertise? If not, why not?
3. How important is PR professionalism to current PR practitioners? Can this differentiate a qualified and unqualified practitioner?
4. Is having an academic degree (with the associated specialised knowledge and skills) a necessary professional qualification for PR?
5. Do you think having recognition from a state (royal charter), people will see public relations as a respected profession?
6. Becoming a profession will make public relations more powerful and dominant. Do you agree with this statement?
7. What are the advantages for business in establishing accreditation and licensing within the PR industry?
8. Do your PR people operate according to the code of ethics?
9. Do you think that public relations has a rigorous body of knowledge like other professions? (e.g. the establishment of training school)
10. What do you think of PR association like the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia setting a standard for PR professionalism in terms of accreditation and licensing in Malaysia?



## APPENDIX

11. What 'professional project' should the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia establish in terms of clarifying membership and the best criteria by which applicants would be assessed?
12. Having achieved professional status, what positive and negative impacts would this make to the PR industry in Malaysia?
13. Recently, other PR bodies such as Public Relations Consultants' Association of Malaysia has rejected the development of PR accreditation as based on free market, everyone can freely practise public relations without interference from a regulatory body? How do you react to this statement?

### Specific questions about multiculturalism

1. Cultural diversity is a big issue in global public relations practice. How do you manage to handle this part in terms of working culture in your corporation?
2. Do you think Malaysian multicultural public relations is unique as compare to other developing countries such as Nigeria? How different are they? Tell me your experience about this.
3. How sensitive are you to Malaysian culture (taboos, religious sensitivity e.g. Halal products or Indian festival) in formulating and conducting your PR business strategy?
4. How do you adapt/localise your services using PR business strategy to fit Malaysian cultural activities? How do they react to your strategy?
5. The arrival of multi-national corporations, with their needs and demands, have changed public relations practice. From the global picture, what challenges will PR practitioners face to adapt themselves in a multicultural environment?
6. As a PR expatriate, has this raised any problem in terms of working within a multi-ethnic Malaysian environment? (a particular question for expatriate-respondent)

Many thanks for your time in answering these questions – we will send copies of articles, papers resulting from our work

## APPENDIX

<Tun/Tan Sri/Dato>

<Job>

<Designation>

<Company>

<Address>

<Postcode>

<Town>

<State>

<Date>

**Re: Zulhamri Abdullah**

### **Letter of Introduction**

I am writing to introduce Zulhamri Abdullah, who is currently completing his doctoral research here in Cardiff at the Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies. An Ethics Statement is attached which describes his project in detail.

The work he has to do in Malaysia in January/February, 2006, involves a series of interviews with CEOs/Senior Directors which will complete his research. I am very grateful to you for agreeing to take part and I thank you very much for giving up your valuable time in this way to support his doctoral research.

Zulhamri's research will benefit greatly from the interview you have agreed to give and from access to any corporate literature (such as strategic plans and so on) which you are able to give him. Of course he already has what is publicly available. If you are able to add to that in any way with documents that may be harder to access I would also be very grateful.

We are able to guarantee that any documents you provide can be kept anonymous should you so wish, and certainly confidential.

Many thanks again for your support for Zulhamri and for the project.

Yours Sincerely

Professor Terry Threadgold

## APPENDIX

### Ethics Statement

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research project. The research is part of a PhD project being undertaken by Zulhamri Abdullah at Cardiff School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies, Cardiff University, entitled: *Towards the Professionalisation of Public Relations in Malaysia: Perception Management and Strategy Development*

#### Outline of the Project:

This study is intended to explore the way CEOs/senior directors; public relations practitioners; and academics perceive the status and standard of the professionalism of public relations in the Klang Valley, Malaysia. Strategic management and multiculturalism are key areas for investigation. It is argued that a shortage of qualified practitioners, a lack of regulation, and a lack of credibility among practitioners are major issues in producing a low level of recognition for the Malaysian public relations industry. The research methods used for the study include interviews, survey research and archival analysis. These are used to focus on the following four dimensions of public relations professionalisation: the set of knowledge and skills regarded as appropriate for practitioners; the relationship between research and education; the importance of a code of ethics; and the question of the accreditation and licensing of the industry.

The hypothesis is that although the Malaysian public relations industry has grown due to the substantial influence of western PR knowledge, the public relations profession has not yet matured in terms of claiming professional status in the society as a whole. The study suggests that the Malaysian public relations professional association, the Institute of Public Relations Malaysia, should play a bigger role, in collaboration with a University, in improving university qualifications in public relations, in providing continuous professional development and in the accreditation of this profession.

#### Anonymity and Confidentiality

What you say in interview will be recorded for the purposes of the research. However, you may at any time ask for your comments to be 'off the record' or ask us not to use information you have given in interview.

Recorded and transcribed interview materials are kept confidential and destroyed after five years.

If you wish, you may see a draft of the section of the PhD thesis which deals with the interviews before it is submitted for examination.

It is your choice whether your name is used in the research. Please indicate below whether you are happy to have your name used or not. If you do not want your name used we are happy to give your interview a code name and to preserve your anonymity.

## APPENDIX

I need to know that you are happy to participate and that you understand the nature of the project. Please sign the Participant's statement below if you are happy to proceed.

### Participant's Statement

You may/may not use my name.

I have read the 'Outline of Project' statement above.

I understand the project and how the information I give to Zulhamri Abdullah of Cardiff University's School of Journalism, Media and Cultural Studies will be used.

I agree to take part in the project.

Signature:

Date:

## APPENDIX

### CHECKLIST OF POLICY DOCUMENTS/MATERIALS

#### A. Academic Documents

- Course outlines
- Meeting minutes
- Notices of announcement
- Press clippings
- Information through official homepage of university & colleges
- Formal letters
- Personal emails
- Conference papers
- Research papers in publication
- 
- 

#### B. Corporate/Organisational Documents

- Strategic plan of PR/corporate communication division
- Organisational/divisional chart
- Key performance indicators
- Annual reports
- Newsletters/brochures
- Information through official homepage of organization and firm
- Press releases/Press clippings
- Formal letters
- Meeting minutes
- Personal emails
- 
-

## APPENDIX

**Table A: PR Programs are Offered by Universities or Colleges**

Programs of Study (Undergraduate)	Universities/Colleges
1. Diploma in Mass Communication (Public Relations)	(a) Tunku Abdul Rahman College (School of Social Sciences & Humanities)  (b) Taylor's College (School of Communication)
2. Advanced Diploma in Mass Communication (Public Relations)	Tunku Abdul Rahman College (School of Social Sciences & Humanities)
3. Diploma in Multimedia, Advertising & Broadcasting	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology (Faculty of Communication)
4. Bachelor degree in Business Studies (Double major in Marketing & Public Relations; Management & Public Relations; Sales & Public Relations; Tourism Management & Public Relations)	Metropolitan College (Curtin Twinning Program, Perth Australia)
5. Bachelor Degree in Mass Communication (Public Relations)	(a) National University of Malaysia (Centre for Media Studies & Communication)  (b) University of Putra Malaysia (Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication)  (c) University of Malaya (Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities)  (d) University of Technology Mara (Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Communication & Media Studies)  (e) International Islamic University of Malaysia (Department of Communication, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences)  (f) Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology (Faculty of Communication)  (g) Monash University of Malaysia (Faculty of Arts)  (h) Olympia College (Business School)

**Table B: Postgraduate PR Programmes are Offered by Universities**

<b>Programmes of Study (Postgraduate)</b>	<b>Universities/Colleges</b>
Master Degree in Corporate Communication	University of Putra Malaysia (Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication)
Master Degree in Organisational Communication	International Islamic University of Malaysia (Department of Communication, Kulliyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences)  University of Putra Malaysia (Department of Communication, Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication)
Master Degree in Public Relations	University of Technology Mara (Department of Public Relations, Faculty of Communication & Media Studies)

## APPENDIX

**Table C: PR Curricular are Offered by Universities or Colleges**

PR Curriculum	Universities/Colleges
1. Principles of Public Relations	National University of Malaysia University of Putra Malaysia University of Malaya University of Technology Mara International Islamic University of Malaysia Metropolitan College Sunway College Olympia Business School Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology Taylor's College
2. Public Relations Campaign	International Islamic University of Malaysia Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology Tunku Abdul Rahman College
3. Public Relations Case Studies	National University of Malaysia International Islamic University of Malaysia Metropolitan College Sunway College Olympia Business School
4. Public Relations Law	Metropolitan College Sunway College
5. Financial Public Relations	Metropolitan College Sunway College
6. International Public Relations	Metropolitan College Sunway College Olympia Business School Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
7. Techniques of Public Relations	University of Malaya Metropolitan College Sunway College Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
8. Publicity Media & Methods	University of Technology Mara
9. PR Counselling Project	University of Technology Mara



## APPENDIX

10. Marketing Communication	Metropolitan College Sunway College
11. Theory of Public Relations	International Islamic University of Malaysia Monash University of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman College
12. Strategy Public Relations	University of Putra Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman College
13. Introducing Corporate Communication	University of Putra Malaysia Monash University of Malaysia Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology Taylor's College
14. Corporate Writing	University of Putra Malaysia Monash University of Malaysia Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
15. Writing for Public Relations	University of Technology Mara International Islamic University of Malaysia Olympia Business School Taylor's College
16. Crisis Management in Organisation	University of Putra Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman College
17. Corporate Public Relations	University of Technology Mara
18. Government Public Relations	University of Technology Mara
19. Public Opinion	National University of Malaysia Tunku Abdul Rahman College
20. Advanced Public Relations	National University of Malaysia University Malaya
21. Public Relations Media & Methods	International Islamic University of Malaysia
22. Electronic Public Relations	University of Malaya
23. Organisational Communication	Tunku Abdul Rahman College
24. Integrated Marketing Communication	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology Tunku Abdul Rahman College

## APPENDIX

25. Public Relations (Consultancy)	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
26. Public Relations (Professional Practice)	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
27. Managing Publicity & Media Relations	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology Tunku Abdul Rahman College
28. Communication Management	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
29. Strategy Marketing Communication	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
30. Public Relations Management	Limkokwing University College of Creative Technology
31. Public Relations Practice in Malaysia (Public Relations and Environment)	Tunku Abdul Rahman College National University of Malaysia
32. Advanced Public Relations Writing	Tunku Abdul Rahman College
33. Public Relations, Advertising & Marketing	Tunku Abdul Rahman College

**Table D: Academic Publications**

<b>Publication</b>	<b>Universities/Colleges</b>
<i>Jurnal Komunikasi</i> (Journal of Communication) (published in Malay & English)	National University of Malaysia (Centre for Media & Communication)
<i>Jurnal Pengajian Media Malaysia</i> (Malaysian Journal of Media Studies) (published in Malay & English)	University of Malaya (Department of Media Studies, Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences)
Compilation of Selected Abstracts	University Putra Malaysia Faculty of Modern Languages & Communication

Table E: Public Relations Textbooks

PUBLIC RELATIONS TEXTBOOKS				
Title	Author	Year published	Publisher/Country	Available at the University Libraries
1. <i>Prinsip Perhubungan Awam</i> (Principles of Public Relations)	Hamdan Adnan	1987	Biroteks Institut Teknologi MARA, MALAYSIA	National University of Malaysia University of Malaya University of Putra Malaysia
2. <i>Teknik Perhubungan Awam</i> (Public Relations Techniques)	Hamdan Adnan	1988	Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, MALAYSIA	National University of Malaysia University of Malaya
3. <i>Konsep Asas Perhubungan Awam</i> (Basic Concepts of Public Relations)	Hamdan Adnan	1988	Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka, MALAYSIA	University of Technology Mara
4. <i>Perhubungan Awam di Malaysia</i> (Public Relations in Malaysia)	Hamdan Adnan	1985	MALAYSIA	University of Technology Mara
5. <i>Perhubungan Awam dan Media</i> (Public Relations & Media)	Adzman Abbas	1993	Longman MALAYSIA	University of Malaya National University of Malaysia
6. <i>Amalan Komunikasi Korporat</i> (The Practice of Corporate Communication)	Muhammad Rosli Selamat	2000	Malindo Publisher, MALAYSIA	University of Putra Malaysia

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7. <i>Strategy Perhubungan Awam</i> (Public Relations Strategy)	Muhammad Rosli Selamat	2000	Malindo Publisher, MALAYSIA	University of Putra Malaysia
8. <i>Perhubungan Awam di Malaysia</i> (Public Relations in Malaysia)	Wan Azmi Ramli	1991	Longman, MALAYSIA	University of Malaya
9. <i>Perhubungan Awam di Malaysia: Satu Kajian tentang Pengamal di Malaysia</i> (Public Relations in Malaysia: A Study on Practitioners)	Syed Arabi Idid & Mohd. Safar Hasim	1994	Department of Communication, National University of Malaysia, MALAYSIA	National University of Malaysia
10. <i>Perhubungan Awam di Malaysia: Satu Tinjauan</i> (Public Relations in Malaysia: An Observation)	Syed Arabi Idid	1981	Department of Communication, National University of Malaysia, MALAYSIA	National University of Malaysia
11. <i>Perhubungan Perindustrian di Malaysia: Teori dan Proses</i> (Industrial Relations in Malaysia: A Theory & Processes)	Raja Noor Aini bt Raja Shamsudin	1995	Faculty of Business & Management, National University of Malaysia, MALAYSIA	National University of Malaysia
12. <i>Komunikasi Aktif. Prinsip-prinsip &amp; Kes-kes Perhubungan Awam di Malaysia</i> (Active Communication. Principles & Cases of Public Relations in Malaysia)	Vincent Lowe	1988	Times Publishing, Malaysia, MALAYSIA	University of Technology Mara
13. World Class Public Relations	Mahathir Mohamad	2003	The Institute of Public Relations Malaysia (IPRM), MALAYSIA	University of Malaya University of Technology Mara

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14. Effective Public Relations	Cutlip, Broom & Center	1994	Englewood Cliffs. New Jersey: Prentice-Hall. USA	University of Malaya University of Technology Mara University of Putra Malaysia National University of Malaysia
15. Managing Public Relations	Grunig & Hunt	1984	Rinehart Winston, New York, USA	University of Malaya University of Technology Mara University of Putra Malaysia
16. Manager's Guide to Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management	Dozier & Grunig	1992	Hillside, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, USA	University of Malaya University of Technology Mara University of Putra Malaysia
17. Principles of Corporate Communication	Cees Van Riel	1994	Prentice Hall Europe (Amsterdam)	University of Malaya
18. Corporate Communication	Paul Argenti	1997	Boston: Irwin the Gran-Hill. USA	University of Malaya University of Putra Malaysia
19. The Power of Corporate Communication: Crafting the Voice and Image of Your Business	Paul Argenti & Janis Forman	2002	McGraw-Hill USA	University of Putra Malaysia
20. How to Manage Public Relations: Practical Guidelines for Successful PR Management	Norman Stone	1991	McGraw-Hill Publishing Co USA	University of Malaya
21. Qualitative Research Methods in Public Relations & Marketing Communication	Christine Daymon	2002	Taylor & Francis Books Lt London, UK	University of Malaya

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22. Clueless in Public Relations	Lwin & Aitchison	2003	Prentice Hall Press, Inc SINGAPORE	University of Malaya
23. The Essential Guide to Public Relations – E-PR	Matt Haig	2000	Kogan Page: London, UK	University of Malaya
24. The Public Relations Handbook	Alison Theaker	2001	Routledge London, UNITED KINGDOM	University of Malaya
25. The Practice of Public Relations	Seitel	2001	Prentice Hall, USA	University of Malaya
26. Public Enterprise in India: PR	Robson	1967	INDIA	University of Malaya
27. Public Relations Writing	Newsom & Carrell	2001	Belmont, Ca. Wadsworth Publishing Co. USA	University of Malaya National University of Malaysia
28. Crisis Management: Media Relations	Reid	2000	Wiley USA	University of Malaya
29. Corporate Communication: PR Strategies	Preece, Moodley & Smith	1998	Blackwell Science, UK	University of Malaya
30. Bringing the Corporation into Corporate Branding in The Expressive Organisation	Schultz, Hatch & Larsen	2000	Oxford: Oxford University Press UK	University of Malaya
31. Handbook of Public Relations	Heath	2001	SAGE Publications USA	University of Malaya
32. This is PR	Newsom	2000	Wadsworth Publishing Co Inc USA	University of Malaya University of Technology Mara

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33. Public Relations	Cranfield	1973	UK	University of Malaya
34. Planned Press and Public Relations	Frank Jefkins	1968	Kluwer Academic Publishers UK	University of Technology Mara
35. Public Relations	Frank Jefkins	1982	Prentice Hall UK	University of Technology Mara
36. Public Relations for Marketing Management	Frank Jefkins	1968	Palgrave Macmillan, UK	University of Technology Mara
37. Public Relations for your Business	Frank Jefkins	1987	Mercury Business Books, UK	University of Putra Malaysia
38. Practical Public Relations	Sam Black	1976	Pitman, UK	University of Technology Mara
39. The Essential of Public Relations	Sam Black	1993	UK	University of Technology Mara
40. International Public Relations	Sam Black	1993	Kogan Page UK	University of Technology Mara
41. The Role of PR Management	Sam Black	1972	UK	University of Technology Mara
42. Writing for Media: PR & Press	Sandra Pesman	1983/88	USA	University of Technology Mara
43. Expose Yourself: The Power of Public Relations	Melba Beal	1990	San Francisco: Chronicle Books USA	University of Technology Mara
44. Public Relations: Strategies & Tactics	Wilcox, Ault, & Agee	1989	Allyn & Bacon USA	University of Technology Mara
45. All about PR	Haywood	1984	McGraw-Hill, USA	University of Technology Mara
46. Asian PR	Vincent Lowe	1986	Times Books International SINGAPORE	University of Technology Mara



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47. Handbook on International PR	Hill & Knowlton	1967	USA/International	University of Technology Mara
48. Biography of An Idea: PR Counsel	Edward L. Bernays	1965	Simon and Schuster, New York, USA	University of Technology Mara
49. International Public Relations	Magaret Nally	1991	Kogan Page, London, UK	University of Technology Mara
50. Public Relations	Harvard University	1961-1975	USA	University of Putra Malaysia
51. The Darthell PR Handbook	Darrow, Forrestale & Cookman	1967	Lrp Pubns USA	University of Putra Malaysia
52. Industrial Publicity	Harold Daubert	1974	Wiley: New York, Chicago, USA	University of Putra Malaysia
53. Lesly's PR Handbook	Phillip Lesly	1971	USA	University of Putra Malaysia
54. The Nature of Public Relations	Marston	1963	Prentice- Hall, Inc USA	University of Putra Malaysia
55. Public Relations: Principles, Cases, and Problems	Frazier	1977	McGraw-Hill, USA	University of Putra Malaysia
56. Communication & Public Relations	Robinson	1966	USA	University of Putra Malaysia
57. Perspective of Public Relations	Simon	1966	USA	University of Putra Malaysia
58. Handbook of Public Relations	Stephenson	1960	McGraw Hill USA	University of Putra Malaysia
59. Public Relations Techniques	Hunt & Grunig	1994	Harcourt Brace College Publishers USA	University of Putra Malaysia

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60. Public Relations: Principles & Practices	Phillip Kitchen	1997	International Thomson Business Press, London UK	University of Putra Malaysia
61. Strategic Communication Management	White & Mazur	1995	Wokingham: Addison Wesley UK	University of Putra Malaysia
62. Corporate Communication Handbook	Foster & Jolly	1997	Kogan Page, UK	University of Putra Malaysia
63. Effective Media Relations: How to Get Results	Michael Bland, Alison Theaker and David	1996	Kogan Page, London, UK	National University of Malaysia
64. Effective Publicity: How to Reach the Public	Lawrence W. Nolte & Dennis L Wilcox	1984	John Wiley & Sons, New York, USA	National University of Malaysia
65. Financial Public Relations	Pat Bowman & Richard Bing	1993	Butterworth-Heinemann for CAM Foundation, Oxford, UK	National University of Malaysia
66. Public Relations Practice Case Studies	Allen H. Center	1975	Englewood Cliffs, Prentice-Hall, N.J. USA	National University of Malaysia
67. Opportunities in Public Relations	Shepard Henkin	1977	Ill VGM Career Horizons : Skokie, USA	National University of Malaysia
68. Public Relations: Introduction.	Garry Winogrand & Tod Papageorge	1977	New York The Museum of Modern Art, USA	National University of Malaysia
69. Public Relations	Edward L. Bernays	1952	Norman University of Oklahoma Press, USA	National University of Malaysia
70. Public Relations: A Practical Guide to the Basic	Philip Henslowe	1999	London : Kogan Page, UK	National University of Malaysia

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71. Public Relations A Team Effort. A Community School's Communication Approach	John E. Walker & Richard L. Perez	1900	Midland, Michigan Pendell, USA	National University of Malaysia
72. Public Relations and Presidential Campaigns A Crisis in Democracy	Melvyn H. Bloom	1973	New York Crowell, USA	National University of Malaysia
73. Public Relations and Survey Research Achieving Organizational Goals in A Communication Context	(none)	1969	Appleton-Century-Crofts: New York, USA	National University of Malaysia
74. Public Relations Can be Fun and Easy Especially for Nursing Home People	Jim Brennan	1977	Mount Kisco, N.Y. Futura Pub. USA	National University of Malaysia
75. Public Relations Cases	Jerry A. Hendrix	1988	Belmont, Ca.: Wadsworth Publishing Co., USA	National University of Malaysia
76. Public Relations Concepts and Practice	Raymond Simon	1976	Columbus, Ohio Grid USA	National University of Malaysia

## **Emails: Accepted & Declined Appointments**

---

From: "Tan Sri Noordin Sopiee" <noordin@isis.com.my>  
To: zulhamri@hotmail.com, abduallahz@cardiff.ac.uk  
Date: Wednesday - November 30, 2005  
Subject: Interview in January 2006

---

Dear Mr. Zulhamri,

Thank you for your fax seeking for seeking for an interview with Tan Sri Dr Noordin Sopiee, Chairman & CEO, ISIS Malaysia.

Tan Sri shall be delighted to do it unless any exigencies intervene to make it not possible. Kindly keep in touch for final/confirm arrangements nearer to the date.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

NIK Hasmu b. Musa  
PA to the Chairman & CEO  
ISIS Malaysia  
Tel: (603) 2693 9439  
Fax: (603) 2693 9430

---

From: "Suthahar" <[redacted]>  
 To: [abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@cardiff.ac.uk)  
 Date: Monday - January 16, 2006  
 Subject: Doctoral project

---

Good morning Mr. Zulhamri,

This is in refgerence to your recent letter to our Executive Chairman Tan Sri G Gnanalingam (Westports, Malaysia). Please could you indicate when you would like to interview Tan Sri and how will you be conducting the interview. Please also indicate how many of you will be attanding. Kindly let me have this information for me to give you some feedback on Tan Sri's availability.

regards

Sutha

#####

**Attention:**

This e-mail message is privileged and confidential. If you are not the intended recipient please delete the message and notify the sender.

Any views or opinions presented are solely those of the author.

#####

From: "Lucy Chin" <[redacted]>  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
Date: Wednesday - December 14, 2005  
Subject: Re: Research: Interview with Dato' Fateh Iskandar binDato\*Mohamed Mansor

Dear En Zulhamri,

Sorry for the late confirmation. Boss was away on leave for the last couple of days. Anyway confirming our appointment for 19 Jan 2006 but at 11.00am instead - here at our office ? Is the time okay with yourself ?

Rgds / Lucy

From: Azizah Yahya <azizah.yahya@fura.com.my>  
To: abduallahz@Cardiff.ac.uk  
CC: [azizah.yahya@fura.com.my](#), [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](#), [azizah.yahya@fura.com.my](#), [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](#)  
Date: Wednesday - December 21, 2005  
Subject: Research: Interview with En. Mohamed Siraj Abdul Razack

Dear Mr. Zulhamri,

i have blocked Tuesday 24 January 2006 at 3pm for you to meet our ceo.

regards  
azizah



From: "Abdul-Manap, Fardzillah AM SRCPD-OMC" <[redacted]>  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
Date: Wednesday - December 28, 2005  
Subject: ACT: Interview with YM Raja Ahmad Murad bin Raja Bahrin

Dear Zulhamri,

I've tentatively booked YM Raja Ahmad's calendar on 26th January 06 @ 1000 - 1200 hours.  
The venue will be in Shell Refining Company, Port Dickson. Kindly confirm if you are ok with the date and time.

Cheers!

From: "Abdul-Manap, Fardzillah AM SRCPD-OMC" <[redacted]>  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
Date: Wednesday - December 28, 2005  
Subject: ACT: Interview with YM Raja Ahmad Murad bin Raja Bahrin

---

Dear Zulhamri,  
I've tentatively booked YM Raja Ahmad's calendar on 26th January 06 @ 1000 - 1200 hours.  
The venue will be in Shell Refining Company, Port Dickson. Kindly confirm if you are ok with the date and time.

Cheers!

Fardzillah Abdul Manap  
Corporate Affairs Advisor  
Shell Refining Company (Federation of Malaya) Berhad  
Batu 1 Jalan Pantai 71000 Port Dickson Negeri Sembilan, MALAYSIA

Tel: +60 6 640 4119  
Mobile: +60 12 303 7065  
Fax: +60 6 647 9658  
Email: [\[redacted\]](mailto:[redacted])

From: < >  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
Date: Monday - January 9, 2006  
Subject: Re: Research: Interview with Dato\* Razman Hashim- URGENT!!!

---

Dear Zul,

Greetings!

Kindly pls note that the interview date will be on 24 Jan at 3pm. Venue:

Datuk Razman's office  
Level 18, Menara Sunway  
Jln Lagoon Timur, Bandar Sunway  
Petaling Jaya

Kindly confirm soonest. TQ

Sincerely,  
SHARZEDE HJ SALLEH ASKOR  
Group Public Affairs  
T : 5639 8060  
F : 5639 9502  
web : [www.sunway.com.my](http://www.sunway.com.my)

From: "Suthahar" < >  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
Date: Tuesday - January 17, 2006  
Subject: Doctoral project

Good afternoon En. Zulhamri,

I just had a discussion with Tan Sri. We would like a sample of the questions you would be asking during the interview. Please could I have it the soonest so that I can get Tan Sri's approval for you.

regards  
Sutha

----- Original Message -----

From: "Suthahar" < >  
To: "Zulhamri Abdullah" <[abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)>  
Sent: Tuesday, January 17, 2006 10:48 AM  
Subject: Re: Doctoral project

> Good morning En Zulhamri,  
>  
> Your message and request is noted and I will revert on whether Tan Sri  
> would be available for the interview.  
>  
> regards  
> Sutha

From: "Badlishah, Tengku Marina, PETALING JAYA, Corporate Affairs"  
<TengkuMarina.Badlishah@my.nestle.com>  
To: abduallahz@Cardiff.ac.uk  
Date: Tuesday - November 22, 2005  
Subject: RE: Research Project: Interview

---

Dear En Zulhamri

Thank you for contacting Nestlé. Regrettably, this is not the best time to get an interview with our MD due to his tight schedule and travel plans.

If you have no objections, I could reply on his behalf. Let me know if this is good for you and if we could conduct a written interview.

I'll be away from office until 6 December, so will not be able to respond to you until after then.

Regards  
Tengku Marina Badlishah  
Group Corporate Affairs Manager  
Nestlé (Malaysia) Berhad  
Nestlé House, 4 Lrg Persiaran Barat,  
46200 Petaling Jaya, Selangor, MALAYSIA  
\* Tel.: (++603) 7965 6000  
\* Fax: (++ 603) 7965 6781  
\* E-mail: TengkuMarina.Badlishah@my.nestle.com

From: "Wong Soo Fong" <wongsoofong@airasia.com>  
To: zulhamri@hotmail.com, abduallahz@cardiff.ac.uk  
Date: Friday - December 30, 2005  
Subject: Executive Research Project

---

Dear Sirs

Thank you for your invitation extended to Dato' Tony Fernandes. We regret to inform you that Tony has declined this invitation as he would be travelling during that period until the end of January 2006. May we wish you all the best for the success of your research project.

Kind regards

Wong Soo Fong

Administrator

CEO's Office

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<p align=center></p>

---

From: < >  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
CC: < >  
Date: Wednesday - December 14, 2005  
Subject: Re: Research: Interview with Encik Ibrahim bin Marsidi

---

Dear En Zulhamri,

Thank you for your mail, and for your kind thoughts (and faith) in PETRONAS.

You would recall that PETRONAS' President/CEO is Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican, while En Ibrahim Marsidi is the MD/CEO of PETRONAS Dagangan Bhd, our petroleum products retail subsidiary.

May we assume that the person you would like to interview is Tan Sri?

You have also forgotten to attach the letter of interview and interview schedule. Perhaps it would also be helpful if you could forward a set of sample questions to help us decide on an alternative interviewee should Tan Sri is not available.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Thank you.

Azman Ibrahim  
Media Relations  
PETRONAS

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E: < >

[www.petronas.com](http://www.petronas.com)

[www.petronastwintowers.com.my](http://www.petronastwintowers.com.my)

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"Zulhamri Abdullah" < <a href="mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk">abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk</a> >
13/12/2005 04:03 PM

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From: <[redacted]>  
To: [abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk](mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk)  
CC: [redacted]  
Date: Monday - January 9, 2006  
Subject: Re: Research: Interview with Tan Sri Mohd Hassan Marican

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En Zulhamri,

Unfortunately, Tan Sri will not be available for the interview. However, we have arranged for you an appointment with En M Azhar Osman Khairuddin, who is PETRONAS' Head for Legal and Corporate Affairs. He also sits on the board of PETRONAS as company secretary, as well as on PETRONAS' Management Committee.

The appointment is on 20 January at 10.00am and will take place at his office on Level 69, Tower 1, PETRONAS Twin Towers.

We hope this would be OK with you.

Cheers,

Azman Ibrahim  
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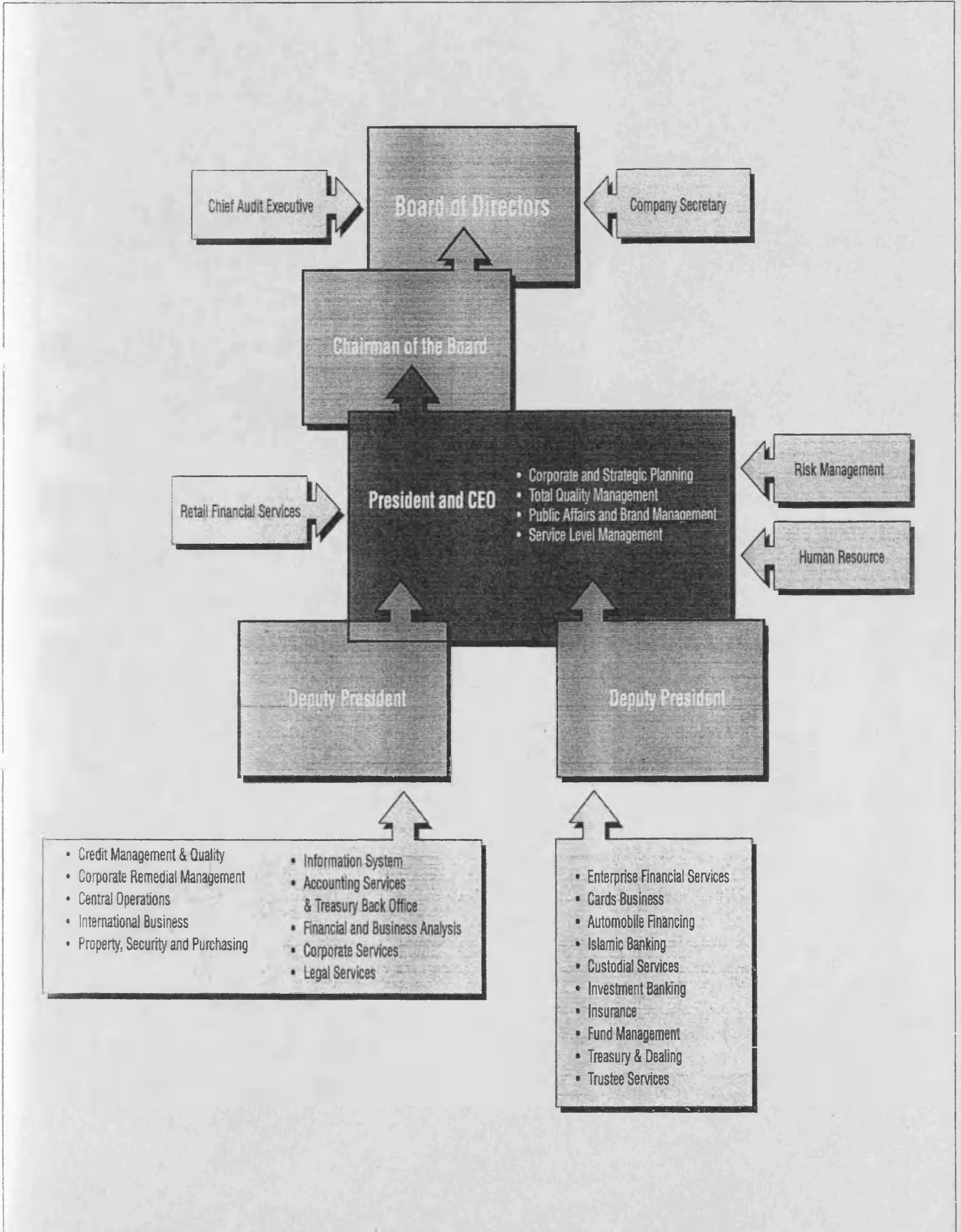
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"Zulhamri Abdullah" < <a href="mailto:abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk">abdullahz@Cardiff.ac.uk</a> >
07/01/2006 12:30 AM

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# ORGANISATION STRUCTURE





PEOPLE

Organisation Chart

- Board of Directors
- Management Committee

Career Opportunities

- Online application
- How we hire
- Grow with us
- Benefits
- FAQ

ORGANISATION CHART

