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Organizational Uncertainty Management: Developing a Framework for Public Relations Practitioner Involvement

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Organizational Uncertainty Management:

Developing a Framework for Public Relations Practitioner Involvement

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my grandfather, Ronald Byford,

for teaching me that I can do anything I put my mind to

if I take it one step at a time.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the concept of organizational uncertainty and the involvement of public relations practitioners. Understanding organizational uncertainty is imperative to the success of an organization, but the effects of uncertainty have been relatively undertheorized within public relations.

To close the gap, this study blended multidisciplinary theories pertaining to uncertainty with a triangulated methodological approach. First, this study took a macro-organizational look at uncertainty by analyzing trends in the literature and conducting qualitative in-depth interviews with members of management and employees in an organization. The results of this portion of the study found uncertainty to be multi-layered and the most common causes of uncertainty to be organizational changes, unclear policies, job insecurities, and the external environment. This data was then used to conduct a micro-organizational analysis of uncertainty.

Therefore, the second step of this study expanded on the organizational findings to look at the role of public relations in uncertainty management. Through this study, a valuable survey instrument was created containing five significant factors of: job

insecurities, the external environment, organization uncertainty, practitioner perceived involvement, and practitioner feelings. It was administered, primarily through use of the Internet, to members of the Public Relations Society of America (N=1,135), yielding a response rate of 31.8 percent.

The results of this study indicated that public relations practitioners do not perceive four main causes of uncertainty, but instead they perceive two: job insecurities and the external environment.

The results also suggest that public relations practitioners personally have low feelings of uncertainty, although they believed their organizations have moderate levels of uncertainty. Additionally, this study found that practitioners reported being moderately involved in the management of uncertainty, with the level of involvement most influenced by job insecurities.

Finally, the results found that public relations practitioners most frequently used electronic communication to help employees cope with organizational uncertainty pertaining to organizational change, policies, and the external environment. However, with job insecurities, interpersonal communication was the most popular communication strategy.

Overall, the results of this study bring us a step closer in establishing a framework for public relations practitioner involvement in the management of organizational uncertainty.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

De Meyer, Loch, and Pich (2002) said, "The word of the hour is uncertainty" (p. 60). Robert Hormats, vice chairman of Goldman Sachs International, concurred, "If you're a corporate executive in this environment, you face a higher level of uncertainty – and more sources of uncertainty – than you have in your career" (Stevenson & Leonhardt, 2002, p.4). Hatch (1997) described organizational environments, as mentioned by Hormats above, as complex systems that create uncertainty in organizations. Uncertainty can lead to decreases in morale, productivity, commitment, and work satisfaction; and increases in turnover, job insecurity, and stress (Casey, Miller, & Johnson, 1997). Therefore, an understanding of organizational uncertainty is imperative to the success of an organization.

Newspaper headlines often link uncertainty to fear rather than to opportunity (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Williams, 2002). Unfortunately, such associations reflect a shallow understanding of the potential benefits of embracing uncertainty. Wise organizational leaders intuitively know this, and they creatively manage their organizations by fostering the proper mindset, while developing appropriate uncertainty coping competencies (Clampitt et al., 2002). They do this because they believe uncertainty must be linked to growth rather than anxiety.

Uncertainty plays an important role in all aspects of life. Ultimately, uncertainty exists when details of situations are complex, unpredictable, or probabilistic; when information is unavailable or inconsistent; or when people feel insecure in their own state of knowledge or the state of knowledge in general (Brashers, 2001). In other words, uncertainty is a state of doubt about current or future events (Milliken, 1987). Therefore, the term organizational uncertainty is misleading – organizations do not feel uncertain, people do (Hatch, 1997). Furthermore, what affects organizations is not so much the conditions, as it is people's perceptions of the conditions (Duncan, 1972a).

The effects of uncertainty on organizations have been relatively undertheorized within public relations. This study aims to close this gap. In doing so, it took a triangulated methodological approach with the ultimate goal of working towards establishing a framework of organizational uncertainty for public relations practitioners. First, this study took a macro-organizational look at uncertainty. Through this, trends in the literature were captured and used to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews with members of management and employees of an organization. The goal of this macro-organizational perspective was to determine *what* uncertainties exist within an organization, *how* managers communicate within uncertainty, and *what* the outcomes of uncertainty are. These data were then used to conduct a more micro-organizational analysis of uncertainty.

Therefore, the second step of this study essentially expanded on the organizational findings of step one by looking at the role of public relations in uncertainty management. Ultimately, this study aimed to further theory-driven public relations research by

determining *what* uncertainties public relations practitioners perceive exist within their organizations, *how* public relations practitioners communicate during times of uncertainty, and *what* their overall perceived involvement is with organizational uncertainty.

A number of organizational development specialists and business strategists have advocated the necessity of creating uncertainty-embracing organizations (Schoemaker, 2002; Courtney, 2001; Stacey, 1992). To accomplish this, strategy development should be closely reviewed, but in choosing strategies under uncertainty, there are no easy answers. The "tried-and true" strategic-planning and decision-making approaches are outdated and often fail to optimize organizations in times of high uncertainty. Because of this, executives often focus on the traditional point-forecast processes that largely ignore uncertainty and result in unmanaged risk and missed competitive advantages (Schoemaker, 2002; Courtney, 2001). Thus, to make better strategy choices, uncertainty must be understood.

Organizational leaders should be aware of and understand uncertainty because it will enable them to manage information better. The ability to manage information to decrease or limit uncertainty is a tactical resource that gives organizations a strategic advantage over competitors (Mangaliso, 1995). It is the amount of uncertainty an organization can handle and how well it manages it that determines success (Kiev, 2002). In other words, by knowing how to profit through uncertainty, a company will set itself apart from its competitors. Therefore, Schoemaker (2002) found the "silver lining to this turbulent environment…to be profit" (p. xv).

In determining the proper communication management within organizational uncertainty, an important question to ask is whose responsibility is uncertainty management? To be truly successful, uncertainty must be handled on all organizational levels; however, this study proposed that the role of public relations provides organizational skills that are critical to the proper management of uncertainty. These include expertise in the collection and dissemination of information. Essentially, the abilities a public relations practitioner brings to an organization can aid in determining the who, what, where, when, why, and how of communication within organizational uncertainty.

Overall, public relations practitioners work to balance the needs of employees with organizational success. The goals of communication management are to "establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the employees on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, p. 289). Overall, this relationship must at a minimum include the following seven components: (1) confidence and trust between employers and employees, (2) free flow of information up, down, and sideways, (3) ample participation for each person, (4) work continuity, (5) healthy atmosphere, (6) organizational success, and (7) optimism about the future (Cutlip et al., 2000). It is when any of these components are lacking that organizational uncertainty thrives.

Uncertainty has been studied over the years and in many disciplines such as mathematics, physics, philosophy, psychology, and communication. As previously

stated, the aim of this study is to extend the understanding of uncertainty to the domain of public relations. To best accomplish this, this study:

- provides a general explanation of uncertainty;

- discusses categories of uncertainty;

- reviews coping strategies;

- explores the multiple layers of uncertainty, such as organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurity, and the external environment; and

- examines how communication practices such as participation and information supply impact uncertainty in organizations.

History tells us that we are destined to repeat our mistakes unless we learn from them and change our behavior. As we look towards the future, we must think about the past, assess our course, and if need be, alter and adjust that course (Sikich, 2003). Through this reflection comes improvement. Overall, this study offers the possibility of helping public relations practitioners, as well as managers and employees, to better understand organizational uncertainty.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

"Organizations can not be explained by any single theory" (Hatch, 1997, p. 4). According to Hatch, to best understand organizations one must look at theories through the years and from various disciplines such as economics, sociology, anthropology, communication, and cultural studies. These theories incorporate four different perspectives on organizations: classical, modern, symbolic-interpretive, and postmodern.

Each of these perspectives represents different assumptions, vocabularies and theorists. Although they do progress through a time continuum, "it would be a mistake to think that newer perspectives replace older ones. In organizational theory, perspectives accumulate, and over time they influence one another" (Hatch, p. 4). This process of continuous change within theories mirrors the current state of complexity and rapid change of today – all requiring flexibility and adaptiveness.

Organizations can be described in many ways, but for the purpose of this study organizations are "cognitive, normative, and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behavior" (Scott, 1995, p.19). Therefore, this study will incorporate organizational theories from different perspectives as appropriate.

This study, in essence, is a blending of organizational theory as it applies to the field of public relations. It is important to note that, although it can be traced back to

previous centuries, public relations became accepted as a field of study in 1950 (Stacks,

Botan, & Turk, 1999). Currently, public relations is viewed as a "management function

that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an

organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip et al., 2000,

p. 6).

Because of its newness, traditional public relations theory has relied on the

modernist view, which "sought universal explanations that could approach…the status of

natural laws" (Hatch, 1997, p. 44). Although not necessarily an incorrect approach, since

this requires the striving for the ideal, postmodernism represents a broader theoretical

approach (Holtzhausen & Vito, 2002). Therefore, the lens used in this study incorporates

cross-perspective theories, while concentrating on more of a postmodern perspective of

looking at organizations.

Uncertainty

Weick (1995) coined the term "sensemaking" as an activity or a process of

retrospectively making sense of a situation (p.1). In other words, reality can only be

understood after it has happened. Essentially, sensemaking can be best illustrated in the

phrase by Wallas, "How can I know what I think till I see what I say?" (as cited in

Weick, 1995, p. 12). Therefore, problems do not present themselves as given, but

> they must be constructed from the materials of problematic situations which are
>
> puzzling, troubling, and uncertain. In order to convert a problematic situation to a

problem, a practitioner must do a certain kind of work. He must make sense of an

uncertain situation that initially makes no sense (p. 9).

The management of uncertainty is best understood through reflection; so

consequently, sensemaking is a critical component of strategic management, one that

involves enactment. This is where an organization is constructed from the activities of

collecting and analyzing information and from "decisions taken on the basis of analysis

which lead to various activities, including further constructions of the organization"

(Hatch, 1997, p. 42). This implies that uncertainty is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon.

Even in the most uncertain organizational environments, the mere fact that uncertainty is

recognized and understood can allow for the withdrawal of strategically relevant

information. Although this withdrawal of information allows for strategic management,

the potential for harm from what is not incorporated into the analysis can be substantial.

Ultimately, what is left can be considered residual uncertainty (Courtney, 2001). It is

within this that sensemaking fails. When there are large chunks of residual uncertainty,

often what follows are larger risks and an increased propensity to fail (Weick, 1995).

It is important to note that while sensemaking is useful in explaining the

perpetuation of uncertainty, it is not the sole explanation for the existence of

organizational uncertainty. This is because through sensemaking people are interpreting

their "uncertainty as a lack of information and then attribute their experiences to

complexity and change" (Hatch, 1997, p. 93). Although a critical component of

continued uncertainty, this does not explain the initial cause of the uncertainty.

Through the years, there have been many definitions of the term uncertainty. For example, in 1987, Milliken defined uncertainty as "the psychological state of doubt about what current events mean or what future events are likely to occur" (p. 133). Bradac (2001) defined uncertainty as "a cognitive state resulting from an individual's assessment of the number of alternative predictions available for a stranger's future behavior or alternative explanations available for past behavior" (p. 464). This definition would be more accurate if referring to ambiguity (as described below) because it implies that the alternatives are known. A more recent definition by DiFonzo and Bordia (2002) described uncertainty as resulting from unpredictable situations that cannot be adequately understood. Although this definition is decent, it does not take into consideration uncertainty for predictable situations. Therefore, even though all three definitions have been widely used, the second two were determined by the researcher to not be as encompassing as needed; therefore, the definition used in this study was Milliken's (1987).

Although ambiguity is quite similar to uncertainty, these two terms should not be confused. This is because ambiguity implies that alternatives are known, while uncertainty implies that the alternatives are potentially unknown or even unknowable (Clampitt & Williams, 2000). In other words, ambiguity means the presence of two or more interpretations, not the lack of interpretation as with uncertainty. Therefore, this study will focus solely on uncertainty.

Individuals are often uncomfortable with uncertainty due to the inherent complexity and lack of predictability. Uncertainty can create feelings of vulnerability or

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anxiety that can lead to "premature closure, false dichotomies, rejection of relevant information, rigid categories, and regression to old rule-of-thumb models of thinking" (Clampitt & Williams, 2000, p. 13). Additionally, the randomness often associated with uncertainty can make it difficult to develop appropriate strategies for current and future circumstances.

On a behavioral level, the literature suggested that there are fundamental differences between how employees cope with uncertainty (Budner, 1962; Kirton, 1981; McPherson, 1983; Kramer, 1999). Most recently, Kramer (1999) identified two factors influencing an individual's experience of uncertainty. First, individuals do not experience uncertainty in each event. Predictable or easily understood situations may result in very low levels of uncertainty. Second, individuals have differing degrees of uncertainty tolerance. In other words, a specific situation may cause intense or even intolerable uncertainty for one person while another finds it to be of no concern. For example, some employees may experience high levels of stress and an inability to work in a fast-paced, high-energy environment with high degrees of uncertainty, while other individuals thrive under the challenge.

No matter what the cause of the uncertainty, it is important to understand current processes and procedures within organizations while recognizing the importance of remaining flexible and adaptable to unlearning or "dropping one's tools" (Weick, 1996, p. 301). For example, Weick (1996, 2001) explained this in relation to the disaster at Mann Gulch. In 1949, 13 firefighters lost their lives retreating from a fire at Mann Gulch. One reason for such a disastrous result was that the firefighters did not drop the

heavy tools they were carrying; therefore, their retreat was slowed, resulting in their deaths just steps away from safe areas.

Weick argued organizational leaders could learn from this tragedy on various levels. For example, it demonstrates that when presented with a need or opportunity, leaders must be willing to "drop their tools" to allow for change. Organizational leaders are responsible for being aware of the potential need for such a change. According to Weick (1996), "Knowledge creation by business is apt to be firm-specific and problem-specific" (p. 306). In other words, leaders cannot handle business through blanket application of policies and procedures. They instead should look at each situation and "drop tools" where and when appropriate.

Organizations consist of many people and, therefore, many mind-sets, distinctive viewpoints, needs, and agendas that determine how individuals view and engage in categories of work events (Culbert, 1996). When faced with uncertainty, organizational leaders must understand the existence of these various perspectives. One way to accomplish this is through research and analysis of employees. Fundamental tools public relations practitioner's use are survey instruments, where the purpose is to "collect accurate measurements of people's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior by asking questions" (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 135).

Implications for Public Relations

Organizational uncertainty affects the entire organization, including all levels of management, all employees, customers, competitors, suppliers, shareholders, and so

forth. Uncertainty can be selective to just one group, or permeate every aspect of the organization. Either way, public relations practitioners are skilled in communication processes that can aid in coping with uncertainty.

"Public relations is a *process* – that is, a series of actions, changes, or functions that bring about a result. One way to describe the process…is to use the RACE acronym" (Marston, 1963, p. 393). Essentially, RACE reflects the perpetual components of public relations. There are clear implications for the usefulness of these key elements in the handling of organizational uncertainty. For example,

- **R**esearch – to identify the existence or cause of uncertainty through obtaining insights from numerous sources.
- **A**ction – analyze these inputs, make recommendations to management and establish a plan to cope with uncertainty.
- **C**ommunication – execute the program of action through communication processes.
- **E**valuation – measure the effectiveness of action through feedback channels.

Essentially, through the continual process of following these steps, public relations practitioners have their finger on the pulse of the organization. This will aid in gauging employee and management perceptions and needs within organizational uncertainty.

Categories of Uncertainty

Through a five-year organizational project study, De Meyer, Loch and Pich (2002), identified three types of uncertainty, each of which requires a different

management approach. Due to this, they suggested the need for a "forward-thinking management approach" through the incorporation of three uncertainty types – "*foreseen uncertainty, unforeseen uncertainty, and chaos* [italics added] (p. 60). In essence, through understanding the category of uncertainty the appropriate coping mechanism can be determined.

Foreseen uncertainty is characterized by identifiable and understandable influences that might occur within a given situation (De Meyer et al., 2002). De Meyer, Loch and Pich found that although this uncertainty is foreseen, it is distinct and carries full-blown risk. This type of uncertainty is typical in pharmaceutical companies. For example, a developer of a new drug can anticipate possible side effects because of his/her previous appearance in the use of related drugs. With this, a contingency plan can be established if side effects (foreseen uncertainty) occur. Events that have potential to cause uncertainty should be identified. Then, it is the responsibility of management to increase awareness of the need for change relative to known criteria and risk, while motivating stakeholders to cope with change. This is the easiest type to plan for because it is identifiable and understandable. Therefore, foreseen uncertainty should be incorporated into strategic plans and included in frequent communication.

Unforeseen uncertainty is the more difficult category to address because it requires a balance between planning and learning (De Meyer et al., 2002). This is the uncertainty that cannot be identified in advance, so there is not a "Plan B" (p. 62). Unforeseen uncertainty is not necessarily caused by "spectacular out-of-the-blue events,

however. It also can arise from the unanticipated interaction of many events, each of which might, in principle, be foreseeable" (p. 62).

The events of September 11, 2001 are an example of this type of uncertainty. This changed many aspects of organizations from security to stock prices. Some organizations were able to champion the changes to grow their companies (e.g., security companies) while others found this to be detrimental (e.g., airlines).

Unforeseen uncertainty is extremely difficult to plan for, so it is advisable for organizations to record the situation and how it was handled after the occurrence. This way, if a similar situation arises, they may not be caught off guard and can act appropriately.

Chaos is the theory that "emphasizes the lack of predictability in system behavior, unexpected and non-linear interactions between components, radical departures from established normal system operations, and ultimately, the re-emergence of order through natural self-organizing processes" (Seeger, 2002, p. 329). The essence of chaos is change – it is not a stable condition or a fixed state (Merry, 1995). When chaos is retrospectively viewed as a whole, patterns can be uncovered; however, at no single point could future direction be predicted.

Because of the reflective nature of determining uncertainty, categories are rarely measured. It is important to be cognizant of different categories, but for the purpose of this study the concept of chaos was determined to be unrelated to this study. Therefore, the only uncertainty this study will concentrate on will be foreseen and unforeseen

uncertainty. The main reason for omitting chaos is because the theory runs counter to the goal-oriented, certainty-seeking public relations practitioners strive for (Murphy, 1996).

Implications for Public Relations.

There are implications for public relations within each of the categories of uncertainty. Specifically, foreseen uncertainty should be included in the overall practice of public relations. In other words, research, action, communication, and evaluation should incorporate predictable uncertainty.

On the other hand, to best handle unforeseen uncertainty, managers should work to continually expand their network and increase the involvement of partners that can help to solve new challenges, while maintaining flexible relationships and strong communication with all stakeholders, which is typically the work of public relations practitioners.

Overall, as with crisis, risk, and issues management, contingency planning is fundamental. It is though the anticipation of both expected *and* unexpected uncertainty that practitioners can help organizations.

Uncertainty Coping Strategies

Once the category of uncertainty is determined, the appropriateness of a coping strategy can be established. Knowing how to cope is important to organizations because not knowing can create an organizational conundrum. In other words, leaders can no longer ignore uncertainty and assume their organization operates in a stable environment.

In organizational theory, coping with uncertainty has been called the central problem of administration (Thompson, 1967). There are a variety of means to cope with uncertainty. Some are healthy, such as the providing of timely and accurate information, while others are not, such as the ignoring of useful information. Overall, there are four basic strategies for coping with uncertainty: *reducing* uncertainty, *acknowledging* uncertainty, *suppressing* uncertainty, and uncertainty *avoidance*.

Reducing uncertainty – Berger and Calabrese (1975) originated uncertainty-reduction theory. The approach emphasizes that "individuals experiencing uncertainty will be motivated to increase predictability by engaging in information seeking, among other behaviors" (p. 103). This theory was created to explain the relationship between the frequency of communication and the degree of uncertainty. Their study showed that the frequency of questions (information seeking) increased as the level of uncertainty increased. This can become self-perpetuating – the more unanswered questions, the greater uncertainty becomes and so forth.

Since 1975, many researchers have furthered this original study (e.g., Lipshitz & Strauss, 1997; Kramer, 1999; Bradac, 2001; Goldsmith, 2001). For example, Lipshitz and Strauss (1997) defined the tactics of reducing uncertainty as pertaining to information processing. This consists of collecting additional information before decision-making or deferring decisions until additional information is available. Often organizations simply lack the necessary additional information to aid in this decision-making. When this is the case, Lipshitz and Strauss (1997) determined that uncertainty could be reduced through

"assumption-based reasoning" (p.153). Options to organizational management are tools such as statistical methods, scenario building, and shortening time-horizons.

Acknowledging or embracing uncertainty – Uncertainty is typically acknowledged when reducing it is either too costly or unfeasible. This can be accomplished by selecting a course of action to avoid or by confronting the potential risks (Lipshitz & Strauss, 1997). When organizational leaders choose to acknowledge uncertainty, the coping tactics used can include buffering ("building slack") and rationing ("rearranging priorities") (p. 153). In other words, through careful planning and by remaining flexible, organizations can acknowledge uncertainty. An employee who acknowledges uncertainty is often self-actualized and flexible, so they are often better able to adapt to change (Foxman, 1976).

Williams and Clampitt (2003) expanded on this concept by renaming it "embracing uncertainty" (p. 2). They stated that an organization could embrace uncertainty through cultivating an awareness of uncertainty, and communicating about it, while catalyzing. This is essentially the same concept as acknowledging uncertainty, but with the caveat of action *while* planning and communicating. This is essentially the coping strategy that best follows Weick's sensemaking (1995). Clampitt, DeKoch, and Williams and (2002) found that employees who embraced uncertainty tended to be more satisfied with their job, and were more committed, less cynical, and more able to identify with the organization. Therefore, the researcher will refer to this coping strategy as embracing uncertainty.

Suppressing uncertainty – Suppressing uncertainty includes denial (ignoring or altering undesirable information) and rationalization. Rationalization meant "coping with uncertainty symbolically by going through the motions of reducing uncertainty or acknowledging it"(Lipshitz & Strauss, 1997, p. 154). Although seemingly undesirable, the tactic of suppressing uncertainty could prove beneficial to decision makers. This would be accomplished avoiding organizational paralysis when coping through reduction or acknowledgement would be inapplicable (Weick, 2001). An employee who suppresses uncertainty may be hesitant to express a dissenting opinion, looking to the supervisor for specific direction (Williams & Clampitt, 2003).

Uncertainty avoidance – Adler (1997) identified uncertainty avoidance as "measuring the extent to which people in a society feel threatened by ambiguity and therefore try to avoid ambiguous situations by providing greater career stability, establishing more formal rules, rejecting deviant ideas and behavior, and accepting the possibility of absolute truths and the attainment of expertise" (p. 51). This is relatively low in the United States, but is typical in countries with low job mobility.

Hofstede (1984) evaluated 40 countries to determine their uncertainty avoidance according to issues ranging from propensity for traffic accidents to preference in managerial style. This study found that some cultures fostered greater uncertainty avoidance than others because of societal rules, rituals, educational standards, and religious orientations. Ultimately, these data were used to conclude that countries such as Greece, Portugal, and Japan were high in uncertainty avoidance. Later studies expanded on this to explain that cultures with high uncertainty avoidance are characteristically

active, aggressive, emotional, security seeking, and intolerant (Taylor, 2000; House, Javidan, & Hanges, 2002).

Implications for Public Relations

Coping with uncertainty is a critical element for organizational success. Because this is coping so important, it is often best to have a baseline understanding of the organizational climate as it relates to uncertainty. It is important to note that organizational climate refers to "a set of measurable properties of the work environment, perceived directly or indirectly by the people who live and work in this environment and assumed to influence their motivation and behavior" [Litwin & Stringer (1968) as cited in Hollmann, 197, p. 562]. Before the affect of uncertainty on organizational climate can be understood, it is important first to determine what kinds of uncertainty exist within the organization and then what role, if any, pubic relations practitioners play in uncertainty management. This can be accomplished through continual assessment of organizational management and employees. Because of the complexity of determining organizational climate, it was determined to be beyond the scope of this study, so this study will work towards a greater understanding about multi-layered uncertainty.

Multi-Layered Uncertainty

As stated previously, organizational uncertainty is multi-layered. Because of this, it is possible that any one or a combination of uncertainty variables can be present at a given time. The following literature pertaining to organizational uncertainty, highlight

four common workplace variables that lead to uncertainty today. They are:

organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurity, and the external environment.

Above all, communication and participation are the threads entwined through each of the

four organizational variables.

Organizational Change

As Mark Twain said, " You know, I'm all for progress. It's change I object to"

(as cited in Pietersen, 2002, p. 32). Change hurts – even if it's beneficial change.

According to Mankin, Cohen, and Bikson (1997), all change processes involve "the

balancing of hopes, expectations, and ideals against the imperatives of performance, and

the constraints of people, resources, and the organization" (p. 63). To compound this,

today, change is the norm and occurs more rapidly, in greater volume, and is more

complex than ever before (Bennett, 2001; Salem, 2002).

As said before, the tragic events of September 11, 2001 impacted the world.

Shortly thereafter, the organizational scandals of Enron and Arthur Andersen were in the

headlines. As a result, today companies are faced with many challenges. Foremost,

competition among companies for customers is becoming increasingly more important as

customers are becoming more selective with whom they conduct business. To combat

this, many organizations are in a state of change (Rothschild, 2002).

Organizational change can be defined as the adoption of a new idea or behavior

by an organization (Liberatore, Hatchuel, Weil, & Stylianou, 2000). Weidman (2002)

found that in the past organizational changes were measured in years, and sometimes

decades, but now, the rate of change is typically measured in months or even days. These changes are just as radical as in past decades, but they are much faster. This balancing act inevitably creates uncertainty, because it involves the unknown. Never before has the pace of change been so rapid. Because of this, "traditional change approaches are incapable of accommodating all of these dimensions" (Arena, 2002, p. 33). As a result, we require change devices that are faster, better, easier to use and cheaper than they were a few years back. Essentially, for an organization to exist it must be built for change (Hatch, 1997).

Managing change – There is an increasing awareness that managing change *well* is the key to organizational success. Bagranoff, Eighme, and Kahl (2002) found six main reasons why people fear change: (1) leaving the comfort zone – not being as good at something new, (2) loss of position – job insecurity, (3) new responsibilities – sometimes change means more work, (4) higher expectations – threat of change fosters doubt, (5) loss of power and influence – increased sense of insecurity, and (6) past experience – if prior change failed, new efforts are less appealing.

Some scholars believe that organizations should embrace the uncertainty of change instead of trying to control it (Mankin et al., 1997; Williams & Clampitt, 2003). This is often more of an ideal than a reality because most large-scale change efforts require significant commitments of time, effort, and money – producing enormous pressures to get it right the first time. Managers need to be flexible enough to recognize and respond to opportunities when they occur.

Bennett (2001) found that in response to change, people are inundated with uncertainty and express emotions similar to those expressed during bereavement of a loved one. To change is to suffer loss, and if left unattended, change can reduce employee and organizational productivity, contribute to burnout, negatively impact the quality of products and services, damage customer relations, and reduce employee morale. As a result, organizational certainty and security are lost, and when change is forced, employees loose their sense of control. Because of this, coping with change is a necessity. If embracing change is the desired outcome, employees must be persuaded into believing that the gains will be greater than the losses (Pietersen, 2002). Also, it is important to note that "one size does not fit all when it comes to embracing change, and it is up to the manager to know which approach works for his staff" (Bennett, 2001, p. 150).

Essentially, change management is not about managing change, but about managing people. Therefore, leaders are fundamental in states of rapid change. A leader can be defined as someone who creates "positive change by working through others" (Pater, 2002, p. 6). Rothschild (2002) found that a risktaker leadership style is best suited for change when rapid decisions are to be made. Similarly, Weidman (2002) found that leaders should focus on their roles as "change agents framing the need for change in a way that makes sense to everyone" (p. 17). Therefore, management should demonstrate a commitment to change through clear and concise communication. To best handle change, Porter (2002) describes change agents as needing problem solving skills, responsiveness, quality work practices, and overall effectiveness. Change agents should

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assess organizational needs to identify vital stakeholders who can support the change. Often, this involves employees.

Organizational change and decision-making – All organizational change includes decision-making, which is typically specialized in traditional organizations. For example, top management makes strategic decisions; middle managers make internal structural decisions; and lower managers are responsible for day-to-day decisions (Hatch, 1997). The problem within this decision-making structure is the lack of employee involvement. Many studies report negative side effects from a lack of participation in decision-making, such as ill health and loss of production (Sashkin, 1984), factors that would negatively affect an organization's ability to innovate and change (Holtzhausen, 2001). When management fails to involve employees in decision-making, employees often feel alienated, and as a result, are less willing to accept change (Argenti, 1998).

Jackson (2001) argued, "Shared decision-making is essential to the success of an organization" (p. 5). Expanding on this, Pfeffer (1992) held three important beliefs about decision-making. First, "a decision by itself changes nothing" (p. 19). Second, "at the moment a decision is made, we cannot possibly know whether it is good or bad" (p. 19). Third, and the most important of the three, is to remain cognizant of the notion that "we almost invariably spend more time living with the consequences of our decisions than we do in making them" (p. 19).

Similarly, Frost (2002) found that organizations often rely on the "analyze-think-change" approach to introduce change. This model emphasized changing behavior by bombarding employees with statistics and analysis. This approach provided a rationale

behind the change, but it did not motivate employees to make the effort change requires. So, slightly different than the action first approach Pfeffer (1992) suggesed, Frost preferred use of the "see-feel-change" approach. This emphasized communicating with employees to understand problems and suggested a "visceral response that reduces emotions that block change and enhances those that support it" (p. 117). Perhaps this idea of the addition of "feeling" serves best as a caveat to Pfeffer's suggestion of action. Thus, action while feeling and analyzing can benefit all involved.

Research is an integral part of organizational decision-making because, it is through research that leaders can more accurately understand the needs of key publics and the means to fulfill those needs (Kruckenberg & Paluszek, 1999). On the other hand, Pfeffer (1992) believed that it is through this action of researching then acting that can cause a delay in action and even result in paralysis. Possibly a blending of the two concepts is most beneficial to organizations. While conducting research and gaining an understanding of publics, leaders can act concurrently. Such action would provide understanding, which should help the organization. In other words, through action the company does not become stagnant, and through research leaders learn how to continually amend their actions to best meet the needs of the organization and key publics. Therefore, action while researching allows the organization to progress and manage through the resulting consequences. This then implies that good organizational leaders are not only good decision-makers, but also more importantly, they are skilled at handling the consequences of decisions.

This has fundamental implications for managing change. For example, Thurow's (1999) statement that explained how change requires individuals "who recognize that new things can be done and who take the initiative to get them done" (p. 82) should be expanded to include someone who can handle the consequences.

The impact of information on organizational change – One way to best be prepared to handle the consequences of organizational change is to provide employees with as much information as possible, often the aim with organizational change (Crabb, 1995). This could be conducted through various means minimally including weekly one-on-one meetings, bi-weekly group meetings with direct managers, and monthly meetings with senior managers. Each meeting should be an opportunity for employees to learn about organizational changes. This should also provide employees an opportunity to openly ask questions without negative repercussions. Also, Argenti (1998) suggested that management simply ask employees questions. Through this, management can find out more about what employees think about change.

Argenti (1998) argued that to have effective employee communication programs managers need to get to know their employees. Problems occur when perceptions about speech are misaligned with actions (or visa versa). This undermines trust through norms of reciprocity. According to Simons (2002), "mistrust often begets mistrust" (p. 22). If employees believe that their managers are unwilling to present them with their actual values, they can easily infer that their managers do not trust them; in turn they mistrust those managers. This is often considered a cycle of reciprocity where if one party is not forthcoming, then the other party lowers its trust and is less cooperative. Through

mistrust, cautious behaviors are generated and subsequently stimulate greater mistrust. This brings the understanding that organizations are part of complex evolving systems that give new meaning to relationships and trust (Senge, 2001).

Organizational change transformations are often stressful and may reduce employee morale and productivity, thus hindering the success of the change itself (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). Plus, in trying to minimize the pain of change, many managers actually create more of it. By contrast, companies that "rip the band-aid off quickly – implementing change programs that are fast, focused, and simultaneous" – have the chance to create effective and long-lasting value (Pace, 2002, p.4).

Implications for public relations.

Change will not occur in an organization unless changes are made at the level of everyday interactions (Holtzhausen, 2001). Frontline managers pioneer this balancing act (Hatch, 1997), but a public relations practitioner can be a useful resource and valuable strength for the organization. As part of the dominant coalition, the "group of senior decision makers who control an organization," the public relations practitioner can use the pursuit of power as a positive force for change in activating and defining change in the organization (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 1). In other words, the practitioner can work as an activist for either the resistance to or the desire for change (Holtzhausen & Vito, 2002).

This can be accomplished through research based public relations programs, whereby managers are enabled to "solve complex problems, set and achieve or exceed goals and objectives, track the opinions and beliefs of key publics, and employ program

strategies with confidence" (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001, p. 4). The use of research cannot guarantee success. However, it can improve the likelihood of achieving desired outcomes by better understanding employee needs, fears, wants, and expectations. Additionally, research allows practitioners to understand the overall needs of the organization and can help in identifying the need for and roles of necessary change agents.

Unclear Policies

Often when things go wrong in an organization, the problem can be traced back to what someone should have known. This "should have known" within organizations represents policies.

A policy (also called an organizational rule) describes a prescribed guide for conduct or action and can be formal or informal; written or unwritten (oral); acknowledged or unacknowledged; implicit or explicit; general (e.g., organization-wide) or particular (e.g., specific to a given task); and positively stated (e.g., "do this") or implied (e.g., "avoid this"); reinforced or not reinforced (Gilsdorf, 1987, p. 35).

Policies are typically created at a high level within the organization, often done by strategic planners, but at times by lower-level management responsible for their own departments (Gildsford, 1998). For example, the planners might develop policies on wide scale initiatives such as sick leave policy while the individual departments might determine how employee breaks are handled. No matter what the origin, policies exist, and they "guide the decisions of organizational actors" (p. 174).

To be successful in an organization, an employee must find out what policies exist and decide whether it is in his/her interest to follow them. Often this can be tricky because there can be many layers of policies, and at times there are conflicting, outdated, or incompletes guidelines entwined throughout. Learning policies is a continual process (Gildsford, 1998). This is because as events occur, people interpret them. Gray, Bougon, and Donnellon (1985) found three additional reasons for the continual learning process. First, they said that action-taking causes amended meanings. In other words, through action decisions and/or policies are made, causing the need for learning. Another reason for the learning process is the power of leadership. Because leaders are essentially powerful for they can cause others to accept *their* interpretations and learn a new way of doing things. Finally, some (not all) organizational meanings will be widely agreed upon. When this agreement is lacking, organizational members will often strive for agreement until it is reached or the policy is abolished.

Organizational newcomers can have difficulty learning the ropes, but this difficulty of learning policies is not limited to them. Instead, unclear policies can occur at all tenure levels resulting from organization to evolutions such as individual promotions, changes in management, and shifts in the way things are done. Perpetually unclear policies are part of what Weick (1995) described as the continuousness and complexity of sensemaking. In other words, organizations are complex systems that interpret events for their members and create meanings or policies that guide actions (Draft & Weick, 1984).

Czarniawska-Joerges and Joerges (1988) found that managers who convey shared meaning about the organization's policies, especially pertaining to the organization's values and cultural assumptions, reduced uncertainty and facilitated control. Gildsford's (1998) organizational study found that employees more confidently followed visible and clearly defined policies, and found that the more visible a policy was, the more confident employees felt in following it and the more management supported it.

Lesser (2001) found organizational knowledge to be at risk during times of uncertainty. This is because, in a state of uncertainty, typically more knowledgeable employees are the ones leaving, causing a lack of trust and hurting knowledge transfer. This becomes a larger problem when it is the departing employees who are organizational resources for the accomplishment of work goals and reduction of policy uncertainty (Wilson & Malik, 1995). This adds to the fact that "informal, nonhierarchical means of communication appear to be filling gaps between what employees want to know and what management has time, attention, or inclination to tell them" (Gildsford, 1998, p. 177).

Implications for public relations.

Public relations practitioners make a key contribution by translating policies into easily accessible information pieces such as newsletters, booklets, manuals, and the intranet. Realistically, however, the practitioner may not be skilled in the knowledge of all specific policies and procedures. This is particularly true in an organization where those directly involved (including management), are uncertain about policies. Therefore, the skills of the practitioner would be greater served by assisting in the formation of

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"intraoganizational links to identifying members who might be good sources of work related information" (Wilson & Malik, 1995, p. 31).

Additionally, in being a part of the dominant coalition the role of the public relations practitioner would not be to simply input decisions made by others in an organization, but to instead assert him or herself as a member of the decision-making team. It is through this active participation that practitioners can accurately relay information between the two groups aiding in the clarity of policies.

Furthermore, one set of policies will not fit all organizations. Therefore, it is important that all organizational actors understand that there is not a simple formula or textbook to follow in establishing policies. Organizational leaders cannot foresee all information needs and should not attempt to formulate blanket or stagnant guidelines for all situations.

Job Insecurity

Job insecurity is a "discrepancy between the level of security employees would like their jobs to provide, and the level that they perceive to exist" (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & Van Vuuren, 1991, p. 18). There are many reasons that lead to job insecurity, but most boil down to two main topics: previous or potential reduction in workforce and unclear job requirements.

Within organizations employees heavily weigh the extrinsic job factor of security or insecurity (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989). Essentially, organization-based self-esteem is tied to job insecurity (Hui & Lee, 2000). Studies found uncertainty perception, in

relation to job insecurity, resulted in employee complaints such as lack of sleep; intent to quit; dizziness; loss of appetite; feelings of anger, skepticism, and withdrawal; decrease in satisfaction; and an increase in stress (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Hui & Lee, 2000). Such outcomes are important from a humanitarian perspective but they are also an organizational financial burden as related to healthcare costs and absenteeism. Because of this, the relationship between job insecurity and subsequent complaints is both theoretically and practically important to organizational understanding (Ashford, Lee, & Bobko, 1989).

Over the past few decades, organizational reductions in workforce, specifically downsizing (layoffs), restructuring, and mergers, have increased in frequency. Through this, employees have become increasingly more insecure, and with good reason. For example, Walsh (1988) found that mergers and takeovers often result in loss of jobs, status, benefits, and opportunities.

Once a company goes through this type of shake-up, employees typically fear for their jobs. As a result, reductions in workforce are often associated with survivor guilt; decreases in morale, productivity, commitment, and work satisfaction; and increases in turnover, job insecurity, and stress (Casey, Miller, & Johnson, 1997). To make sense of the past, present, and future, employees elicit and respond to messages from their environment, specifically from their supervisors and coworkers. The less information available through the supervisor, the more apt the employees are to believe information from less traditional communication channels such as rumors. Studies have found that employees are most curious about organizational plans for the future and that they prefer

to seek information from their immediate supervisor (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000).

Greenhalgh and Rosenblatt (1984) suggested that the level of insecurity experienced depends on the perceived threat (e.g., the likelihood of job loss) and the perceived amount of control. Additionally, firms facing substantial uncertainty are likely to make frequent adjustments in staffing levels (Klass, McClendon, & Gainey, 1999). This then becomes a circular event, because adjustments in staffing create additional uncertainty.

Additionally, ongoing organizational change such as undefined and redefined roles creates uncertainty and insecurity. As such, previous research showed employees and organizations enter into a psychological contract of which it is clear what each will give and receive (Schein, 1980). This gives employees a sense of "reasonable control" (Gwynne, 2002, p. 15). Therefore, performance appraisals are a great cause of anxiety for employees.

For many employees the performance appraisal is the one time of year they receive information about their performance. It is within this review that an employee learns about his/her meeting or failing to meet organizational goals. The goals themselves may be objective or subjective in nature, definition, and determination. "Often managers within the same company use differing or potentially conflicting performance criteria" (Gwynne, 2002, p. 15). These vague expectations create employee fear and uncertainty in the security of their jobs.

Management by measurement is a reality of the world we currently live in, according to Lingle and Schiemann (1996). Within this, two factors of employee uncertainty are the "clarity of measures in each strategic area of the business, and the frequency with which measurement is taken" (p. 57). Managers and employees should work together to clarify the following five areas to gain agreement and understanding of employee job requirements. Both the manager and the employee should understand and agree on: (1) organizational objectives the employee is to achieve, (2) resources and support the employee will need from the organization, (3) personal objectives the employee seeks in his/her work, (4) skills and knowledge the employee will need to develop to achieve the objectives, and (5) rewards or recognition the employee can expect for specific levels of performance (Wing, 2000).

"When employees understand management's expectations, they apparently contribute better to management's goals" (Gildsford, 1998, p. 175). Essentially, employees' commitment to the organization positively correlates with organizational clarity. This is maintained even in states of change if employees "sense some form of clarity or orderliness exists for work activities, goals, objectives, and the like" (Guzley, 1992, p. 398). As stated previously, Gildsford's (1998) organizational study found that employees more confidently follow visible and clearly defined policies. Although this is desired, it is often not realized. Indeed, in a national study by Harcourt, Richerson, and Wattier (1991) middle managers rated the quality of information they received on company policies, objectives and other job responsibilities elements, as poor.

Overall, the concept of a shared organizational meaning is fundamental to the creation of organizational reality and coping with uncertainty related to employee job insecurity. This is because through a shared vision a common perception of the organization is created, and according to Pfeffer (1992) "perceptions can become reality" (p. 136). As Scott (1995) explained, the construction and maintenance of social identities allow individuals to provide a foundation for action in social situations. Therefore, this perception of reality affects how others behave within uncertainty and can subsequently aid in organizational success.

Although the concept of shared meaning is often a catchphrase in organizations, it frequently is unrealized. This is because communication is lacking and the organizational climate is not participative. Even to the extent that, oftentimes, employees do not feel free to ask what managers really want. Ashford and Cummings (1985) referred to the risk employees take in exposing their ignorance and asserting their needs. They argued that managers should reduce risk by communicating with employees and discussing their interpretation. They should also

> become more self-conscious about their own actions and how employees are
> interpreting them as feedback... Managers need to be aware that through their
> behavior they signal to employees those behaviors they most value, those
> employees they most esteem, and what strategies really lead to goal attainment in
> that setting (p. 78).

Overall, organizational uncertainties may threaten an individual's sense of self-worth and feelings of competence, making him/her insecure in his/her job. Therefore, by

"focusing on fostering an employee's self-worth and self-esteem, managers can improve the negative effects of uncertainty" (Hui & Lee, 2000, p. 21). But, before this can be accomplished, management should clearly understand the causes of the uncertainty.

Additionally, employees look at an organization's reward system, as well as its communication, for signals about what the organization really values. Porter and Lawler (1968) found that employees are more likely to perform desired behaviors if they are told what is expected, offered incentives toward those behaviors, shown they are feasible, and rewarded fairly for doing desired behaviors.

Though it should be clear that an organization's reward system is for reinforcing desired behaviors, Kerr's (1975) famous article *On the Folly of Rewarding A, While Hoping for B* showed otherwise. Essentially, this is the rewarding of behaviors that are contrary to what the organization actually wants. For example, organizations often want to promote teamwork and collaboration while they reward employees for being the *best* team member. It is important to note that although the Kerr article was written many years ago, this problem is still rampant in organizations today. A poll conducted in 1994 by Dechant and Veiga found that ninety percent of respondents agreed that "Kerr's folly is still prevalent in corporate America today. Over half concluded that the folly is widespread in their companies" (as cited in Kerr, 1995, p. 15).

If organizations reward the behaviors they say they reward, their messages are congruent and credible, but if the messages are conflicting, employees' responses will be at worst antagonistic (because contradictory signals generate resentment) and at best unpredictable (because no clear signal is available for guidance) (Gildsford, 1998).

Implications for public relations.

Winklhofer (2002) suggested that a focus on communication and an awareness of its fragility would help employees with job insecurity. Within organizations that have uncertainty related to job insecurity, a public relations practitioner can be a resource for both employees and management. Through this role, they can work to ensure proper communication. This communication can include information about possible layoffs and job responsibilities as well as ways to cope with uncertainty. Additionally, through involvement in building a communication culture practitioners can help managers communicate, by being actively involved in fostering a culture of participative communication and decision-making and by assisting in the development of organizational processes such as reward and recognition systems. This internal communication function would go past the traditional information provision by working closely with management to aid in the improvement of their communication processes. For example, practitioners can be involved in the training of management in delivering "bad news" to people and ways to help "survivors" (Crabb, 1995, p. 24).

One way to aid employees is to clearly articulate the organizational goals. Often executives "institute broad policies and establish corporate objectives… and simply assume that employees will understand them" (Clampitt, Berk, & Williams, 2002, p. 53). Instead of just leaving the employees to "figure it out," leaders should communicate to inform employees of such changes in policies or goals. This education of the state of the business can aid employees in overcoming a sense of job insecurity by understanding requirements. Additionally, this will aid in cultivating trust in the organization.

For example, Crabb (1995) looked at uncertainty involved with the Glaxo-Wellcome corporate merger. They found that employees were uncertain about what they would be doing, where they would be doing it, if their job were secure, and so forth. To help with this uncertainty, management reminded the staff about the employee assistance programs, and launched a stress awareness program. They provided managers and supervisors training in change management and how to deliver bad news. They also stepped up face-to-face meetings in an attempt to keep in touch with staff views and receive feedback.

External Environment

Over the years, much research has contributed to the view that organizations need to adapt to their environments. One of the central issues in this adaptation process is coping with environmental uncertainty. The organizational environment is defined as "the totality of physical and social factors that are taken directly into consideration in the decision-making behavior of individuals in the organization" (Duncan, 1972b, p. 155). Essentially, there are two sources of environmental uncertainty: internal and external. For the purpose of this study the researcher identified trends in internal environmental uncertainties and discussed them independently, such as organizational change, unclear policies, and job insecurities. Therefore, in relation to the environment, this study will refer to the environment as consisting exclusively of external organizational factors.

Environmental uncertainty has long been recognized as an important variable in the explanation of organizational equilibrium and performance (March & Simon, 1958).

Much research has been conducted to conceptualize and measure uncertainty; however, most have followed the assumptions that uncertainty is dysfunctional and that organizations cannot influence the environment (e.g., Duncan, 1972). Since the mid 1970s this viewpoint has been changing.

For example, Jauft and Kraft (1986) ascertained that organizations often seek or create external uncertainty to maximize competition and increase profits. More broadly viewed, Hatch (1997) stated that, "Every organization interacts with other members of its environment" (p. 65). This is particularly true within uncertain situations related to the environment, where organizational politics are likely to occur. According to Weick (2001), organizations have two choices with the environment. They can choose to be proactive or reactive. Ultimately,

> Organizations have to build their environments before they can have the
> luxury of controlling them. The ways in which they construct them
> cognitively will have strong effects on their actual actions of control.
> Furthermore, in the act of controlling their constructed environments,
> organizations learn quite vividly what those environments consist of (p. 183).

In other words, organizations create their environments, and it is through these efforts that related uncertainty can be absorbed.

It is important to note that even though the assumptions related to environmental uncertainty have changed over the years, a fundamental understanding about organizations has not. This is the need to understand and act according to the organization's structure. In essence, "flexible, organic styles and structures benefit

turbulent, uncertain environments, and bureaucratic, mechanistic styles are appropriate

for stable, predictable environments" (Bourgeois, 1985, p. 549).

When organizations potentially face high environmental uncertainty, they must

keep a close watch on the environment for information to analyze and interpret in order

to manage for and possibly reduce the uncertainty (Manaliso, 1995). Often change

triggers are events in the external environment that are of high importance and magnitude

requiring organizational response. Change triggers play an important role in strategic

control, which involves the monitoring, and evaluation of plans, activities, and results

with a view toward future action (Julian & Scifres, 2002).

This is partially due to the complexity of the environment. According to Hatch

(1997), the environment is comprised of seven sectors: the social sector (e.g., class

structure and demographics), the cultural sector (e.g., values and expectation), the legal

sector (e.g., laws and taxes), the political sector (e.g., autocratic or democratic), the

economic sector (e.g., financial markets), the technical sector (e.g., systems technology),

and the physical sector (e.g., nature and natural resources).

Some external environmental uncertainty will always exist, such as the financial

markets for financial organizations. Miller and Shamsie (1999) suggest companies come

to terms with this uncertainty by identifying the source of it and determining the degree

in which it can be reduced. Ultimately, being cognizant of external uncertainty will aid

in preventing surprises.

The most successful organizations in the long run are those that continuously

adapt to changes in the environment because the forces for change in the environment are

diverse, competitive, and continue to build at an increasing rate (Sauser & Sauser, 2002). Therefore, it has become essential to manage external environmental uncertainty as a continuous process, not as a discrete event or even a series of discrete events.

Implications for public relations.

"Organizations are effective when they have the expertise needed to respond to threats and opportunities in their environment" (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 1). Typically, in an effort to be both proactive and reactive, organizations utilize boundary spanning in an attempt to monitor the internal and external environment to determine if updating is necessary. Often this responsibility lies with public relations practitioners. Essentially, a boundary spanner is someone who monitors the environment, passing along necessary information to the decision makers (Hatch, 1997; J. Grunig, 1992). In other words, according to Leifer and Huber (1977) boundary spanners "operate under the skin of the organization" allowing them to first interpret environment environmental conditions and then relay it to decision makers (p. 235). This understanding will allow the dominant coalition to make educated decisions pertaining to priorities and strategies while abiding to necessary environmental cues (Bhatt & Zaveri, 2002). Or, if appropriate, the practitioner can serve in a management role overseeing a skilled environmental scanning team to ensure proper communication of the material.

In keeping with the concept that organizations create their environment, it is most appropriate to look at the role of a boundary spanner as monitoring and interpreting

perceptions of the environment rather than with more objective indicators of environmental conditions (Leifer & Huber, 1977).

Another useful public relations tool for helping organizations cope with uncertainty is buffering. It is often considered as the role of protecting internal operations from "environmental shocks such as material, labor, or capital shortages" (Hatch, 1997, p. 91). Although buffering is less common than boundary spanning, both roles are important means to monitor, identify and cope with organizational uncertainty. This will allow organizations to be aware of environmental changes and to make quick adjustments to new contingencies (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Williams, 2002).

At the same time, it is important to be aware that organizational learning is influenced by individual and organizational world-views. This is because oftentimes organizations see what they want to see and filter out information that fails to match their self-conceived image (Murray, 2002). So, underlying a firm's coping ability is its capacity to learn and change simultaneously. This type of adaptive learning then involves the concept of aligning an organization with its environment, and this can be accomplished through boundary spanning and buffering. Ultimately, this awareness in organizations is imperative to aid in the overcoming of what Weick (1996) sees as the "fact that firms have a poor sense of who they are, what they are doing, and why they face the outcomes they do" (p. 307).

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Uncertainty Communication Practices and Public Relations

As stated previously, communication is the thread entwined through all organizational uncertainty. According to Meyer (2002), "In these uncertain and always changing times – or for that matter, in any situation – communication is critical between leadership and its members" (p. 7). It is through communication that uncertainty can be caused (with improper or lack of communication), prevented (with communication of timely and accurate information), or accepted (with proper communication of the how's and why's of the uncertainty).

Executives can communicate about anything but they cannot communicate about everything (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Fundamentally, this is largely because communication is associated with costs (Miller & Jablin, 1991). Minimizing those costs with limited effort may be preferable to organizations, and one way to accomplish this is to create a tolerance of uncertainty. Often the best way to do this is through proper communication. In other words, accurate and timely communication can aid in coping with uncertainty, thereby reducing the need for corrective or after the fact communication. As Schramm (1971) pointed out, communication is complicated by people.

> Communication (*human* communication, at least) is *something people do.* It has no life of its own. There is no magic about it except what people in the communication relationship put into it. There is no meaning in a message except what the people put into it (p. 17).

The aim is to give employees as much information as possible (Crabb, 1995). But, the act of disseminating large amounts of information can backfire causing a negative result. The motives seem admirable because "managers often assume that more information equals better communication and decision-making. Simple, yes. Effective, rarely"(Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000 p. 12). This is because employees receive a vast array of information that is often confusing, contradictory, or vague. Weick (1995) purposed that what is commonly considered uncertainty actually is "equivocality" or the result of communication that is subject to two or more interpretations and usually lead to confusion (p. 27). In essence, there are too many organizational meanings, not too few. According to Weick (1995),

> The problem faced by the sensemaker is one of equivocality, not one of
> uncertainty. The problem is confusion, not ignorance. I emphasize this because
> those investigators who favor the metaphor of information processing often view
> sensemaking, as they do most other problems, as a setting where people need
> more information. That is not what people need when they are overwhelmed by
> equivocality. Instead, they need values, priorities, and clarity about preferences
> (p. 27).

In other words, people need clear and accurate information that is tailored to meet a need of the situation, event, or recipient. Above all, it is important to know the employees and understand their needs and points of view. With any communication, it is helpful to define the purpose or goal to stay focused.

There is no "one size fits all" communication strategy, but there are some aspects of communication that many organizations share. According to Argenti (1998), the top key goals of employee communication from a study of over 200 companies are:

1. To improve morale and foster goodwill between employees and management.

2. To inform employees about internal changes such as reorganization and staff promotions.

3. To explain compensation and benefit plans such as a new health care plan.

4. To increase employee understanding of the company and its products, organization, ethics, culture, and external environment.

5. To change employee behavior toward becoming more productive, quality oriented, and entrepreneurial (p. 201).

Although the above-mentioned communication goals are typically known within organizations, they are often not practiced. Gildsford (1998) found that most organizations could do more to help employees cope with uncertainty by making better communication decisions. For example, communication strategies fail when they inadequately handle uncertainty associated with organizational change (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). This is mainly due to the organizational parameters that can limit communication surrounding the change such as the number of people involved, the strength of relationships, methods available, and prior interactions (Salem, 2002). Additionally, communication should be timely, consistent, complete, and recursive.

Public relations is a tool that can aid in organizational uncertainty. Above all, public relations is "an effort to mitigate uncertainty" (Murphy, 1996 p. 102). This is

because public relations, is a "management function that identifies, establishes, and maintains mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the publics on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, p. 6).

To best understand what involvement a public relations practitioner has in organizational uncertainty, it is helpful to be familiar with the associated public relations roles. In organizations, roles are "abstractions of behavior patterns of individuals" (Dozier, 1992, p. 327). Roles set apart individuals in organizations while defining expectations organizations have of employees.

Dozier (1992) distinguished public relations practitioner roles to be either that of managers or technicians: "Managers make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations program outcomes," whereas "technicians carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products that implement policy decisions made by others" (p. 333). For example, the public relations manager role is not limited to communications, and includes tasks requiring skills such as research and strategic planning. On the other hand, the technician role typically includes tasks such as writing and disseminating communication. It is important to note that the manager and technician roles only refer to the *primary* functions of a public relations practitioner. That is, public relations practitioners normally do not function *only* as managers or *only* as technicians, but primarily as managers or primarily as technicians.

Both roles would be involved in uncertainty management. Managers would participate in strategic planning, buffering, boundary spanning, and by helping management make decisions about organizational uncertainty, all the while, making

important decisions about which information should be disseminated and how. Technicians on the other hand would deal with the information and structure it in such a way that it is accessible and easy to digest. Therefore, the excellent functioning public relations department would incorporate collaborative work between the two groups – "with the top communicator verbalizing concepts and ideas with her subordinate. The subordinate then commits those ideas to paper" (Dozier, L. Grunig, & J. Grunig, 1995, p. 56).

Since communication is the key to coping with uncertainty, it is critical to understand the different communication practices. Two-way communication and one-way communication are the outer ends of a communication continuum (J. Grunig, 2001).

Two-way communication.

Two-way communication is a technique that, by definition, employs social science research, allows management to better understand the attitudes, opinions, and behaviors of their employees. Some two-way communication techniques are asymmetrical, meaning that management seeks to understand more about its employees so they can be persuaded to management's point of view. Other techniques are symmetrical, meaning that participation through an open dialogue is fostered between management and employees that allows both sides to shape a better relationship (J. Grunig, 2001). By using symmetrical communication, leaders try to satisfy their own interests while simultaneously satisfying the interests of their employees. J. Grunig (2001) argued,

Symmetry does not take place in an ideal setting where competing interests come together to resolve differences because they share a goal of social equilibrium and harmony. Rather, it takes place in situations where groups come together to protect and enhance their self-interests. Argumentation, debate, and persuasion take place, but dialog, listening, understanding, and relationship building also occur because they are more effective in resolving conflicts than are one-way attempts at compliance gaining (p. 24).

Katz and Kahn (1966) discussed the asymmetrical communication needs of management and employees and determined that an individual in a direct-report relationship does not always want to send or receive the information desired or offered by the other.

The greater the conflict between the communication needs of these two hierarchically situated senders and recipients of information, the more likely is an increase in lateral communication...Horizontal exchange can be an escape valve for frustration in communicating upward and downward; and sometimes it can operate to accomplish some of the essential business of the organization (p. 247).

Essentially, an individuals' cognitive style, the uncertainty level, and the nature of the organization (organic or mechanistic) regulate what kinds of organizational linkages (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal) are relied on for information and whether the communication will be symmetrical or asymmetrical (Wilson & Malik, 1995). For example, a vertical linkage would be when employees look for assistance from management, a horizontal linkage would be when employees turn to their peers, and a

diagonal linkage could be seen when employees turn to those outside the chain of command.

Overall, participation is the key component of two-way communication. As such, Holtzhausen (2001) identified participation as a special form of communication. Employee participation is one of the oldest areas of study within organizational behavior with the first published participation study dating back to 1913 (Glew, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Van Fleet, 1995; Pruden & Vavra, 2000). Today, employee participation continues to be the subject of "widespread interest in contemporary organizations" (Drehmer, Belohlav, & Coye, 2000, p. 397). This is because participation has been identified as a vital requirement for organizational success. As with all communication, if done correctly participation can aid in the successful handling of uncertainty and if handled improperly it can *cause* uncertainty or even failure.

Even though there has been considerable study within the field, there is not a generally accepted definition of participation. The definitions often include reference to eliciting input (Cooke, 1992), shared decision-making (Drehmer et al., 2000), involvement of multiple employees (Glew et al., 1995), and optimization of information flow (Cludts, 1999). Overall, organizational participation can be said to be a process that "allows and enables individuals throughout the organization to have the opportunity to plan, make, and modify decisions affecting their work environment and their organization as a whole" (Drehmer et al., 2000, p. 398).

Within an organization, participatory processes may be found in many forms. These processes can be seen as "add-ons" to existing structure (e.g., parallel committees),

as an integral part of corporate reorganization (e.g., all level work teams), or as a fundamental way of doing business (e.g., employee cooperatives) (Stohl & Cheney, 2001). It is through these avenues that employees can participate. The gain is to broadened workers' rights and responsibilities. Examples of issues typically covered through employee participation are the following: shop-floor questions (e.g., vacation days), mid-level decisions (e.g., hiring and firing), and upper-level issues (e.g., mergers) (McCall, 2001).

In many countries, including the United States, participation is becoming a fundamental social right of people in the workplace (Stohl & Cheney, 2001; McCall, 2001). Employee involvement is likely to be seen as more meaningful when employees have more authority to implement changes (Schwochau, Delaney, & Jarley, 1997). Therefore, employee involvement programs typically include: 1) a human relations model, which assumes that both employee and management have the potential to benefit; 2) a human resources model, which encourages employee participation as a tool for employee development; 3) a workplace democracy model, which supports employee participation as a way to redistribute power within the organization; or 4) instrumental management, which views employee participation as a vehicle for obtaining management goals (Glew et al., 1995).

Just with overall participation, employee participation in decision-making can also be argued to have both positive and negative outcomes at the organizational level. Innately, employees are seen as having the most to gain from participation. This is because with participation the possibility to meet higher-order needs is attained. In turn,

this leads to increased morale and satisfaction and decreased resistance to change (Schwochau, et al., 1997). The organizational benefit for employee participation is the variety of inputs received. Each employee has a specific expertise and participation is a means for management to gather information and feedback and to communicate problem solving information. This allows for an increase in the quality of decisions and in the efficiency of the organization (Cludts, 1999).

Management typically encourages employee participation to help employees grow or to "increase their willingness and capacity to bear responsibility" (Cludts, 1999, p.62). The goals of management within an organization will influence the breadth of employee participation. Typically, participation can be identified as pertaining to four primary areas that often are great causes of uncertainty: goal setting, decision-making, problem solving, and changes to the organization (Glew et al., 1995).

The power structure of many organizations is to some extent autocratic. The greater this autocracy, the more "individual freedom and group decision-making is virtually impossible" and the more uncertainty runs rampant (Cludts, 1999, p. 63). Therefore, participation can be viewed as a means to increase employee influence, this ultimately resulting in a more equal distribution of power and responsibility. Participation possesses the ability to reduce the power of any group especially managers; therefore, one of the biggest obstacles to the implementation of participative schemes is management's fear to loose part of their power (Cludts, 1999; Schwochau et al., 1997). Overall, organizations benefit from employee participation because of the variety of

inputs received (Cludts, 1999). Subsequently, participation leads to commitment, not merely compliance.

The key factor behind managing uncertainty is leadership in the form of a committed team of leaders and managers that guide the effort. However, participation can be a double-edged sword. "Not only can participation lead to a poor solution if the process is not carefully managed, but also it can be enormously time consuming" (Liberatore et at., 2000, p. 185). Time translates to money, so transaction costs rise as participation increases. The more people become involved in making and carrying out a decision, the higher the financial costs. These added costs reduce the net benefit associated with increased employee participation (Cooke, 1992). Thus, employee participation can reach the point where it is considered inefficient (Schwochau et al., 1997). The dominant coalition that includes a skilled public relations practitioner would be equipped to make the determination of the appropriate level of participation. Often, an evaluation of employees will aid in determining the necessary amount of participation. This evaluation would include indicators such as employee morale and an understanding of employee uncertainty perceptions.

Employees have diverse needs, wants, skills, and ways to cope with uncertainty. This can potentially cause some employees to participate in decision-making while others refrain. Reasons for this can range from employees that feel their opinion is not needed to employees that are not included in the process because of large workloads. No matter what the reason, it is the responsibility of management to recognize the existence of these climate elements (Cludts, 1999; Shadur, Kienzle, & Rodwell, 1999). Additionally,

management should consider what is keeping employees from participating and try to motivate employees to overcome the obstacles (Hassounah, 2002).

Inappropriate participation can reduce the degree of success in reaching desired goals (Drehmer et al, 2000). When considering changes in employee involvement in decision-making, employers should look carefully at all possible variables including: "the type of organization, the nature of the problem, the strategic goals of the organization, and who is involved in the decision-making" (Thompson, 2002, p. 285). Employee participation is an important aspect of an organization, thus it is key to "achieving increased organizational effectiveness and positive employee perception" (Shadur et al., 1999, p. 479).

Clampitt, DeKoch, and Williams (2002) suggested one way to aid in fostering a participative employee network is to hire the right people. Essentially, employees should be able to work in teams (since this is often required for consensus), readily adapt to change, take risks, and remain flexible. Hiring the right people is critical because "newly hired employees that experience uncertainty tend to be less satisfied with their jobs, less productive, and more likely to voluntarily leave their organizations" (Spiker & Daniels, 1981, p. 345).

Essentially, a two-way organizational communication strategy such as participation starts with either a perceived or anticipated benefit/outcome. In other words, upper management can decide, for the entire organization, to implement a strategy to "achieve some anticipated benefit, such as decreased uncertainty; increased performance, morale, motivation, quality; or overall organizational effectiveness and

competitiveness" (Glew et al., 1995, p. 396). Therefore, if this is the desired outcome, it would serve as a benefit for managers to increase participation within the organization.

However, it is important to note that the actual participation program determines the outcome of the strategy. Therefore, the results may be quite different than originally presumed, and they could turn out to be positive or negative with the magnitude being greater or less than anticipated. Essentially, management designs or plans a communication program to lead to the desired outcome. This plan can include various forms of alterations in power and influence patterns within the organization. Once the strategy is decided on, the next step is to implement the intended program. It is important to be cognizant of organizational (culture, technology, history, design, and operating systems) and individual factors (ability level, preferences, attitudes, and personality) that may serve as obstacles or facilitators involved with implementing the chosen strategy (Glew et al., 1995).

Participation increases an organization's ability to deal with uncertainty, but ultimately, employee involvement does not take place until the employee perceives the involvement. Communication is the tool that can aid in this sense of involvement (Holtzhausen, 2001). As times change, there is an increasing need for more personalized communication processes such as one-on-ones and town hall meetings. So, the strategy with which organizational participation best is achieved is two-way communication. No matter what the medium, organizations will benefit from frequent open communication channels, especially in states of organizational uncertainty (Argenti, 1998; Crabb, 1995; Pruden & Vavra, 2000).

One-way communication.

One-way communication is the technique that disseminates information through controlled media such as advertisements or newsletters. These methods are in essence an absence of participation (J. Grunig, 2001). This communication model is used by organizations to change the attitudes, opinions, and behavior of employees without targeting specific messages to particular groups, and without simultaneously considering any alteration of their own attitudes, opinions, or behavior. Essentially, as the definition above explains, one-way communication is dissemination of a message without the feedback loop to propel it to the involvement of collaborative means.

One-way communication is most effective when it supplements two-way communication. For example, to aid in coping with organizational uncertainty and establishing a participative environment a shared organizational vision should be created. Pfeffer (1992) saw this shared vision (although not necessarily written) as a means of getting things done. It is his belief that if people share a common goal, through the use of shared vocabulary, they then have mutual behavior and subsequently hierarchical authority becomes less important. Not only should this vision be verbally communicated, but it should also be written and posted through out the organization. Essentially, this communicated commitment of vision is asymmetrical or persuasive in nature.

Even if the existing communication has all the right mechanisms, leaders still must make choices about what channels to use. For instance, when announcing major changes, as in the example above, managers should use multiple channels because it increases the probability employees will receive key messages. Different mediums work

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best in different situations and also with different employees. Some employees might ignore print media or e-mail and only respond to oral messages, while for others, the reverse. Managers should also use face-to-face meetings, to allow for rapid feedback and quick adaptation to employee concerns (Clampitt, Berk, & Williams, 2002).

When there are deficient communication channels, rumors run rampant and rumors lead to uncertainty (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998, 2000, & 2002). Defined by Allport and Postman (1947), a rumor is (a) information that is not verified, (b) is of local or current interest or importance, and (c) is intended primarily for belief.

To organizational leaders, rumors are often a cause of trepidation. Though not always harmful, rumors contribute to the perception of internal or external organizations, products, services, or events. Specifically, rumors are bits of information that are of interest to people that are not accompanied by secure standards of evidence, and that are proposed for possible belief. A characteristic of a rumor is doubt about its veracity (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002).

It is important to be cognizant of the differences between rumors and news, gossip, and legends. News at its foundation has standards of authentication, and rumors do not. Gossip on the other hand, is typically about private affairs and used as a form of entertainment, while rumors are characteristically about important or significant topics. Additionally, rumors are created to be believed, such as George Washington, the cherry tree, and telling the truth; while a legend is typically created to convey a message. Through an understanding of these fundamental differences, one can see the possible severe effects of rumors (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2002).

"Social science research on the generation and spread of rumors has identified four important predictors of rumor activity: uncertainty, anxiety, importance, and belief" (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998, p. 2). Rumors have been known to sap productivity, lower employee morale, sully reputations, and interfere with formal organizational communication (DiFonzo & Bordia, 1998). Organizations are particularly vulnerable in times of organizational change, restructuring, and layoffs, and as DiFonzo and Bordia (2002) said, "The need for rumor control during change is essential" (p.173). Additionally, organizational leaders should structure a climate of trust and honesty (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000).

The establishment of effective formal communication channels can potentially overcome rumor activity. Additionally, the organization should structure a climate of trust and honesty (DiFonzo & Bordia, 2000). Overall, researchers have identified two main reasons why communication itself is not enough to successfully combat rumors. First, rational discussion usually does not work, particularly when it is impossible to prove the truth, when the technological complexity of the problem is hard to explain, or when the rumor is highly emotional. Second, a credible source must be found, but it is often difficult to find a source the public will deem credible (Pritchard & Hatch, 2003).

According to Fearn-Banks (2002), there are six types of rumors: (1) intentional rumor (started with a purpose); (2) premature-fact rumor (an early version of what will later become the truth); (3) malicious rumor (started to damage someone or something like a competitors' business); (4) outrageous rumor (so outrageous that "It has to be

true!"); (5) nearly true rumor (is partially true); and (6) the birthday rumor (has regular birthdays and continues to emerge over and over again) (p. 46).

At times rumors are out of the control of an organization. For example, DiFonzo and Bordia (1997) found that when related to the financial markets rumors do not have to be believed or trusted in order to powerfully affect trading; "they simply have to make sense" (p. 346). In other words, they found that the presence of a message in conjunction with a change in stock price served to signal the direction of the next day's price change. This external rumor has a potentially large effect on organizations especially financial organizations since they handle customer concerns and questions pertaining to such market uncertainty.

With this in mind, Clampitt, DeKoch, and Williams (2002) suggested five steps for communicating in during times of uncertainty. Although all five subsequently follow, for the purpose of this study the researcher determined that only three are applicable. First, de-emphasize formal presentations. This does not mean to stop formal presentations, because as mentioned earlier, it is best to communicate though multiple channels. However, it does mean that the emphasis should *not* be on formal presentations. This is because formal presentations do not foster employee involvement or two-way communication.

Second, is the idea that executives set the tone for employee views through language, so organizational language should be modified. One example is the use of absolutes. Through telling employees that they must accept or reject something without the availability of alternative plans, opens the door to uncertainty. Additionally, weather

metaphors should not be used to instill confidence. For example, the statement "We don't see any storm clouds on the horizon, so the forecast is for full production next month" is at its very nature unpredictable and can lead to uncertainty due to the dynamics of weather (p. 16).

When uncertainty is involved executives should follow the third step by discussing contingencies. Although action then evaluation is preferred to planning then action, contingencies must be determined in either situation. It is through knowing that there is a back-up plan that permits employees to avoid the feeling like the bottom is dropping and thus aids in coping with uncertainty.

The fourth step is to ask penetrating questions. With this, it is believed that the right question can unmask artificial certainty. This then "introduces more doubt into conversations" (p.16). For the purpose of this study, the researcher has determined that as worded this step is contradictory to coping with uncertainty and more along the lines of inducing uncertainty. Possibly, if the penetrating questions were in an effort to determine employee perception of uncertainty this step would be appropriate.

Finally, the fifth step is to focus internal communication on routine and speed. This requires changing the method of communicating from formal to informal. In doing this, the organization would focus messages on how they think about issues not what they know. Although the authors do not expand on this, the researcher has determined that this too is inappropriate for coping with uncertainty because employees need to know facts, not just how management thinks about issues.

Generally speaking, the public relations practitioner serves as a counselor to management in an effort to aid in the translation of private aims to reasonable and acceptable policies and actions (About PR). In helping to define and implement policy, the practitioner utilizes a variety of professional communications skills and plays an integral role both within an organization and between an organization and its key publics.

For public relations practitioners to operate effectively, they cannot simply implement decisions made by others in the organization. Instead, they need to assert themselves as members of the dominant coalition – those with the authority to make decisions and set policy (Austin & Pinkleton, 2001). Often organizational senior managers are likely to turn to advisors, such as public relations practitioners, for advice on "how to proceed and on how to make sense of the organizational environment" (White & Verčič, 2001, p. 195).

Finally, according to the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Web site, public relations practitioners aid in the success of complex organizations by:

- Anticipating, analyzing and interpreting public opinion, attitudes, and issues that might impact, for good or ill, the operations and plans of the organization.

- Counseling management at all levels in the organization with regard to policy decisions, courses of action, and communications, taking into account their public ramifications and the organization's social or citizenship responsibilities.

- Researching, conducting, and evaluating, on a continuing basis, programs of action and communication to achieve the informed public understanding necessary to

success of an organization's aims. These may include marketing, financial,
fundraising, employee, community or government relations, and other programs.

- Planning and implementing the organization's efforts to influence or change public
  policy. Setting objectives, planning, budgeting, recruiting and training staff,
  developing facilities-in short, managing the resources needed to perform all of the
  above (About PR).

Summary

Overall, the review of literature leads to the construction of a public relations
framework of organizational uncertainty. Figure 1 demonstrates this construction and the
critical components of this theory. Essentially, organizational uncertainty is composed of
four main variables: organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurity, and the
external environment. Central to these variables is the construct of communication
practices. Combined, this represents the organization, and the table demonstrates how
communication practices are central to organizational uncertainty and influence each of
the variables.

For each of the four common causes of uncertainty, Figure 1 provides common
themes that come from the literature. For example, the primary components of
organizational change are (1) organizations must be built for change (Hatch, 1997), (2)
change produces emotions similar to those expressed during bereavement (Bennett,
2001), (3) shared decision-making is essential to the success of an organization (Jackson,

2001), and (4) action while feeling and analyzing is suggested (Pfeffer, 1992; Frost, 2002).

For unclear policies the main components are (1) learning policies is a continual process (Gildsford, 1998), (2) visible and clearly defined policies are more confidently followed (Gilsdorf, 1998), (3) employees must find out what policies exist and decide whether it is in his/her interest to follow them (Gildsford, 1998), and (4) policies guide decisions of organizational actors (Gildsford, 1998).

Job insecurity is comprised of (1) uncertainty perception, in relation to job insecurity, results in employee complaints and illness (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984; Hui & Lee, 2000), (2) the less information available through the supervisor, the more apt employees are to believe information from less traditional communication channels such as rumors (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000), (3) the level of insecurity experienced depends on the perceived threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), and (4) firms facing substantial uncertainty are likely to make frequent adjustments in staffing levels (Klass, McClendon, & Gainey, 1999).

Finally, the external environment key components are (1) organizations often seek or create external uncertainty to maximize competition and increase profits (Jauft & Kraft, 1986), (2) organizations can choose to be proactive or reactive (Weick, 1995), (3) boundary spanners monitor the environment, passing along necessary information to the decision makers (Hatch, 1997; J. Grunig, 1992), and (4) buffering protects internal operations from environmental shocks such as material, labor, or capital shortages (Hatch, 1997).

Figure 1: Public Relations Framework of Organizational Uncertainty

Organizational change

1. organizations must be built for change.
2. produces emotions similar to bereavement.
3. shared decision-making is essential to the success.
4. action while feeling and analyzing.

Job Insecurity

1. results in employee complaints and illness.
2. rumors are believed with less information from supervisors.
3. level experienced depends on perceived threat.
4. frequent adjustments in staffing levels.

Communication Practices

Unclear Policies

1. continual process.
2. visible and clearly defined policies are more confidently followed.
3. employees decide to follow or not.
4. guide decisions of organizational actors.

External Environment

1. sought or created to maximize competition and increase profits.
2. can be proactive or reactive.
3. boundary spanners monitor the environment.
4. buffering protects internal operations from environmental shocks.

Research Questions

There has been little research in public relations about organizational uncertainty. For this reason, research questions are more appropriate than hypotheses, so from the above review of literature, the following questions were formulated:

RQ1: Do public relations practitioners personally feel uncertain in their organizations?

RQ2: Do public relations practitioners perceive their organizations to have uncertainty?

RQ3: What degree of perceived involvement do public relations practitioners have in the management of uncertainty?

RQ4: What communication strategies do public relations practitioners utilize to aid employees in coping with organizational uncertainty?

RQ5: Is there a relationship between public relations practitioner expression of personal uncertainty and what is perceived to exist in the organizations?

RQ6: What influences public relations practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty?

RQ7: In what organizational sectors do public relations practitioners have the largest and smallest perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty?

RQ8: Is there a relationship between the demographic attributes such as position, degree, sex, accreditation, and international status with public relations practitioner level of perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty?

The next chapter contains the exploratory research designed to answer the above research questions. Essentially, this is the first step in the triangulated research approach this study will take. Therefore, chapter three will take a macro-organizational look at uncertainty. Through this, trends in the literature will be used to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews with members of management and employees of an organization. The goal of this macro-organizational perspective is to determine *what* uncertainties exist within an organization, *how* managers communicate within uncertainty, and *what* the outcomes of uncertainty are. These data then will be used to conduct a more micro-organizational analysis of uncertainty.

Therefore, the following chapters contain the remaining steps for completion of this study by expanding on the organizational findings of chapter three in looking at the role of public relations in uncertainty management. Ultimately, this study aims to further theory-driven public relations research by determining *what* uncertainties public relations practitioners perceive exist within their organizations, *how* public relations practitioners communicate during times of uncertainty, and *what* their overall perceived involvement is with organizational uncertainty. It is through this research that the underpinnings necessary for the establishment a framework of organizational uncertainty for public relations practitioners is possible.

CHAPTER THREE

EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

Introduction

This chapter contains the exploratory research that was the first methodological

step taken in working towards a public relations framework for organizational

uncertainty. This step focused on uncertainty in organizations by gaining an

understanding of uncertainty at the macro-organizational level. In doing so, the aim was

to determine *what* uncertainties exist within an organization, *how* managers communicate

within uncertainty, and *what* the outcomes of uncertainty are.

Therefore, this chapter builds on the identified trends from the literature included

in chapter two to conduct qualitative in-depth interviews with members of management

and employees an organization. The contents of this chapter include the method, results,

discussion, conclusions, and post study reflections pertaining to the following research

questions:

RQ1: What are common causes of uncertainty within an organization?

RQ2: How do managers handle internal communication in uncertain situations?

RQ3: Is there a difference in how management and employees perceive each

other for the workplace variables that lead to uncertainty?

RQ4: Is there a perceived difference in leadership skills required for handling

uncertain situations?

Once uncertainty at the organizational level is understood, the researcher can work

towards a framework of organizational uncertainty for public relations practitioners.

Method

The Research Setting

The research site of this applied research project was a financial services

organization located in Tampa, Florida. This investment management firm, based in

Maryland, offered investment management guidance and expertise to individuals and

institutions around the world. The firm strove to offer its clients world-class investment

guidance and attentive service. Founded in 1937, the firm offered separately managed

investment portfolios for institutions and a broad range of mutual funds for individual

investors and corporate retirement programs.

The Tampa office was one of two satellite offices with the other in Colorado.

Overall, the firm employed approximately 3,500 employees; with approximately 400

working in Tampa, of whom, 33 were members of management. This Tampa office,

mainly a call center, included five separate departments. Within the departments,

associates provided information to prospective and current shareholders, fielded inbound

phone calls regarding customers' regular or retirement accounts, and handled the

processing of written shareholder requests and inquiries utilizing a variety of

computerized systems.

Employees generally started with the company at entry-level, serving retail and retirement plan customers, and promotions characteristically came from within the firm. Common responsibilities ranged from account processing to customer service provided through inbound telephone calls. Employees were required to possess a service orientation, a positive attitude, a college degree, excellent oral and written communications skills, as well as organizational and basic math skills. The company provided employees with extensive training and the opportunity to pursue their National Association of Security Dealers (NASD) licenses. Additionally, operations were open to clients year 'round, and business is conducted during all holiday seasons, and weekends.

Because the Tampa office was primarily a call center, phone volumes were forecasted based on historical call volume data, current market conditions or expectations, and customer statement delivery. This was because the variables of market fluctuation and the delivery of customer statements could cause an increase in calls received at the firm and the Tampa office specifically.

The elevator pitch was a new initiative within the company. Elevator pitch is a term used to describe a quick, effective, and consistent description of the company, appropriate for any situation. This company's elevator pitch was: We are an "investment management firm offering individuals and institutions around the world an exceptional combination of investment management excellence, world-class service and guidance" (Company Manager A, personal communication, November 30, 2002).[1] This was a type of brand communication because it was the organization's goal to leverage their brand

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[1] For sake of anonymity and confidentiality the manager who provided this information is identified as Company Manager A.

through their call centers. They saw this as an opportunity for them to "turn more

prospects into customers; attract a greater share of clients' investments; retain customers

longer; and influence clients' and prospects' perception of [the company] as a primary

provider of world-class investment services and products" (Company Manager A,

personal communication, December 3, 2002).

Data Collection and Analysis

Once the researcher selected the site, information was gathered to allow the

researcher to better understand the firm. Then, five members of management and five

members of the employee population were selected to conduct in-depth interviews in

November 2002. Those chosen were based on previously established personal

friendships with the researcher. This was determined to be appropriate to assist in

achieving honest and candid feedback. The interview group was representative of four

out of the companies five departments.

The guidelines used for conducting in-depth interviews were a combination of

Austin and Pinkleton (2001), Marshall and Rossman (1995), and Stacks (2002). This

qualitative method was chosen because it allowed the researcher to understand the

meaning, perceived opinions, and beliefs of those studied.

As typical of applied research, this research was constrained by organizational

dynamics. Each interviewee was approached outside the organization and was allowed

discretion to determine the setting for their interview. All interviews were conducted

outside the organization to prevent the potential fear of organizational involvement or

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repercussions. The researcher interviewed each individual separately, and all provided

consent to being recorded. Each interview lasted approximately one hour.

A series of open-ended interview questions were created and asked based on

knowledge gained from the information obtained about the firm, the methodological

literature, and previous studies. The interview schedule (see Appendix A) was created in

advance and loosely followed to ensure consistency for the ten interviews. This followed

Marshall and Rossman's (1995) understanding of qualitative in-depth interviews because

they are "much more like conversations than formal events with predetermined response

categories" (p. 80).

Because the aim of this study was to determine *what* uncertainties exist within an

organization, *how* managers communicate within this uncertainty, and *what* the outcomes

are of uncertainty, the management members were asked how they handle certain

situations and the employees were asked how they perceive management handles those

same situations. Additionally, the managers were asked their perception of employees

and employees answered similar questions about themselves. This provided the

researcher a means of perception comparisons within the organization. Once the

interviews were completed, the researcher carefully reviewed the interview transcriptions

while making note of patterns and themes through the use of the constant comparative

qualitative research method.

Results

As stated previously, data analysis focused on determining *what* uncertainties

exist within an organization, *how* managers communicate within this uncertainty, and

what the outcomes are of uncertainty. The following research questions are the

culmination of interview findings.

RQ1: What are common causes of uncertainty within an organization?

Although this research question is a foundation for the overall study, it is best

answered by evaluating the findings from the final interview question. Each interviewee

was asked to describe what they believed was the greatest cause of uncertainty within

their company. Overall, the two groups had differing determinations of what causes

uncertainty.

Of the five interviewed members of management, all but one identified the

external environment as the largest factor leading to uncertainty within their organization.

For example, manager one said "The market and tax law changes are the most constant

forms of uncertainty for us," while manager three said, "We are most uncertain about

things out of our control like changes in tax laws and the market. Then, there's war and

terrorism. It's really the things that happen that we don't have control over." Manager

five was the one member of the group who did not see the environment as the greatest

cause of uncertainty. This is because s/he saw communication as the strongest variable.

As expressed in the following statement, "The lack of communication causes people to

not understand things, and when they don't understand, you have uncertainty."

In contrast, the employees were concerned with internal factors of uncertainty. Three employees expressed that goals or expectations were the main cause of uncertainty. For example, employee one said, "We have a lack of communication. Unclear expectations. Not everyone has the same skill set and things are different for each of us. We lack training, communication, and uniformity." Employee five expressed, "The problem is you don't hear how you're doing. So you don't see it coming when you are not doing it right." Similarly, employee three stated, "Change causes such a struggle for us to figure out what our responsibilities are and what things mean to us, just to prevent being surprised."

Overall, the answers from both groups were reflective of the previously identified four most common workplace variables that lead to uncertainty.

RQ2: How do managers handle internal communication in uncertain situations?

To best understand the communication between management and employees, both groups were asked how often they have face-to-face conversations with each other. Both the management group and the employee group were consistent, and stated an average of approximately three-to-four interactions per day. This is interesting, because when asked about all communication and the percentage that e-mail communication comprised in a typical day, the average of the five manager replies was 50 percent while the average for the employee group was 75 percent. The total e-mail received in an average day, as provided by each interviewee, averaged approximately 70 e-mails per day.

When the researcher asked about communication challenges between managers and employees, there were vastly different answers between the two groups. Two

managers were focused on the difficulties of consistency. As manager two said, "You can't communicate to everyone, and when you don't, things snowball." Then, manager four said, "When and how. It's hard to know which way is best for each person…all at once, in person, by e-mail…each person needs communication differently." The others were more concerned with employee understanding. Manager three expressed this when s/he said, "Employees recognize we have problems. They need to understand that management is trying. They don't…so we have to make them understand why. They're just not able to see the big picture." Just as manager five said, "Making them understand, you know the bottom line. They want to just do their job and go home. They don't understand their performance in relation to the big picture."

Employees expressed strong challenges in communication as well, but for different reasons. Specifically, the employee responses implied their feelings of a lack of respect by management. This was clear in replies such as employee one's statement,

> I don't always feel like I can give my honest opinion. I fear being outcast, and that I can't voice my opinion or it will be reflected in my evaluation. Managers are not cooperative, not receptive. They say that they encourage your opinion but then you can't express it.

The other employees also had strong statements on the topic. For example, employee four said, "We don't have a lot of interaction and what we do is somewhat regimented. We just don't have time." Just as employee five said, "Communication? He's never at his desk, and is always in meetings."

This discrepancy between the two groups was also evident when asked about rumors. The management group described their role as being there for the employees to come to for clarification of rumors, to address them and to "get to the root to find who started it, correct it, and clarify it" as manager five said. Manager three went so far as to say, "They'll always exist, and it's healthy to talk about things. It's my job to make sure my employees know that they can come to me for answers if they need them."

Employees on the other hand saw management as being passive. As employee two said, "This place is a rumor mill. Management doesn't do anything to control them. They just let them run like water off a ducks back." Employee one saw things deeper and sarcastically stated, "Rumors here….No. A lot of the time a supervisor or coworker drops a hint or makes off hand comments, starting rumors not stopping them."

RQ3: Is there a difference in how management and employees perceive each other for the workplace variables that lead to uncertainty?

As explained earlier, the researcher identified four workplace variables that lead to uncertainty. They are: organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurity, and the external environment. It is through analyzing management and employee opinions and perceptions on each of these topics that organizational uncertainty can be understood.

Organizational Change

When discussing organizational change, the management group had a relatively similar and clear understanding of what they believed their roles to be. As manager two said, "All change is loss, all loss must be mourned. My job is to explain to them why it's good for business and for them. I just have to show commitment, and lead by example."

Just as manager one said, "Change is inevitable. Reps. [employees] have to expect it. I need to support them, because they need someone to talk to and manage through it. It's my responsibility to help them see the big picture."

The employees, on the other hand, were unaware of what management felt they were doing. This was apparent when employee one said, "Change is introduced in the form of threats – accept or we'll replace you with someone who will." Employee two said s/he could "see their [management] commitment to the change. They learn more with each change but not much is done to help adapt." Just as employee five said, "they try to explain how it's the wave of the future…we have to adapt. They try to stress importance, but personally they have an it's done, gone…go on attitude."

Participative decision-making is an important aspect of change within this company as with most. Unfortunately, the definition of participation differs between the two groups. For example, manager four said, "We give employees an opportunity to ask questions." Then as manager two said, "Employee's number one job is to take calls." Neither of these statements refers to participation. In other words, the managers do not place a priority on employee participation or involvement in decision-making.

The management group did see things differently when discussing their involvement in upper level decisions. This is clear with manager three's statement that "It's hard to change a department when we don't have a say in an allocation of additional resources. It's because of the constraints of upper management and their red tape…if they asked we'd tell them what we need."

Employees expressed similar opinions to the managers in their involvement with upper level decisions. In other words, they felt their desire to participate in decision-making was not being realized. As with employee two's statement "Decisions are made and approved on certain levels. End users are not getting information about them in a timely fashion. Once we do, being part of the decision process is not a possibility." Employee four agreed by saying, "When it comes to the big things, all we hear is 'we can't tell you yet.' Maybe if they ask for input…we could provide feedback. Would be nice…. But, we're not at that level." Clearly, the employees did not share the management view that they provide the employees an "opportunity to ask questions," or they did not feel this was ample involvement in decision-making.

Unclear Policies

Within this organization unclear policies appeared to be rampant. The ambiguity expressed in the interviews ranged from human resource policies to departmental policies. Therefore, when asked if there were unclear policies within the company everyone in both groups answered either "yes" or "absolutely." The difference between the two groups is that the employees look to the managers for support and clarity of the unclear policies and not visa-versa.

Manager three said "We make policy decisions on consensus." The other managers explained this uncertainty differently. For example, manager one said they had "ambiguity," manager two said, "we make business decisions as we go," and manager four said, "sure, we have gray area, wiggle room, room for judgment."

The employees reflected the same sentiment about the clarity of policies. As employee four said,

> You do what you think is best and just hope it's not against any larger company policies. You have to make a decision so you use your best judgment. There are a lot of unwritten policies that you don't find out about until you make a mistake. Then you really hear about it.

*** Job Insecurity***

To evaluate job security the researcher asked two questions, the first of which was about the clarity of goals. The managers answered both about the goals that are set for them as well as the goals they set for their employees. When asked if their goals were clear, one manager answered that they were "murky," but the rest said "no." For example, manager five said,

> No, they are never as clear as I think they should be. This is because of a lack of experience in upper management. Sometimes I think that they feel that if they share information then I will know as much as they do. Then their importance will be questioned.

The other managers answered more generally, with statements such as "they're murky," "my goals tend to be conflicting or too subjective," or "no one has set goals."

Management, however, felt more positive about the goals they set for their employees. As manager one said, "they're clear enough" and according to manager four, "I guess they're clear. They [his/her employees] weren't surprised in their year-end reviews."

When asked this same question, the employees, however, disagreed with the manager's beliefs that they set clear goals for their employees. In essence, they too felt that their goals were unclear especially in areas of long-range development. Employee three demonstrated this in his/her statement, "it's up to me to set my goals and make them clear." Employee three was concerned because, "nothing's clear when it comes to long range," and employee four mirrored this by stating, "we have no developmental goals at all."

The second question that related to job insecurity pertained to what employees fear at work. To this, all managers answered: "Layoffs." The employees were not as clear-cut. A few did state layoffs as one of their fears but they mentioned additional fears as well. For example employee four said, "At one time, it was job security. Now that's not so much. I would say having a bad call listened to. Then I'd be pointed out for sub-par performance like a trade error… and get called out." Employees one, two, and three were concerned with "doing the best job I can" as employee one said s/he feared, "Letting the customer down. They count on me and there are things out of my control that can cause me to let them down."

External Environment

The analysis of the interview content clearly identified the external environment as an important factor of uncertainty within the organization. Both groups were specifically concerned with the financial markets and the threat of potential war. For example, manager three said, "The markets are an ever-changing variable that increases stress levels." While manager four expressed a need to be "supportive of employees in

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times when the market is not doing well, because it's not the best working environment." Employees also agree that this is a stressful time, or as employee one called it a "generally unhappy time." Additionally, the employees appear realistic and acknowledge that the company "exists *because* of the market," as employee four said.

The researcher discussed with each interviewee the "perfect world" created for interview purposes. Within this researcher created perfect world, the only change to the way things currently are within the company is the perfect forecasting of call volumes. All interviewees chuckled at this false reality, possibly because they each understood the impossibility if such a perfect world. Ultimately, both groups saw this change to their existing days as positive.

For example manager two expressed that this was just what s/he needed to "go home at the same time each day." Manager one stated that this "would help to plan the day and would reduce stress." Manager three agreed with this and took it a step further to include that this would cause an "increase in morale, efficiency, and productivity." They did, importantly, recognize this to be an ability to reduce employee stress levels.

The employees mirrored this by saying that their days would be "more enjoyable and less stressful." Employee two cheerfully said, "I'd enjoy my job a lot more. We all would. Things are much better when you know what's going on." Just as employee one said, "I would have a lower stress level, because there would be a lot less micromanagement and less stress. It would be more enjoyable."

RQ4:   Is there a perceived difference in leadership skills required for handling uncertain situations?

When asked what skills are important in a leader within this organization, the answers between the two groups varied drastically. Table 1 lists the replies received. Some interviewees provided more than one answer, so there is a disproportionate amount of skills listed compared to the number interviewed. In essence, both the manager group and the employee group had four variables in common. Those being: having confidence, being a good communicator, leading by example, and being proactive. Aside from this list, the groups have a clear difference in the skills they expect or deem important in a leader. The management group was focused on the broad organizational perspective and what is best for the company, while the employee group was more concerned with interpersonal skills relating to what they need. For example, manager three saw being a visionary important as it related to the "big picture," while employee one felt visionary skills pertaining to "goals and helping people" were important.

Table 1: Important Leadership Skills

Managers	Employees
Confidence *	Confidence *
Good Communication *	Good Communication *
Lead by Example *	Lead by Example *
Proactive *	Proactive *
Benefactor to Change/Change Agent	Approachability
Energized	Availability
Honest	Develop People to Reach Goals
Inspirational Leader	Good Delegation Skills
Motivator	Good Listener
Respect from Employees	Organized
Understanding	Teacher
Visionary of Big Company Picture	Visionary to Set Employee Goals

* Signifies skills listed by managers and employees.

Discussion

Overall, the research results confirmed the literature findings pertaining to uncertainty. Although the findings within this study are potentially quite common, typically within a financial call center environment such as this, they are however, not generalizable. Additionally, the focus of this study has not been to calculate how many incidences of uncertainty there are, but to determine *what* uncertainties exist within an organization, *how* managers communicate within this uncertainty, and *what* the outcomes are of uncertainty.

Multi-Layered Uncertainty

Through the application of interdisciplinary research, the results indicated that uncertainty was multi-layered. Consequently, this study confirmed the four most common workplace uncertainty variables to be: organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurity, and the external environment. Additionally, communication was determined to be a critical factor in managing uncertainty.

Organizational leaders have a responsibility to support employees by providing timely and accurate information, working to clarify goals, and including employees in decision-making. Additionally, as the employees clearly expressed, there is an expectation that managers will lead by following those basic requirements. This management awareness is imperative to organizations because the ability to manage information to decrease or limit uncertainty is a tactical resource that gives organizations a strategic advantage over their competitors (Mangaliso, 1995). Since, as stated

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previously, it is the amount of uncertainty an organization can handle and how well they manage it that determines their success (Kiev, 2002).

The findings demonstrated that individuals experience uncertainty differently. This was shown in the vast difference in answers the two groups provided for each of the interview questions. In essence, it showed that each individual might not experience uncertainty in each event, and that individuals have differing degrees of uncertainty tolerance, confirming Kramer's (1999) study. As was also confirmed through the expression by two of the interviewed managers in stating that their employees each require different means of communication.

Organizational change.

Although this study focused on front-line managers and employees, the findings confirmed the decision-making structure defined by Hatch (1997). It is through this hierarchy of decision-making that both the employees and the managers interviewed found problems in communication around organizational change. As was the case when some of the managers expressed concern pertaining to their lack of involvement in change, and how they say their role is to "lead by example." On the other hand, employees expressed desires to participate and provide input on decisions; something they feel is currently lacking in their organizational structure. This is important because as Jackson (2001) found, shared-decision making essential to organizations.

In states of change, the aim is to provide employees with as much information as possible (Crabb, 1995). This organization (as well most) has taken this statement to heart. This causes a counterbalance in quantity not quality. This is evident in the sheer

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volume of e-mails each person receives within a day; the typical per day average was around 70. In other words, priority is not placed on interpersonal two-way communication. Within this structured organization, this lack of priority is also evident in the interviewee concerns related to involvement in decision-making at various levels.

This organization would benefit greatly from a communication manager to assist in appropriately disseminating information. This is clearly an area of trepidation since the employees identified organizational change as one of their top ranking uncertainty concerns. This, coupled with the organization frequently undergoing various forms of change, signifies the importance of appropriately handling these situations.

Unclear Policies.

Each interviewee expressed the existence of unclear policies within the organization. The employees specifically expressed a desire to have more clear-cut policies. As employee three wanted have a "better-defined attendance policy," and employee five said, "Clarity needs to be a priority between departments as well as within." They saw this indistinctness as a potential for possible misuse as well as an impending job danger as a result of incorrect interpretation. This confirms Gildsford's (1998) study that found employees more confidently follow visible and clearly defined policies.

Job Insecurity.

Within this organization, managers have monthly one-on-one meetings and yearly evaluations to discuss performance with each of their direct reports. Gwynne (2002) found these meetings to be a great cause of stress, and often different managers have

conflicting performance criteria. The research confirmed this as well. For example, employee three expressed that each manager s/he worked for had different "priorities" and that it takes "time to learn what each manager requires." Both the managers and the employees within this study expressed uncertainty and concerns with new systems and their related productivity requirements. This causes a problem because often systems are implemented before goals are determined. Then, once established, employees and managers are often required to meet these goals retroactively.

Additionally, as one manager mentioned in the interview, each year everyone employed at the organization is "force ranked against his or her peers." This ranking is based on pre-established goals and is then used to determine pay increases and the bonus structure for management. Because of this, understanding what to do is just as important as doing it.

The tragedy of September 11, 2001 caused new uncertainty within organizations. As a result of the tragedy, this company experienced a decrease in assets under management, and due to this, the organization laid off employees and members of management in 2001. Those left were felt uncertainty of further reductions. Employees acknowledged that competitor companies had subsequent reductions in workforce and the potential for this company to do the same was a very real concern.

Communication is the tool that can help employees deal with uncertainty that results around job insecurity. A communications manager would be an invaluable resource in this possible layoff environment by appropriately providing information to employees and suggesting ways to cope with the uncertainty (Crabb, 1995).

External Environment.

The research findings confirmed Hatch's (1997) statement, "every organization interacts with other members of its environment" (p. 65). The key external environmental sectors identified within this study, and relevant to this company, are the economic sector and the legal sector. Specifically, the financial markets and tax law changes. The greatest recognizable impact both of these sectors have is on the amount and type of calls the company receives. This directly affects not only how busy they will be, but also the amount of assets under management, and the potential need for a further reduction in workforce. When the American people are uncertain, they often sell their stock; many call this company to do so. In turn, the markets continue to drop, creating more uncertainty and a greater number of phone calls, leading to higher employee stress and lower morale. The longer this continues, the more uncertain employees become.

Conclusions

Overall, the research confirmed the importance of studying organizational uncertainty. Currently, uncertainty is high in financial organizations. This increasingly high level of external uncertainty is adding to the ever-present internal organizational uncertainty. This study demonstrated the existence of multi-layered workplace uncertainty. Overall, employees may feel uncertain about many factors. This study found that most organizational uncertainty fits into the four workplace variables of organizational change**,** unclear policies, job insecurity**,** and the external environment. It also confirmed that communication and participation are the necessary key to handling

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uncertainty. Ultimately, organizational leaders need to support their employees by providing them timely and accurate information, working to clarify goals, and including them in decision-making.

This exploratory research was conducted by in-depth interviews as a starting point. This was a necessary starting point in the study of organizational uncertainty. Specifically, from here through the use of a large-scale quantitative survey of public relations practitioners the understanding of organizational uncertainty can be obtained.

In conclusion, this study succeeds in its attempt to apply theory to technique. This was accomplished by making a theoretical link to the importance of a formalized and strategic understanding of organizational uncertainty. The ability to merge social science theory and practice brings scholars closer to understanding what is needed within organizations. It is this understanding that bridges the gaps to establish a theory of organizational uncertainty.

Post Study Reflections

After completion of part one of this study, the researcher conducted three follow-up sessions to discuss the findings. The first was to bring the study to a public relations academic conference. The presentation of the material led to discussions that confirmed both the need for the study and for a more quantitative look at organizational uncertainty.

The second was a presentation of the material to public relations practitioners at a PRSA conference. This resulted in encouragement for both the topic of studying

organizational uncertainty and the need to look at a more macro-organizational view of uncertainty as it relates to public relations practitioners.

Finally, the researcher went back to the managers and employees interviewed for feedback on the study. Overall, the comments were positive and as expected. The employees as on average were not surprised about the studies findings and as employee five said, this was a "good summary of why the morale continues to be low within the organization." The managers, on the other hand, found that as manager two said, the research was "definitely eye opening." They were not shocked that the employee interpretations were different from theirs. Manager one stated that he/she saw communication as "definitely the cause" of problems. Bitterly, manager five felt that the findings confirmed what he/she expected that, "Employees expect managers to be visionaries and mystics and read their minds." Just as manager three was concerned that the employees expect management to set clear developmental goals for them, but in his/her opinion he has found "that they [employees] dislike the notion that they have a role in coming up with their own developmental plan."

Overall, the consensus was that the study confirmed the disconnect between the two groups that they each believed existed, while demonstrating that it is worse then either group expected. Finally, the management group said they learned from this study and will apply this new understanding to their daily and monthly communications. The employees hope they do.

Finally, the next chapter contains builds on the findings from this exploratory chapter to look at public relations practitioner involvement in organizational uncertainty.

CHAPTER FOUR

METHOD

Following the findings from the exploratory qualitative analysis of organizational uncertainty, the researcher conducted a quantitative analysis at the macro-organizational level. In other words, step one in this study described the findings of the qualitative research previously conducted to elaborate on *what* uncertainties exist within an organization, *how* managers communicate within this uncertainty, and *what* the outcomes of uncertainty are.

Step two expanded on the above-mentioned organizational findings to look at the role of public relations in uncertainty management. This step was to determine if uncertainty affects organizations similarly to what was found in the qualitative findings. Additionally, this step was to determine *what* uncertainties public relations practitioners perceive exist within their organizations, *how* public relations practitioners communicate during times of uncertainty, *what* their comfort or tolerance is within organizational uncertainty, and *what* their overall perceived involvement is with managing organizational uncertainty. In doing so, the following research questions will be addressed:

RQ1: Do public relations practitioners personally feel uncertain in their organizations?

RQ2: Do public relations practitioners perceive their organizations to have uncertainty?

RQ3:   What degree of perceived involvement do public relations practitioners have in the management of uncertainty?

RQ4:   What communication strategies do public relations practitioners utilize to aid employees in coping with organizational uncertainty?

RQ5:   Is there a relationship between public relations practitioner expression of personal uncertainty and what is perceived to exist in the organizations?

RQ6:   What influences public relations practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty?

RQ7:   In what organizational sectors do public relations practitioners have the largest and smallest perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty?

RQ8:   Is there a relationship between the demographic attributes such as position, degree, sex, accreditation, and international status with public relations practitioner level of perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty?

Population and Sampling

For the purpose of the second phase of this study, the universe – or general concept of people to be sampled (Stacks, 2002) – was the broad group of public relations practitioners across the United States. The best available population to sample was the members of the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). "With the vision to unify, strengthen and advance the profession of public relations, the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has established itself as the pre-eminent organization that builds value, demand and global understanding for public relations" (The Blue Book, 2003, p. B4).

PRSA is the world's largest organization for public relations professionals. At the time of the study, it contained nearly 20,000 members from various organizational sectors. "Chartered in 1947, PRSA's primary objectives are to advance the standards of the public relations profession and to provide members with professional development opportunities through continuing education programs, information exchange forums and research projects" (The Blue Book, 2003, p. B4).

Membership in PRSA is highly considered within the public relations profession. This is because it requires both qualification and substantial annual dues. Essentially, to qualify for membership, individuals must devote a substantial portion of time (at least 50%) to the paid professional practice of public relations or to the teaching or administration of a public relations curriculum in an accredited college or university. Additionally, PRSA membership requires that members adhere to the principles of the Society's Member Code of Ethics. In abiding by this Code, each PRSA member fulfills an individual responsibility to make the public relations profession worthy of public confidence (The Blue Book, 2003, p. B6).

Because of the vastness and caliber of this collection of public relations professionals, the 2003 membership list from PRSA was used as the population for this study. Of course, PRSA is not reflective of the public relations field as a whole, because practitioners in professional associations obviously may display more characteristics of professionalism than the universe of practitioners because of their membership and involvement in a professional association (Choi & Hon, 2002). Nevertheless, this group

was determined to be an appropriate population given the nature of the research questions.

Furthermore, the researcher used simple random sampling to select people from the population. According to Wimmer and Dominick (2003), the advantages of simple random sampling are that "detailed knowledge of the population is not required, external validity may be statistically inferred, the representative group is easily obtainable, and the possibility of classification error is eliminated" (p. 91). While on the other hand, the disadvantages are that "lists of the population must be compiled, a representative sample may not result in all cases, and the procedure can be more expensive than other methods" (p. 91).

To compensate for the disadvantages, the researcher methodically numbered each individual entry in the PRSA Blue Book – the annual member services directory that lists PRSA members, their addresses, and business affiliations. It is from this listing that the sample frame was drawn. Because this list is compiled annually, it was determined to have minimal coverage errors. The next step was to eliminate entries from members that are identified as educators since the evaluation of teaching practices are beyond the scope of this study. Additionally, members with addresses outside the United States were also removed since research has shown that uncertainty is handled differently in other countries (Hofstede, 1984; Adler, 1997; Taylor, 2000; House, Javidan, & Hanges, 2002).

Once the sample frame was accurately numbered, a scientific computer program (the Research Randomizer) was utilized to generate 4,000 random numbers, between 1 and 19,652 (the study population) whereby selecting the individuals that comprise the

sample to whom the survey instrument was distributed. Overall, with the population of

19,652, the number of responses needed to be at least 377 to be generalizable (Austin &

Pinkleton, 2002). Therefore, the questionnaire was sent to 4,000 randomly selected

members of PRSA. This over sampling strategy was used since this group is known to

have low response rates. For example, recently published articles with this same

population reported a response rate of 15.2 percent (Porter & Sallot, 2002) and 22 percent

(Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

Survey Instrument

This study utilized the most frequently used methodology in public relations

research – the survey (Stacks, 2002). Surveys are used to collect reliable information, as

Stacks (2002) defined, surveys are a "measuring instrument" that seek detailed data and

insights about respondents' attitudes, beliefs, actions, and opinions. In addition, "surveys

provide data from a larger population from which results can be generalized within

certain degrees of confidence" (Stacks, 2002, p. 174).

For the purpose of this study, the survey instrument was transformed from a Word

document and posted on the World Wide Web. This was accomplished through the use

of an Internet Survey Tool called RightNow (RN) Metrics. This tool allowed for the

conducting of the survey and the storing of completely random anonymous responses.

To aid in respondent perceived credibility of the study, the Web site was on the

University of South Florida Internet server and therefore contained a similar look to the

rest of the university site.

Internet surveys are a frequently used methodology (Austin & Pinkleton, 2002).

This is because of the ease of survey distribution and the speed of data collection

(Wimmer & Dominick, 2003). Because of the Internet, most researchers see survey

implementation being "reduced from weeks to days, or even hours" (Dillman, 2000, p.

352). Additionally, Internet surveys are often favored because the costs are lower than

telephone surveys or postal procedures (Dillman, 2000; Stacks, 2002). Another option to

researchers is an e-mail survey, but Web surveys have a more refined appearance and

provide a more dynamic interaction between the respondent and the questionnaire.

Therefore, this study incorporated the use of e-mail solely to notify the sample of the

Web questionnaire.

Although the advantages of Internet surveys are abundant, they must be weighed

with the disadvantages. First, not all households have computers, eliminating part of the

population from the study. To compensate for this, the researcher mailed hard copy

questionnaires to all people selected in the random sample that did not have e-mail

addresses provided (N=66).

On the same hand, not all people that have a computer know how to use it to

complete a questionnaire, so respondents that replied to the researcher with computer

problems were also mailed questionnaires (N=2). Therefore, the total of questionnaires

that were sent by hard copy mail was 68.

Another problem to be cognizant of is that respondents may view the

questionnaire differently due to system configurations and differences in Web browsers.

Dillman (2000) found that the "methodological consequences of one respondent seeing

something quite different from that seen by another respondent on a screen are not yet known" (p. 361). Since this can not be prevented, the best way to overcome differences is to keep the instrument complexity low, so that was what the researcher did.

Another problem is that there is no way to ensure that the person who completes the questionnaire is the specific person wanted for the study. This lack of control can have a potentially negative effect on the results (Dillman, 2000). To compensate for this, as previously mentioned, the survey was placed on the University of South Florida server. This study did not come up under search terms on the university site or on a Google search. Plus, the survey cover page stated, "If you were asked to participate in this survey, please click here" (http://isis.fastmail.usf.edu/metrics). The researcher felt this was an appropriate safeguard to prevent unwanted or inappropriate respondents.

Additionally, a concern of Internet surveys is there is no "guarantee of anonymity or confidentially that can be provided" to respondents (Stacks, 2002, p. 183). This disadvantage was compensated for by including a statement in the cover letters letting the respondents know that the researcher will keep the responses confidential and that responses would in no way be personally identified. Although a few people expressed concerns about the study integrity because of the sensitivity of questions, the researcher did not find this to be much of a concern. In each case (N=2) the researcher informed the respondent that the study had received Institutional Review Board approval and that the work was part of a thesis at the University of South Florida. It was also reiterated that they were not required to participate.

Finally, a growing disadvantage is the amount of unwanted or spam e-mail that people receive. Spam is defined as an unsolicited e-mailing, usually to many people (Anti-Spam.com). This has caused people to have spam blockers that filter e-mail from unknown senders. This is important to note, because spam blockers are becoming increasingly more common. Since the prevalence of spam was increasing at the time of the study, many people did not yet have blockers, but served as their own filters by not opening unsolicited e-mails.

Additionally, the increase of e-mail viruses has resulted in many people not opening e-mails from names they do not know. This is particularly relevant because at the time of the study a widespread and extremely dangerous e-mail virus (mydoom) was circulating. The virus attack started on February 1, 2004 (F-Secure – Mydoom.com). Essentially, mydoom was a computer worm that spread over e-mail. When executed, the worm attacked systems and forwarded the virus through the e-mail address book. In e-mails, it used variable subjects, bodies, and attachment names; therefore it was extremely difficult to determine what e-mails were affected. As a result, the potential for someone to receive a debilitating virus from an unsolicited e-mail was extremely great; therefore, many people that were contacted with the survey may not have even opened it, decreasing the response rate.

Procedures

To carry out the study, after the sample was picked and the survey was created, the following procedures were employed. This first step included pretesting the questionnaire and incorporating the feedback received to then distribute it to the participants. This included two groups. The first, and largest, is the group that received the Web questionnaire. The second is the hard copy mail group. Each procedure will be discussed separately.

Pretest – Once the questionnaire was uploaded to the Web it was pre-tested with local Tampa Bay public relations practitioners on the week of February 2, 2004. This sample included 30 members of the Tampa Bay chapter of the Florida Public Relations Association (FPRA). They received a forwarded e-mail cover letter (Appendix B) typed by the researcher asking for their assistance in pretesting a public relations study. The subject line of the e-mail was "Public Relations Survey Pretest." Respondents completed the survey online and provided their comments on the Web site at the end of the study.

Of the 30 FPRA members that received the request, six completed it. Therefore, the response rate for the pretest was 20 percent. Their names were later cross-referenced with those selected for the final sample to ensure that this group was not included in the study's random sample. Therefore, the data received from the pretest was not included in the final study analysis. Instead, the participants were asked to take the survey as a pretest and to provide feedback on the questionnaire. This feedback on the questions and format were then used to make minor modifications to the questionnaire prior to the distribution to the sample.

Web Survey Process – Once the Web site was completed, the researcher

followed Dillman's (2000) steps for increasing survey response rates:

1. During the week of February 9, 2004 each participant was personally sent

    a brief prenotice e-mail (see Appendix C). Painstakingly, this e-mail was

    a direct communication (individual e-mails addressed personally to each

    participant) that indicated the importance of the study and asked the

    participant to be on the lookout for the questionnaire.

2. During the week of February 6, 2004 each individual participant was then

    sent the link to the Web address (URL) for the questionnaire. This was

    included in a cover letter e-mail (see Appendix D) that identified the name

    of the researcher and indicated where the researcher got his/her name and

    e-mail address. The letter also informed the participant that the

    questionnaire would take approximately ten minutes to complete and that

    responses would be anonymous and remain confidential. The request for

    participation also included an explanation of the importance of the study

    and the benefit to the recipient. Finally, it provided the participants an

    opportunity to request a copy of the findings once the study was

    completed and thanked them for their participation.

3. During the week of February 23, 2004 participants were e-mailed a

    reminder/thank-you (see Appendix E). In this, the participant was told

    that this was the final contact, that his/her time was appreciated. Plus,

they were asked to complete the questionnaire if it had not yet been completed.

Mail Survey Process – For the random numbers that coincided with members without an e-mail listed, the name were first be used to look in the online database to ensure the most up-to-date information. If an e-mail was listed in this database, the member was included in the larger group that received the online version of the questionnaire. For those that an e-mail was not provided, a separate group was kept, and they received the questionnaire by mail. In total this group was comprised of 66 people. Two participants that were unable to complete the online survey version or were unfamiliar with Web surveys were also mailed hard copy questionnaires. This brought the total mailed surveys to 68.

The hard copy version as closely resembled the Web version as possible while remaining functional. Additionally, university and departmental letterhead and envelopes were used. The same guidelines with slight modifications were followed for the mail group as with the online group.

1. On February 18, 2004 the first mailing was sent. This included a personalized cover letter (see Appendix F) inviting participants to participate in the study, the questionnaire, and a prepaid business reply envelope.

2. On February 25, 2004 a reminder/thank you letter (see Appendix G) was mailed.

Data Collection

Data collection for the online survey and the mail version ended on March 16, 2004. The 1092 responses for the Web version were directly compiled and downloaded from the survey into an Excel document. For the mail version, 14 responses were received, and the researcher personally coded each.

Measurement

The questionnaire (see Appendix H) was meticulously developed in order to provide a broad quantitative analysis of uncertainty theory. The questionnaire guidebook (see Appendix I) was broken into seven sections. Section one contained sixteen statements about practitioner perceived involvement in the four most common workplace variables of organizational change**,** unclear policies, job insecurity**,** and the external environment. The researcher asked a series of four statements for each construct and participants were asked to indicate their perceived involvement on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, where "1" indicated "strongly disagree" and "7" indicated "strongly agree." Below, the four constructs are explained.

Construct #1 – The first construct pertained to organizational change. For this, each statement came from the literature review. Specifically, the four statements that made up this construct came from the literature findings that organizations must be built for change (Hatch, 1997), that shared decision-making is essential to the success of an organization (Jackson, 2001), and that action should be taken while feeling and analyzing (Pfeffer, 1992; Frost, 2002). Additionally, statements were created to determine

practitioner perceived involvement in change processes. Therefore, one statement asked about achieving a clear sense of future, one about reasons for change, one about planning change, and one about involving employees in decision-making.

Construct #2 – The second construct pertained to unclear policies. For this, each statement came from the literature review. Specifically, the four statements that made up this construct came from the literature findings that learning policies is a continual process (Gildsford, 1998), and employees more confidently follow visible and clearly defined policies (Gilsdorf, 1998). Additionally, statements were created to determine practitioner perceived involvement in organizational processes. Therefore, one statement pertained to communicating about policies, one about conveying a shared meaning about policies, one about defining policies, and one about working with policy experts to communicate about policies.

Construct #3 – The third construct pertained to job insecurities. For this, each statement came from the literature review. Specifically, the four statements that made up this construct came from the literature findings that the less information available through the supervisor, the more apt the employees are to believe information from less traditional communication channels such as rumors (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000), the level of insecurity experienced depends on the perceived threat (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984), and firms facing substantial uncertainty are likely to make frequent adjustments in staffing levels (Klass, McClendon, & Gainey, 1999). Additionally, statements were created to determine practitioner perceived involvement in communicating about job insecurities. Therefore, one statement pertained to

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communicating about performance appraisals, one about employee measures, one about mergers and layoffs, and one about management expectations.

Construct #4 – The fourth construct pertained to the external environment. For this, each statement came from the literature review. Specifically, the four statements that made up this construct came from the literature findings that organizations often seek or create external uncertainty to maximize competition and increase profits (Jauft & Kraft, 1986), organizations can choose to be proactive or reactive (Weick, 1995), boundary spanners monitor the environment, passing along necessary information to the decision makers (Hatch, 1997; J. Grunig, 1992), and buffering protects internal operations from environmental shocks such as material, labor, or capital shortages (Hatch, 1997). Additionally, statements were created to determine practitioner perceived involvement in communicating about the external environment. Therefore, one statement pertained to communicating news about monitoring industry development, one question was about acting as a boundary spanner, one was about providing boundary spanning feedback, and one was about aligning values to the environment.

Construct #5 – Section two contained construct five. This included statements to determine the level of organizational uncertainty within the organization. For this, a total of four statements were asked with one pertaining to each of the overarching variables of change, policies, job insecurities, and the external environment. These were also measured through the use of a Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, where "1" indicated "strongly disagree" and "7" indicated "strongly agree."

Construct #6 – Section three contained construct six. This was comprised of five statements pertaining to practitioner uncertainty. These statements were to determine the uncertainty practitioners personally felt. For this, four statements simply asked if the practitioner felt comfortable with organizational changes, organizational policies, and the external environment. Plus, one broad statement was included about their job being secure. Along with this, one statement asked them about their tolerance for uncertainty in their organization. Each statement required participants to indicate their feelings on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, where "1" indicated "strongly disagree" and "7" indicated "strongly agree."

Construct #7 – Section four is the composition of construct seven about practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty. There were a total of six statements. Four statements pertained to practitioner perceived involvement in the original four variables of change, policies, and job insecurities, and the external environment. Additionally, two statements were asked to determine practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty by simply asking about uncertainty and the management of uncertainty. The statements also used the Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, but "1" indicated "no involvement" and "7" indicated "extremely involved."

After the testing of the seven constructs was section five. This contained four statements that focused on the communication practices used by practitioners within the uncertainty causes of change, policies, job insecurities, and the external environment. For each statement, participants were asked to provide a percentage of use for each of the following types of communication: electronic communication, mediated communication,

interpersonal communication, and a self identified other category. Respondents were able to select a percentage between 0 and 100 in 10 point increments.

The final section contained the demographic questions. These questions were aimed to determine public relations roles, sex, tenure in position, number of years working in public relations, the category that best described their organizational sector, and if their organization is international. This page ended with an open-ended opportunity for participants to provide their opinions, questions, or concerns on the study.

Quantitative Analysis

Upon completion of the questionnaire, the data from each participant was routed from the Web site to the researcher in an Excel document and uploaded into the statistical program SPSS® (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) Version 11.5. This software was used to perform all the statistical analyses. Upon carrying out the descriptive statistics, the researcher will consider the probability level $p<0.05$ as statistically significant for all analysis performed.

Qualitative Analysis

The final question of the survey offered respondents an opportunity to provide opinions, questions, or concerns. Responses to this question were combined with responses to the e-mail notifications the researcher sent about the study, and all were systematically analyzed.

This analysis began by the researcher thoroughly reading the combined responses while jotting down notes in the margins (Creswell, 1998). This served as an "initial sorting-out process" (p. 140). Additionally, the researcher paid close attention to the words and phrased used by the participants.

After the initial general review of the information, the researcher compiled a list of approximately "five to six categories with shorthand labels or codes," as suggested by Creswell (1998, p. 142). This list was used as a starting ground for the placement of concepts throughout the transcripts. The list was expanded and contracted as needed with the goal to conclude with overall themes.

This research analysis adhered to the following principles set forth by Krueger (1994, as cited in Austin & Pinkleton, 2001) to ensure rigor and accuracy. First, the analysis was systematic. Each interpretation was thoughtfully considered to determine if an "alternative explanations might provide an equally valid analysis" (p. 128). Next, the analysis was verifiable. In essence, it was conducted so "another person could arrive at similar conclusions using similar methods" (p. 128). Finally, the analysis was focused, practical, and timely.

Finally, the next chapter will expand on the methodology to explain the results of the statistical analysis conducted to answer the eight research questions. Reliability for the measures was determined using Chronbach's Alpha and analysis of variance and multiple regression analysis was used to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

Out of the random sample of 4,000 PRSA members 3,932 individuals received the Web questionnaire and 68 received it through the mail. Of this, 1,120 individuals completed or partially completed the Web version and 15 completed or partially completed the mail questionnaires. This yielded an overall response rate of 28.4 percent with the Web version having a response rate of 28.5 percent and the mail version 22.1 percent. Although these initial response rates are important, a more accurate reflection of the study is the valid response rates discussed below.

In this particular case, the study suffered from participant exhaustion, so unfortunately, not all questionnaires were fully completed. This was apparent when looking at a decrease of 132 responses from the first page to the second page. However, due to the exploratory nature of the study, partially completed questionnaires were used in the data analysis.

Online Response Totals

Before beginning the analysis, it is important to identify the results of the e-mail notification of the survey. The mail responses will be separately discussed. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the valid responses. Of the 3,932 e-mails sent, 373 came back

as undeliverable. This meant that either the e-mail was typed incorrectly or the person was no longer using that e-mail address. Eighteen e-mails came back to the researcher identified as being blocked by a spam blocker.

Ineligibility was another important component of the valid sample total. Many sub components led to the total of 42 identified ineligible individuals in the sample. Specifically, this included 15 retirees, 4 unemployed, 1 international company, 2 professors in higher education, 6 people that left the company the e-mail was sent to, 2 people who were too new at their company to answer (having worked there just two or three months), and 13 people who had left the field of public relations.

Table 2: Online Valid Sample Total

		Total
RANDOM E-MAIL SAMPLE		3,932
Undeliverable		373
Spam Blocked		18
Ineligible for Study		
Retired	15	
Unemployed	4	
International Company	1	
Education (Teaching)	2	
Left Company	6	
Left Public Relations	13	
Too New at Company	2	
TOTAL		42
ONLINE VALID SAMPLE TOTAL		3,499

Ultimately, to calculate the valid sample total the 373 undeliverable surveys, the 18 Spam blocked surveys, and the 42 ineligible participants must be subtracted from the 3932 e-mails initially sent. This yielded a total valid sample of 3,499. Based on this, the response rate for the Internet survey was 32.0 percent.

Next, it was necessary to determine the contact response total. Table 3 demonstrates this calculation as the number of valid responses (N=3,499) reduced by the

completed or partially completed questionnaires (n=1,120), the refusals (n=94), and the

other replies (n=185). Therefore, the overall contact response total was 1,399.

Table 3: Online Contact Response Total

		Total
Completed/Partially Completed Online Questionnaires		1,120
Refusals		
Just No	9	
Too Busy	26	
Problem with Survey Instrument	6	
Does Not Match Job	53	
TOTAL		94
Other Replies		
Completed	17	
Yes	103	
Thank You for Reminder/Prenotice	21	
Miscellaneous	8	
Computer Problems	14	
Copy	22	
TOTAL		185
ONLINE CONTACT RESPONSE TOTAL		1,399

To better understand the contact response total, it is important to further expand

on the components of this calculation. There are two main categories, refusals and other

replies.

The refusal total was comprised of four subcomponents. Although this total was

slightly high, it is understandable with a study such as this. Specifically, the first

component included nine replies that were requests to be removed from the "mailing list"

(they may have considered the e-mail spam). Second, 26 people replied to let the

researcher know that the respondent was too busy to complete the survey. Third, six

respondents had comments on the survey instrument or e-mail correspondence. Finally,

the fourth and largest component of the refusals pertained to the respondent not believing

the study matched his/her job responsibilities. This group of 53 people lends credence to

the large number of public relations practitioners that perceive to be uninvolved in organizational uncertainty.

Another large component in the calculation of contacts response total are the other replies. This included six subcategories. First, there were 17 notifications of completed questionnaires. Second, there were 103 replies by respondents that he/she would "be happy to complete the questionnaire." Third, 21 respondents thanked the researcher for the reminder or the prenotice. The forth, included eight miscellaneous comments. Fifth, a total of 14 respondents contacted the researcher about computer problems. For each, the researcher replied with specific instructions on how to access the survey and asked him/her to reply back if they still could not access the survey. Of the 14, two replied back so they were each sent a hard copy version through the mail. Finally, the sixth sub component included 22 respondents that requested a copy of the results.

Once the valid sample total and contact response total were calculated, the non-contact total could be determined (see Table 4). This was done by taking the valid sample total (the number of e-mails sent minus the undeliverable, spam blocked, and ineligible) (N=3,499) and subtracting the contact response total (the completed/partially completed questionnaires plus the refusals and other replies) (N=1,371). Therefore, the non-contact total is 2,100. Essentially, this is the number of individuals who for some reason did neither complete the questionnaire nor contact the researcher, so they are unaccounted for within the study. In other words, 46.6 percent of the people contacted about this study responded in some way.

Table 4: Online Non-Contact Total

	Total
Online Valid Sample	3,499
Online Contact Response	1,399
Online Non-contact	2,100

Mail Response Totals

Since there was a possibility of differences in how public relations practitioners with e-mail versus practitioners without e-mail handle organizational uncertainty, it was appropriate to analyze the two groups separately. Therefore, this section will discuss the response totals for the mail portion of the study. Of the 68 hard copy mail questionnaires that were sent 17 were returned. Table 5 describes the mail valid sample total. Essentially, this was calculated by reducing the number of surveys sent by the number ineligible for the study because they are retired (n=2). The result is a valid mail sample total of 66. Subsequently, since questionnaires were returned completed or partially completed, the corresponding valid response rate was 22.7 percent.

Table 5: Mail Valid Sample Total

	Total
RANDOM MAIL SAMPLE	68
Ineligible for Study	
Retired	2
VALID MAIL SAMPLE TOTAL	66

No other contacts were received from the individuals sent the mail version, so the mail contact response total was simply the number of completed or partially completed questionnaires (N=15). Therefore, Table 6 describes the mail non-contact total of 51 (22.7%).

Table 6: Mail Non-Contact Total

	Total
Mail Valid Sample	66
Mail Contact Response	15
Mail Non-contact	51

Combined Response Totals

Since the number of responses for the mail portion of the study was so small (N= 15), no meaningful statistical analysis could be performed, and because past research found little or no significant differences between mail groups and online groups in survey research with this population (Werder, 2003), the mail group was combined with the online group for the purpose of analysis.

Once the numbers were combined, the combined valid sample total was calculated as 3,565 (see Table 7). Since there was a total of 1135 completed questionnaires, the resulting response rate was 31.8 percent.

Table 7: Combined Valid Sample Total

	Total
RANDOM SAMPLE	4,000
Undeliverable	373
Spam Blocked	18
Ineligible for Study	44
COMBINED VALID SAMPLE TOTAL	3,565

Next, the combined online and mail total of 1,135 completed or partially completed questionnaires yielded the combined contact response total of 1,414 (see Table 8). This is the complete picture of active survey respondents, including individuals that took the survey and those that contacted the researcher.

Table 8: Combined Contact Response Total

	Total
Completed/Partially Completed Questionnaires	1,135
Refusals	94
Other Replies	185
COMBINED CONTACT RESPONSE TOTAL	1,414

Finally, Table 9 shows the resulting combined non-contact total of 2,151. This included

all completed and partially completed questionnaires and any contact to the researcher.

Therefore, the researcher heard from 39.7 percent of the random sample with only 60.3

percent not replying or not completing the questionnaire.

Table 9: Combined Non-Contact Total

	Total
Mail Valid Survey	3,565
Mail Contact Response	1,414
COMBINED NON-CONTACT TOTAL	2,151

Research Participants

The responses of 1,135 respondents were included in the data analysis. Of these

respondents, a maximum of 936 individuals responded to the demographic portion of the

questionnaire. Table 10 provides the demographic data for the survey respondents while

Table 11 provides demographic data for PRSA members as of January 1, 2004. For this

study, 66.8 percent (n=625) were female and 33.2 percent (n=311) were male. In

comparison, membership in PRSA was 68.0 percent female and 32.0 percent male,

almost an equal comparison.

As Table 10 reveals, respondents worked within a variety of public relations

sectors: Corporate (n=151, 16.6%), Association/Non-profit (n=139, 15.2%),

Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical (n=109, 12.0%), Agency/Public Relations Firm (n=102,

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11.2%), Government/Municipal/Military (n=91, 10.0%), Financial Services (n=56, 6.1%), Manufacturing/Industry (n=42, 4.6%), Other (n=42, 4.6%), Education (Counseling) (n=37, 4.1%), Technology (n=35, 3.8%), Travel/Tourism/Hospitality (n=31, 3.4%), Professional Services (n=17, 1.9%), Education (Teaching) (n=16, 1.8%), Public Relations Consultant (n=11, 1.2%), Employee Communications (n=10, 1.1%), Sports/Entertainment (n=10, 1.1%), Food/Beverage (n=9, 1.0%), and International/Multicultural (n=4, 0.4%).

Unfortunately, although the sector categories were the same categories provided on the PRSA application, the data retention on behalf of PRSA (see Table 11) is not as inclusive. The organization collapses the 18 specific sector categories into seven broader categories. However, a cursory analysis of the survey respondents compared to the PRSA population appears to be representative. For example, the Government/Municipal/Military sector of the survey was 10 percent and at PRSA this sector comprises 8 percent. Similarly, the sector for Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical in the survey was 12 percent and for PRSA it was 10 percent. Therefore, it is notable that there was sufficient variation in the demographics of respondents to be confident that their responses captured a wide range of opinions while remaining representative of the population.

Table 10: Survey Demographics

	Survey	Percent (%)
Sex		
Female	625	66.8
Male	311	33.2
Total	**936**	**100.0**
Sector		
Agency/Public Relations Firm	102	11.2
Association/Non-profit	139	15.2
Corporate	151	16.6
Education (Teaching)	16	1.8
Education (Counseling)	37	4.1
Employee Communications	10	1.1
Financial Services	56	6.1
Food/Beverage	9	1.0
Government/Municipal/Military	91	10.0
Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical	109	12.0
International/Multicultural	4	.4
Manufacturing/Industrial	42	4.6
Professional Services	17	1.9
Public Relations Consultant	11	1.2
Sports/Entertainment	10	1.1
Technology	35	3.8
Travel/Tourism/Hospitality	31	3.4
Other	42	4.6
Total	**912**	**100.0**

Table 11: PRSA Demographics

	Population	Percent (%)
Sex		
Female	13,041	68
Male	6,168	32
Total	**19,209**	**100.0**
Sector		
Agency/Public Relations Firm	4,625	24
Association/Non-profit	2,600	14
Corporate	4,514	23
Education	1,344	7
Government/Municipal/Military	1,602	8
Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical	1,823	10
Other	2,762	14
Total	**19,270**	**100**

Although the demographic data showed great similarity between the sample and the population the research questions required further data, so Table 12 describes the additional survey demographics. Specifically, survey respondents were largely supervisors, directors or managers (N=457, 49.0%) with a very small number at the entry or technical level (N=7, 0.8%).

The majority of respondents had either a bachelors (N=562, 61.4%) or a masters (N=295, 32.2%) degree. Very few respondents had only a high school diploma (N=4, 0.4%), an associates degree (N=18, 2.0%), or no degree (N= 8, 0.9%). The average tenure in public relations for the respondents was 13 years.

Overall, 73.3 percent of the respondents were not accredited (N=674) and 64.2 percent of the organizations were not international (N=586).

Table 12: Additional Survey Demographics

	Survey	Percent (%)
Position		
Entry Level/Technician	7	.8
Specialist/Coordinator/Assistant/Junior	217	23.3
Supervisory/Director/Manager	457	49.0
Senior Management	251	26.9
Total	**933**	**100.0**
Degree		
High School	4	.4
Associate	18	2.0
Bachelor	562	61.4
Master	295	32.2
Doctorate	23	2.5
No Degree	8	.9
Certificate	5	.5
Total	**915**	**100.0**
Accreditation		
Yes	245	26.7
No	674	73.3
Total	**919**	**100.0**
International		
Yes	328	35.8
No	586	64.2
Total	**914**	**100.0**

Reliability of Measurements

Prior to anwering the research questions, it is valuable to analyze the survey instrument. "Reliability is the ability of a measure to measure the same thing comparably over time. A reliable measure is one that is stable – it does not fluctuate without reason." (Stacks, 2002, p. 131). This is especially relevant for this study since this is the original testing of the constructs for measuring organizational uncertainty.

The primary interest of this study was centered on identifying what uncertainty public relations practitioners perceived they were involved in. Table 13 represents the 31 measures used in this study, arranged by each of the seven distinct theorized uncertainty variables, along with the number of responses, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alphas. This includes the four common cause variables that were identified in the literature review and qualitative analysis of: organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurities, and the external environment. Also included are the variables of organizational uncertainty, the personal feelings of practitioners, and practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty.

Reliability statistics were computed on the questions for each of the variables by calculating the Cronbach's *alpha* for each and then collapsing them into single variables (see Table 13). Overall, each variable was found to be reliable, since *alpha* values between .70 and 1.00 indicate reliability (Stacks, 2002). Specifically, according to labels identified by Stack, job insecurities was found to have a great reliability (α =.838), unclear policies also had a great reliability (α =.832), organizational change had a good

reliability (α =.788), and finally the external environment also had a good reliability (α = .775).

Additionally, the test for reliability resulted in good reliability for practitioners personal feelings (α =.798), a great reliability for organizational uncertainty (α = .870), and the variable for practitioner perceived involvement in uncertainty had excellent reliability (α = .927).

In response to the questions about organizational uncertainty over the past year, respondents to this study indicated that they just slightly agreed to its existence in their organization (*M*=4.17). This was based on a scale where one represented "strongly disagree" and seven represented "strongly agree." In respect to the four common causes, the external environment variable was the highest (*M*=4.65), followed by organizational change (*M*=4.16), then unclear policies (*M*=3.86), and finally job insecurities (*M*=3.27). However, respondents agreed that they personally had low uncertainty (*M*=4.75). Next, based on a scale from one to seven where one represented "no involvement" and seven represented "extremely involved," practitioners expressed moderate perceived involvement (*M*=3.96) in communicating about uncertainty. Even the highest of these means does not indicate very strong perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty.

Table 13: Means and Standard Deviations for Uncertainty Variables

Item	N	M	SD	α
Organizational Change	**1051**	**4.16**	**1.55**	**.79**
I am involved in achieving a clear sense of future direction for my organization.	1086	4.90	1.74	
I communicate reasons for organizational change.	1073	4.52	2.07	
I am involved in the planning of organizational change processes.	1068	3.78	2.07	
I am involved in including employees in decision-making related to change.	1061	3.45	2.01	
Policies	**1050**	**3.86**	**1.72**	**.83**
I communicate to employees about policies.	1082	4.48	2.14	
I convey a shared meaning about my organization's policies to employees.	1069	4.23	2.09	
One of my organizational goals is to define policies clearly.	1065	3.76	2.11	
I work with organizational policy experts to communicate to employees.	1059	2.99	2.11	
Job Insecurities	**1047**	**3.27**	**1.79**	**.84**
I communicate with management about the importance of regular employee performance appraisals.	1072	3.17	2.06	
Before a major event such as layoffs or a merger, I communicate the news to employees.	1061	3.69	2.38	
I communicate with employees about the measurements used in performance appraisals.	1061	2.85	2.07	
I communicate with employees about management's expectations of their performance.	1060	3.35	2.20	
External Environment	**1048**	**4.65**	**1.49**	**.78**
I monitor the development of my industry for my organization.	1080	4.80	1.80	
I regularly provide feedback to executives about what is happening outside my organization.	1069	4.81	1.89	
My job is to monitor the external organizational environment.	1059	4.27	2.07	
I actively work to align the values of my organization with its environment.	1063	4.72	1.96	
Uncertainty in the Organization	**1055**	**4.17**	**1.83**	**.87**
Over the past year, organizational changes have created uncertainty within my organization.	1076	4.57	2.17	
Over the past year, unclear organizational policies have created uncertainty within my organization.	1068	3.96	2.13	
Over the past year, job insecurities have created uncertainty within my organization.	1065	4.00	2.22	
Over the past year, external organizational factors have created uncertainty within my organization.	1063	4.13	2.12	
Personal Feelings	**924**	**4.75**	**1.22**	**.80**
As an employee I find it easy to tolerate uncertainty within my organization.	931	3.69	1.75	
I feel comfortable within the organizational changes at my company.	933	4.58	1.67	
I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's organizational policies.	935	4.93	1.70	
I feel my job is secure.	937	5.15	1.68	
I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's external environment.	933	5.42	1.39	
Perceived Involvement in Uncertainty	**923**	**3.96**	**1.73**	**.93**
What is your perceived level of involvement with the communication of organizational uncertainty?	934	3.90	2.01	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational change?	934	4.34	2.04	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational policies?	932	4.05	2.01	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about factors that lead to job insecurities such as layoffs or employee goals?	932	3.59	2.14	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about external factors such as the financial markets or competitors change?	933	4.35	1.96	
What is your perceived level of involvement with the management of organizational uncertainty?	928	3.61	1.96	

Measured on a 7-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Disagree (or No Involvement and Extremely Involved)

Factor Analysis

These variables could not be used to answer the research questions without first subjecting them to a factor analysis. This is because a factor analysis is a "statistical tool that establishes dimensionality for the measure and tests for subdimensions" (Stacks, 2002, p. 233). This is a critical step for measuring construct validity. Therefore, to be certain that the survey actually measured what it appears to measure, all 31 questions were subjected to a factor analysis. This analysis did not include questions pertaining to percentage of time spent on communication tactics or the demographic questions.

According to Stacks (2002), before a factor analysis can be conducted the researcher should assure the instrument meets specific requirements. First, the included questions must have at least a 10:1 ratio of respondents to items. Since this analysis used 31 questions, this would require a minimum of 310 responses. Based on the lowest response rate of 895 (a ratio of 29:1), the data set was eligible for factor analysis. To determine factor loadings, measurement dimensions were held to the standard of requiring at least two items with each found in one factor with a loading greater than ±.60 and not greater than ±.40 on any other factor (Stacks, 2002).

Consequently, a factor analysis rotated using a Varimax solution with a minimum eigenvalue of 1.0 was conducted on all 31 questions representing the seven variables. Five factors emerged. The analysis was theoretically strong because the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy was very strong at .939 and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity showed statistical significance at the .0001 level. Altogether, the factor solution explained nearly 65 percent of the variance in this group of 31 variables.

Table 14 presents a composite picture of the five resulting factors including factor names, factor loadings, and communalities. The variables organizational change and unclear policies did not form factors. However, the first factor extracted by the analysis, which explained 18 percent of the variance in the variables, was practitioner perceived involvement in communicating about job insecurities. For this, only three of the four questions loaded in the factor. Additionally, one of the policy questions and one of the change questions loaded in this factor.

The external environment was the other uncertainty variable that formed a factor. This factor, Factor 4, which explained 10 percent of the variance in the variables, represented practitioner perceived involvement in communicating about the external environment, for which only three questions loaded.

Factor 2, which explained 17 percent of the variance in the variables, was the level of practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty. The original questionnaire contained six questions, but two also loaded above .40 in other factors. Therefore, this factor consisted of four questions pertaining to practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty.

Factor 3, which explained 10 percent of the variance in the variables, consisted of all four questions to measure the variable of organizational uncertainty. Finally, the fifth factor, which explained 10 percent of the variance in the variables, consisted of four of the five questions pertaining to practitioner's personal feelings about uncertainty.

Table 14: Factor Analysis of Measures of Uncertainty

	Factor Loadings	Communalities
Factor 1 – Job Insecurity		
I communicate with management about the importance of regular employee performance appraisals.	.765	.616
One of my organizational goals is to define policies clearly.	.633	.528
I communicate with employees about the measurements used in performance appraisals.	.790	.669
I am involved in including employees in decision-making related to change.	.648	.546
I communicate with employees about management's expectations of their performance.	.775	.691
Factor 2 –Practitioner Perceived Involvement		
What is your perceived level of involvement with the communication of organizational uncertainty?	.808	.826
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational change?	.813	.841
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about factors that lead to job insecurities such as layoffs or employee goals?	.811	.799
What is your perceived level of involvement with the management of organizational uncertainty?	.707	.718
Factor 3 – Organization Uncertainty		
Over the past year, organizational changes have created uncertainty within my organization.	.864	.763
Over the past year, unclear organizational policies have created uncertainty within my organization.	.771	.627
Over the past year, job insecurities have created uncertainty within my organization.	.861	.760
Over the past year, external organizational factors have created uncertainty within my organization.	.802	.682
Factor 4 – External Environment		
I monitor the development of my industry for my organization.	.807	.673
I regularly provide feedback to executives about what is happening outside my organization.	.772	.675
My job is to monitor the external organizational environment.	.740	.602
Factor 5 – Practitioner Feelings		
As an employee I find it easy to tolerate uncertainty within my organization.	.664	.519
I feel comfortable within the organizational changes at my company.	.812	.771
I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's organizational policies.	.758	.725
I feel my job is secure.	.617	.560
I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's external environment.	.596	.519

Each factor was subjected to Cronbach's reliability analysis (see Table 15). The resulting high *alphas* for each factor provided strong evidence that the measures used to construct the variables represented the same underlying constructs. Specifically, Factor 1, job insecurity, had great reliability (α =.855); Factor 2, practitioner perceived involvement in uncertainty, had excellent reliability (α = .927); Factor 3, organization uncertainty, had great reliability (α = .870); Factor 4, external environment, had good reliability (α =.760); and Factor 5, practitioner feelings, had good reliability (α =.798). The high reliability permitted for the collapsing of each of the five factors into individual indices. The means for the five factors were moderate.

Table 15: Factor Means, Standard Deviation and Alphas

FACTOR	M	S.D.	α
Factor 1 – Job Insecurity	3.27	1.72	.86
Factor 2 – Practitioner Perceived Involvement	3.86	1.85	.93
Factor 3 – Organization Uncertainty	4.17	1.83	.87
Factor 4 – External Environment	4.63	1.58	.76
Factor 5 – Practitioner Feelings	4.76	1.22	.80

Tests of Research Questions

RQ1: Do public relations practitioners personally feel uncertain in their organizations?

Research question one seeks to determine if practitioners personally feel uncertain. The factor for practitioner feelings is useful in determining this because it is composed of the questions that relate to how practitioners feel about uncertainty (see Table 16). Overall, practitioners agree that they feel moderately comfortable with the uncertainty in their organizations (*M*=4.75). To best interpret the results for this factor it is important to note that the lower the mean the more uncertain practitioners are.

The greatest comfort practitioners feel is with the external environment (*M*=5.42), then organizational policies (*M*=4.93), and then organizational changes (*M*=4.58). Additionally, they feel secure in their jobs (*M*=5.15). However, when directly asked to rank their agreement to the statement that they find it easy to tolerate uncertainty in their organizations, most disagreed (*M*=3.69).

Table 16: Practitioner Feelings

Practitioner Feelings	N	M	SD	α
	924	**4.75**	**1.22**	**.798**
As an employee I find it easy to tolerate uncertainty within my organization.	931	3.69	1.75	
I feel comfortable within the organizational changes at my company.	933	4.58	1.67	
I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's organizational policies.	935	4.93	1.70	
I feel my job is secure.	937	5.15	1.68	
I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's external environment.	933	5.42	1.39	

Measured on a 7-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Disagree

RQ2: Do public relations practitioners perceive their organizations to have uncertainty?

Research question two seeks to determine if practitioners believed that there was uncertainty in their organization over the past year. The factor for organization uncertainty is useful in determining this because it is composed of the questions that relate to practitioners overall perception of uncertainty in their organizations (see Table 17). Overall, public relations practitioners just barely agree that their organizations have uncertainty (*M*=4.16). Of the four components of organizational uncertainty, change is the component practitioners found to be most prevalent (*M*=4.57), then the external environment (*M*=4.13), then job insecurities (*M*=4.00), and lastly organizational policies (*M*=3.96).

Table 17: Organization Uncertainty

	N	M	SD	α
Organization Uncertainty Factor	**1055**	**4.16**	**1.83**	**.870**
Over the past year, organizational changes have created uncertainty within my organization.	1076	4.57	2.17	
Over the past year, unclear organizational policies have created uncertainty within my organization.	1068	3.96	2.13	
Over the past year, job insecurities have created uncertainty within my organization.	1065	4.00	2.22	
Over the past year, external organizational factors have created uncertainty within my organization.	1063	4.13	2.12	

Measured on a 7-point scale where 1=Strongly Disagree and 7=Strongly Disagree

RQ3: What degree of perceived involvement do public relations practitioners have in the management of uncertainty?

Research question three seeks to determine to what extent practitioners perceive their involvement in the management of organizational uncertainty is. The factor for practitioner perceived involvement is useful in determining this because it is composed of the questions that relate to practitioners' perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty (see Table 18). This factor was measured differently than the remainder of the factors. Essentially, respondents answered on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 7, but "1" indicated "no involvement" and "7" indicated "extremely involved."

As a result, practitioners answered that they perceive they are close to moderately involved in the management of uncertainty (*M*=3.86). Subsequently, the highest degree of perceived involvement pertained to organizational change (*M*=4.34). While, the least amount of perceived involvement was in relation to job insecurities (*M*=3.59).

Table 18: Practitioner Perceived Involvement

	N	M	SD	α
Practitioner Perceived Involvement Factor	**926**	**3.86**	**1.85**	**.927**
What is your perceived level of involvement with the communication of organizational uncertainty?	934	3.90	2.01	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational change?	934	4.34	2.04	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational policies?	932	4.05	2.01	
What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about factors that lead to job insecurities such as layoffs or employee goals?	932	3.59	2.14	
What is your perceived level of involvement with the management of organizational uncertainty?	928	3.61	1.96	

Measured on a 7-point scale where 1= No Involvement and 7= Extremely Involved

RQ4:   What communication strategies do public relations practitioners utilize to aid employees in coping with organizational uncertainty?

Table 19 provides means for the communication strategies practitioners use to help employees cope with organizational uncertainty. Therefore, it demonstrates that to help employees cope with organizational change, the most common communication practice is electronic communication (M=5.72), then interpersonal communication (*M*=3.83), and finally mediated communication (*M*=3.83).

To help employees with unclear policies, the most common communication practice is again electronic communication (*M*=5.73), then interpersonal communication (*M*=4.29), and then mediated communication (*M*=4.04).

With job insecurities, practitioners participate differently to help employees. Specifically, the most common practice is interpersonal communication (*M*=5.07), then electronic communication (*M*=4.13), and finally, mediated communication (*M*=3.29).

With external communication, electronic communication is the most prevalent

(*M*=5.65), then mediated communication (*M*=4.00), and then interpersonal

communication (*M*=3.94).

Table 19: Communication Practices Rank Order

	N	M
Organizational Change		
Electronic Communication – (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)	891	5.72
Mediated Communication – (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)	856	3.83
Interpersonal Communication – (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)	878	4.37
Policies		
Electronic Communication – (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)	854	5.73
Mediated Communication – (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)	793	4.04
Interpersonal Communication – (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)	820	4.29
Job Insecurities		
Electronic Communication – (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)	783	4.13
Mediated Communication – (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)	716	3.29
Interpersonal Communication – (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)	814	5.07
External Environment		
Electronic Communication – (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)	852	5.65
Mediated Communication – (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)	770	4.00
Interpersonal Communication – (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)	796	3.94

RQ5: Is there a relationship between public relations practitioners' expression of

personal uncertainty and what is perceived to exist in the organizations?

Overall, Table 20 demonstrates that practitioners slightly agree that their

organizations have uncertainty (*M*=4.16). At the same time they moderately agree that

they are comfortable with the uncertainty in their organizations (*M*=4.75).

Table 20: Relationship between Practitioner Feelings and Organization Uncertainty

	N	M	SD	α
Organization Uncertainty	1055	4.16	1.83	.870
Personal Feelings	924	4.75	1.22	.798

A correlational analysis was conducted to determine the relationships between

these two variables. According to Stacks (202) correlations tell how two variables are

related to each other and how much they influence each other. It is important to note that correlations of 0.0 shows "no relationship," between ±.01 and ±.25 are "weak," between ±.26 and ±.55 are "moderate," between ±.56 and ±.75 are "strong," between ±.76 and ±.99 are "very strong," and ±1.00 is a perfect relationship (Merrigan & Huston, 2004, p. 192).

Pearson correlation coefficients were computed among the five factors. Using the Bonferroni approach to control for Type I error across the 10 correlations, a p value of less than .005 (.05/10=.005) for significance. The results of the correlational analysis presented in Table 21 show that 9 of the 10 correlations were statistically significant at the .001 level, and one at the .005 level. Essentially, a strong relationship existed between job insecurities and practitioner perceived involvement $r = .65$, $p<.001$; a moderate relationship existed between practitioner feelings and job insecurities $r = .30$, $p<.001$, practitioner perceived involvement $r = .40$, $p<.001$, and the external environment $r = .26$, $p<.001$; a moderate relationship existed between the external environment and job insecurities $r = .39$, $p<.001$ and practitioner perceived involvement $r = .37$, $p<.001$; weak relationships existed between organization uncertainty and job insecurities $r = .14$, $p<.001$; practitioner perceived involvement $r = .14$, $p<.001$, practitioner feelings $r = -.23$, $p<.001$, and the external environment $r = .10$, $p<.005$.

As could be expected, the relationship between practitioner feelings of uncertainty and organization uncertainty was an inverse one. In other words, as the amount of organizational uncertainty increases the less comfortable and tolerable practitioners will be within that uncertainty.

Table 21: Correlations Among the Five Factors

	Job Insecurities	Perceived Involvement	Uncertainty	Environment
Involvement	.646**			
Uncertainty	.134**	.144**		
Environment	.362**	.368**	.095*	
Feelings	.279**	.399**	-.225**	.263**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.005 level (2-tailed)

RQ6:   What influences public relations practitioner perceived involvement in the

management of uncertainty?

As research question five discussed, there are significant relationships between

the variables. Because research question six is interested in the variables in relation to

practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty, the correlation

findings are also relevant here.

Essentially, as Table 21 demonstrates, a strong relationship existed between

practitioner perceived involvement and job insecurities $r = .65$, $p<.001$, a moderate

relationship existed between practitioner perceived involvement and the external

environment $r = .37$, $p<.001$ and practitioner feelings $r = -.23$, $p<.001$, and a weak

relationship existed between practitioner perceived involvement and organization

uncertainty $r = .14$, $p<.001$.

Since the correlation analysis showed that relationships exist between the factors

and practitioner perceived involvement, it is then necessary to determine if these

relationships are linear. Therefore, separate scatterplots were created based on the

criterion variable of practitioner perceived involvement and each predictor variable of job

insecurities, the external environment, organization uncertainty, and practitioner feelings.

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Upon review of the four scatterplots, it was determined that all four predictor variables were positively linearly related to practitioner perceived involvement, i.e. as each predictor increases practitioner perceived involvement increases. Specifically, the strongest linear relationship was between practitioner perceived involvement and job insecurities, while the weakest was between practitioner perceived involvement and organization uncertainty.

Next, a multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine influences on practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty. Overall, the results of the multiple regression analysis found the study's factors of job insecurities, the environment, feelings, and organization uncertainty influenced perceived involvement. The factors accounted for approximately 49 percent of the unique variance in perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty $(R = .698, R^2 = .336, \text{Adj. } R^2 = .485, F(4,878) = 208.111, p = .000)$. Table 22 reports the results that suggest perceived involvement is most influenced by: (1) job insecurities, (2) feelings, (3) uncertainty, and (4) the environment.

Table 22: Regression Model for Practitioner Perceived Involvement

Predictor	Beta	t	p-value
Job Insecurities	.520	18.957	.000
Practitioner Feelings	.256	9.454	.000
Organization Uncertainty	.127	4.888	.000
External Environment	.082	3.086	.002

The multiple regression showed that all the factors influenced perceived involvement, but it is, however, not yet known if a combination of these factors has the most influence on perceived involvement. Therefore, a stepwise multiple regression

analysis was an appropriate statistical method to answer this research question, because it is "a model-building technique which finds subsets of predictor variables that most adequately predict responses on a dependent variable by linear (or nonlinear) regression, given the specified criteria for adequacy of model fit" (StatSoft). Essentially, stepwise multiple regression analysis combines various combinations of predictors until the "best fit" is found (Merrigan & Huston, 2004).

A stepwise multiple regression analysis was performed using practitioner perceived involvement as the criterion variable with job insecurities, the external environment, organization uncertainty, and practitioner feelings as the predictor variables. Job insecurities entered on the first step (Model 1) of the analysis and was significantly related to practitioner perceived involvement, $F(1,878) = 630.153$, $p = .000$. The multiple regression correlation coefficient was .65, indicating approximately 42 percent of the unique variance of perceived involvement could be accounted for by job insecurities.

Job insecurities is a good predictor of practitioner perceived involvement, but Table 23 demonstrates how the addition of organization uncertainty for step two (Model 2) was significant and slightly increased the predictability $F(2,876) = 318.683$, $p = .000$, while increasing the unique variance by less than one percent. Next, the external environment was added for step three (Model 3) to slightly more increases the predictability $F(3,875) = 224.970$, $p = .000$, while increasing the unique variance by almost one and a half percent. Finally, step four (Model 4) added practitioner feelings to increase the unique variance by just over five percent and yielded a multiple regression

correlation coefficient of .70, indicating that approximately 49 percent of the unique

variance of perceived involvement could be accounted for by job insecurities,

organization uncertainty, the external environment, and practitioner feelings $F(4,874) =$

208.111, $p = .000$.

Table 23: Stepwise Regression Model for Practitioner Perceived Involvement

	Predictor	R	R^2	Adj. R^2	$R^2\Delta$	p
1	Job Insecurities	.647	.418	.417	.418	.000
2	Job Insecurities + Organization Uncertainty	.649	.421	.420	.003	.032
3	Job Insecurities + Organization Uncertainty + External Environment	.660	.435	.434	.014	.000
4	Job Insecurities + Organization Uncertainty + External Environment + Practitioner Feelings	.698	.488	.485	.052	.000

To determine which step was the best predictor of practitioner perceived

involvement, the stepwise analysis excluded variables at each step (see Table 24). At

step one, organization uncertainty, the external environment, and practitioner feelings

have been excluded, at step two, the external environment, and practitioner feelings have

been excluded, and at step three, external environment has been excluded. The partial

correlation for each excluded variable in each step is significant. This, combined with the

collinearity statistics tolerance (the lower the tolerance, the less contribution to the

model), indicates that the step that has the highest influence on practitioner perceived

involvement is step one (Model 1).

Table 24: Stepwise Regression Model Excluded Variables

	Predictor	Beta	t	p-value	r	Tolerance
1	Organization Uncertainty	.056	2.148	.032	.072	.976
	External Environment	.133	4.827	.000	.161	.854
	Practitioner Feelings	.229	8.848	.000	.286	.912
2	External Environment	.130	4.707	.000	.157	.850
	Practitioner Feelings	.272	10.161	.000	.325	.827
3	Practitioner Feelings	.256	9.454	.000	305	.798

Overall, step one accounts for 49 percent of the unique variance of perceived

involvement. Of this, 42 percent comes from job insecurities, .3 percent comes from

organization uncertainty, 1.4 percent comes from the external environment, and 5.2

percent comes from practitioner feelings.

RQ7: In what organizational sectors do public relations practitioners have the largest

and smallest perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty?

For this research question, an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was run. The

relationship between sector and perceived involvement was significant, $F(17,895) =$

1.843, $p = .020$. Table 25 provides a rank order of practitioner perceived involvement in

the management of uncertainty as received through a *post hoc* Duncan analysis. For this,

employee communications organizations (*M*=4.50), education (teaching) organizations

(*M*=4.35), and health/medical/pharmaceutical organizations (*M*=4.35) were the top three

organizational sectors that had practitioners that perceived themselves to be the most

involved, while international/multicultural organizations (*M*=2.88) had the least

perceived involved practitioners.

Table 25: Rank Order for Perceived Involvement in Uncertainty by Sector

Sector	N	M
Employee Communications	10	4.50
Education (Teaching)	37	4.35
Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical	107	4.32
Professional Services	17	4.28
Manufacturing/Industrial	41	4.21
Other	41	4.15
Education (Counseling)	16	4.11
Financial Services	55	4.04
Sports/Entertainment	10	3.95
Corporate	151	3.94
Government/Municipal/Military	90	3.86
Public Relations Consultant	9	3.72
Agency/Public Relations Firm	98	3.69
Travel/Tourism/Hospitality	30	3.54
Technology	35	3.41
Association/Non-profit	138	3.35
Food/Beverage	9	3.25
International/Multicultural	2	2.88

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, ANOVAs were run on the factors

of organization uncertainty, job insecurities, the external environment, and practitioner

feelings. However, practitioner feelings was the only factor that was significant,

$F(17,890) = 1.989$, $p = .010$. Table 26 provides a rank order of practitioner feelings of

uncertainty in relation to sector as received through a post hoc Duncan analysis. Because

the questions asked practitioners about their comfort to tolerance a high mean in relation

to feelings indicated low uncertainty; therefore, the lower the mean, the higher the

practitioner uncertainty. Consequently, international/multicultural organizations

($M=3.60$) resulted in the highest feelings of uncertainty, followed by

Travel/Tourism/Hospitality organizations ($M=4.33$), and Agency/Public Relations Firms

($M=4.47$). Education (teaching) organizations ($M=5.17$) and the other category ($M=5.19$)

had practitioners that felt the least uncertain.

Table 26: Rank Order for Practitioner Feelings by Sector

Sector	N	M
International/Multicultural	4	3.60
Travel/Tourism/Hospitality	31	4.33
Agency/Public Relations Firm	93	4.47
Food/Beverage	9	4.56
Technology	35	4.59
Government/Municipal/Military	88	4.63
Employee Communications	9	4.67
Public Relations Consultant	9	4.71
Corporate	151	4.72
Association/Non-profit	139	4.73
Education (Counseling)	16	4.76
Manufacturing/Industrial	42	4.83
Sports/Entertainment	10	4.90
Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical	107	4.97
Financial Services	53	5.02
Professional Services	17	5.09
Education (Teaching)	37	5.17
Other	41	5.19

RQ8: Is there a relationship between the demographic attributes such as position,

degree, sex, accreditation, and international status with public relations practitioner level

of perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty?

To answer this research question, parametric analysis was conducted. This is

because according to Stacks (2002), the "interpretations made from continuous – interval

and ratio – data can be quite complex and provide in-depth understanding of sample and

population relationships" (p. 254). Therefore, five one-way analysis of variance

(ANOVA) tests were run. Practitioner perceived involvement was the dependent variable

in the analysis, with specific values of position, degree, sex, accreditation, and

international status as the independent variables.

First, a one-way analysis of variance was conducted to evaluate the relationship

between respondent positions (entry level/technician, specialist/coordinator,

supervisor/director, and senior manager) and practitioner perceived involvement. For the

purpose of the analysis, the one "other" for position was recoded as an unanswered

question. The ANOVA was significant, $F(3,916) = 51.499$, $p = .000$. *Post hoc*

comparisons using Scheffe, the most conservative test, were conducted. According to

Stacks (2002) Scheffe "is to be used when testing a theory or in a situation where true

differences are extremely important" (p. 267).

The *post hoc* found significance between senior managers and their counterparts

of entry level/technicians, specialist/coordinators, and supervisor/directors; and

specialist/coordinators and supervisor/directors. The remainder of the relationships was

not significant. Therefore, as Table 27 demonstrates, senior managers (*M*=4.82) perceive

they are more involved than the other three groups, and supervisor/directors (*M*=3.84) are

more involved than specialist/coordinators (*M*=2.88).

Table 27: ANOVA for Practitioner Perceived Involvement with Position

	N	M
Senior Manager	247	4.82
Supervisor/Director	452	3.84
Specialist/Coordinator	211	2.88
Entry Level/Technician	7	2.21

The second ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between

respondent degrees (high school, associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, no degree,

and PR certificate) and practitioner perceived involvement. The ANOVA was

significant, $F(6,896) = 5.055$, $p = .000$. Post hoc comparisons using Scheffe, found

significance between practitioners with bachelor's (*M*=3.61) and master's degrees

(*M*=4.28). Thus, respondents with master's degrees had higher perceived involvement (see Table 28). The remainder of the relationships were not significant.

Table 28: ANOVA for Practitioner Perceived Involvement with Degree

	N	M
Doctorate	22	4.52
Master's	287	4.28

The remainder of the ANOVAs conducted were comparing two groups to evaluate relationships with practitioner perceived involvement. Therefore, *post hoc* tests were not conducted.

The third ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between respondent sex and practitioner perceived involvement. The ANOVA was significant, $F(1,916) = 14.843$, $p = .000$. As shown in Table 29, perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty was greater for males (*M*=4.19) than females (*M*=3.70).

Table 29: ANOVA for Practitioner Perceived Involvement with Sex

	N	M	SD
Male	304	4.19	1.75
Female	613	3.70	1.87

The fourth ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between respondents being accredited (yes or no question) and practitioner perceived involvement. The ANOVA was significant, $F(1,902) = 27.219$, $p = .000$. Table 30 shows perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty was greater for accredited practitioners (*M*=4.41) than non-accredited practitioners (*M*=3.69).

Table 30: ANOVA for Practitioner Perceived Involvement with Accreditation

	N	M	SD
Yes	238	4.41	1.84
No	665	3.69	1.81

The final ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between respondent organizations international status (yes or no question) and practitioner perceived involvement. The ANOVA was not significant, indicating there is not a relationship.

Other Demographic Findings

Because of the exploratory nature of this study, and simply because this measurement of uncertainty is new, additional demographic analysis was conducted. Essentially, ANOVAs were also run on the factors of organization uncertainty and practitioner feelings. The five analyses are reported separately below.

The first analysis was to evaluate the relationships between respondent positions (entry level/technician, specialist/coordinator, supervisor/director, and senior manager) and the factors of organization uncertainty and practitioner feelings. For organization uncertainty the ANOVA was significant, $F(3,918) = 3.134$, $p = .025$, but post hoc comparisons using Scheffe, found no significance between the positions. On the other hand, for practitioner feelings, the ANOVA was significant, $F(3,911) = 16.024$, $p = .000$. Post hoc comparisons using Scheffe, found significance between senior managers and their counterparts of specialist/coordinators and supervisor/directors. The remainder of the relationships was not significant. As Table 31 indicates, senior managers personally felt more uncertain than the other groups.

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Table 31: ANOVA for Practitioner Feelings with Position

	N	M
Senior Manager	243	5.18
Supervisor/Director	451	4.69
Specialist/Coordinator	211	4.46
Entry Level/Technician	7	4.29

The second analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationships between

respondent degrees (high school, associate, bachelor's, master's, doctorate, no degree,

and PR certificate) and the factors of organization uncertainty and practitioner feelings.

For organization uncertainty the ANOVA was not significant. For practitioner feelings it

was significant $F(6,890) = 2.144$, $p = .046$, but post hoc comparisons using Scheffe found

no significance between the positions.

The third analysis evaluated the relationship between respondent sex (female and

male) and organization uncertainty and practitioner feelings. For organization

uncertainty, the ANOVA was not significant. However, the ANOVA for practitioner

feelings was significant, $F(1,911) = 4.549$, $p = .033$. Table 32 reports that male

respondents ($M=4.88$) felt slightly less uncertain than female respondents ($M=4.70$).

Table 32: ANOVA for Practitioner Feelings with Sex

	N	M	SD
Male	300	4.88	1.13
Female	613	4.70	1.24

The fifth analysis was conducted to evaluate the relationship between respondents

being accredited (yes or no question) with organization uncertainty and practitioner

feelings. Both ANOVAs were significant at $F(1,904) = 5.347$, $p = .021$ and $F(1,896) =$

7.689, $p = .006$, respectively. Table 33 reports that organizational uncertainty was higher

with practitioners that are accredited (*M*=4.43) than those without accreditation

(*M*=4.12). Additionally, practitioner feelings of uncertainty were greater for accredited

practitioners (*M*=4.96) than non-accredited practitioners (*M*=4.71).

**Table 33: ANOVA for Organization Uncertainty and Practitioner Feelings
with Accreditation**

		N	M	SD
Organization Uncertainty	Yes	241	4.43	1.77
	No	664	4.12	1.83
Practitioner Feelings	Yes	237	4.96	1.26
	No	660	4.71	1.16

The final analysis conducted evaluated the relationship of the respondent's

organizations international status (yes or no question) with organization uncertainty and

practitioner feelings. The ANOVAs were not significant, thus, indicating that there is not

a relationship between either of the two groups.

Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Next, to examine how the demographic variables, a cross-tabulation was run.

According to Stacks (2002) this adds "layers" to the analysis (p. 221). Essentially, this

provided statistical significance of the relationship between variables (Green & Salkind,

2003). Chi-square tests are appropriate for comparing categorical variables such as

degree and position, as was done in this study.

One analysis important to this study was a comparison between degree and

position because the ANOVA found that practitioners with bachelor degree's perceived

less involved in the management of uncertainty than those with a master's degree. The

cross-tabulation found respondent degrees and positions to be significantly related,

Pearson χ^2(18, N =909) = 63.971, p=.000. Accordingly, 94 survey percent of

respondents had either a bachelor's degree or a master's degree. Figure 2 depicts that 62

percent of respondents had a bachelor's degree and was comprised of 100 percent of the

entry level/technicians, 77 percent of the specialists/coordinators, 59 percent of the

supervisor/directors, and 52 percent of the senior managers. Respondents with a master's

degree made up 32 percent of the total, and that came from 17 percent of the

specialist/coordinators, 36 percent of the supervisor/directors, and 39 percent of the

senior managers.

Figure 2: Cross-Tabulation of Degree and Position
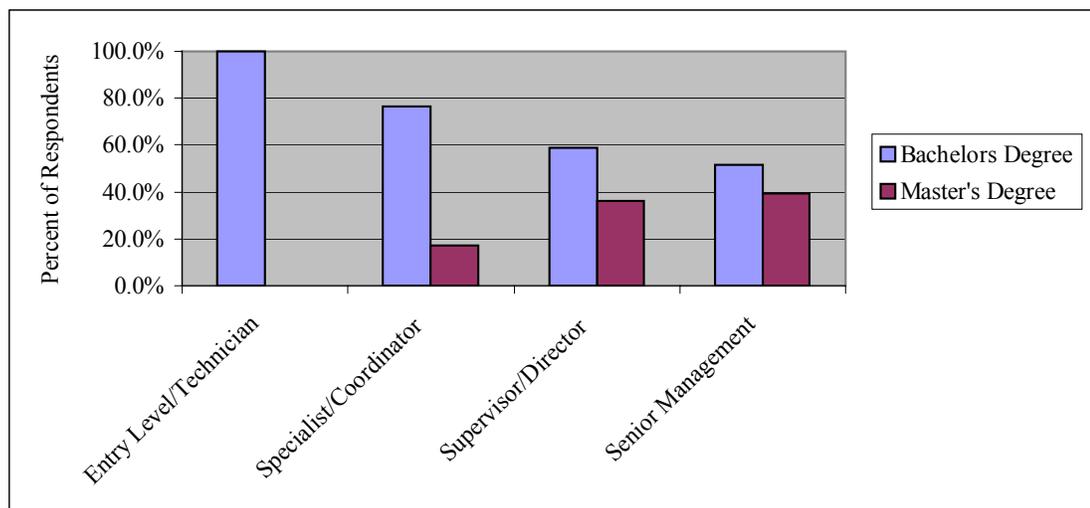
Additionally, since males were found to perceive more involved than females, a

cross-tabulation was conducted on degree and sex. This was found to be significantly

related, [Pearson χ^2(6, N =913) = 18.024, p=.006]. Essentially, 63 percent of survey

females had bachelor's degrees compared to 60 percent of males, and 30 percent of

females had master's degrees compared to 37 percent of males (see Figure 3).

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Figure 3: Cross-Tabulation of Degree and Sex
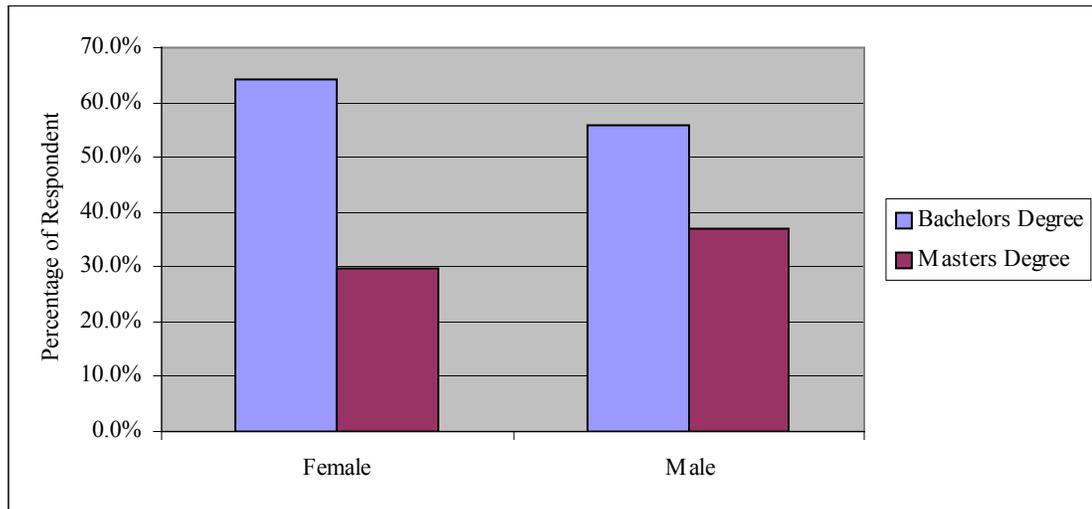
Cross-tabulation analysis was conducted with sector and sex. Because males were found to perceive more involved, it was important to know what sector they were more heavily employed. This analysis was found to be significant [Pearson χ^2(17, N =910) = 30.195, p=.025]. Overall, Figure 4 demonstrates that the largest percentage of survey respondents was in the corporate sector (17%) followed by the non-profit sector (15%). Of this, 22 percent of the male respondents worked in the corporate sector, compared to 14 percent females. Whereas, 17 percent of females worked in the non-profit sector compared to only 10 percent males.

Figure 4: Cross-Tabulation of Sector and Sex
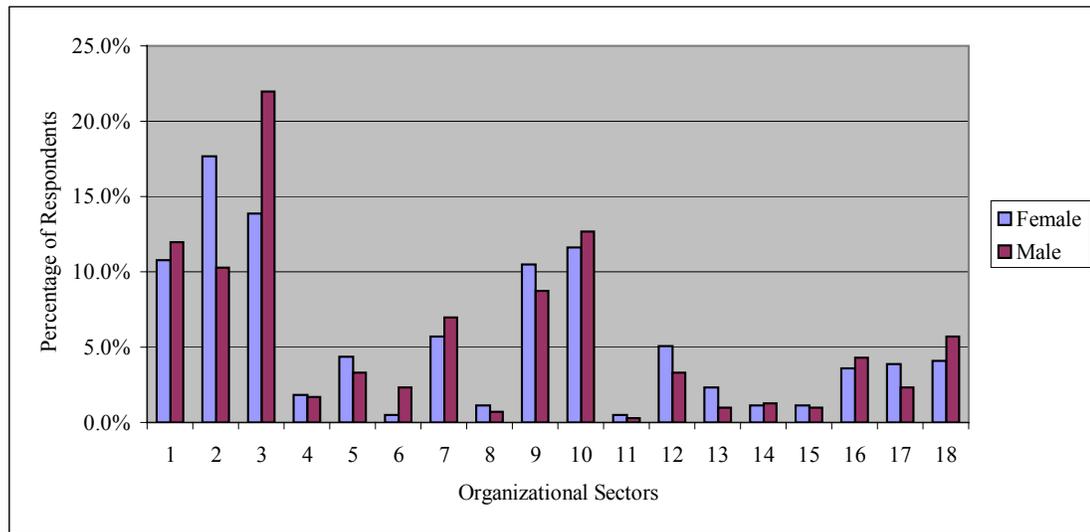
** *Legend for Organizational Sectors*

1. Agency/ PR Firm	7. Financial Services	13. Professional Services
2. Association/Non-profit	8. Food/Beverage	14. PR Consultant
3. Corporate	9. Govt./Municipal/Military	15. Sports/Entertainment
4. Education (Counseling)	10. Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical	16. Technology
5. Education (Teaching)	11. International/Multicultural	17. Travel/Tourism/Hospitality
6. Employee Comm.	12. Manufacturing/Industrial	18. Other

Qualitative Analysis of Respondent Feedback

The qualitative analysis of this study consisted of an analysis of the final survey question that offered respondents an opportunity to provide opinions, questions, or concerns (n=210) and an analysis of responses to the e-mail notifications the researcher sent about the study (n=137). All 347 responses were analyzed for trends.

Figure 5 demonstrates the breakdown of concepts, categories, and subcategories in the analysis of public relations practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty. This figure shows additional reasons why practitioners perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty is low. The trend analysis found that

some practitioners believe the management of uncertainty is a function of human

resources (n= 21) or internal communications (n= 44). Plus, many firms do not get

involved in employee communication for their clients (n= 30), and in some organizations,

public relations is not highly considered (n= 19). As Figure 5 shows, each of these

categories is expanded to include quotations taken from the qualitative analysis.

Figure 5:
Breakdown of Concepts, Categories and Subcategories in the Analysis of Public Relations Practitioner Perceived Involvement in the Management of Uncertainty

- It seemed like most of these questions related to a job in Human Resources, not Public Relations.
- As a public relations professional, as opposed to a human resources professional, I do not handle many of the communication issues addressed in your survey.
- The questions seemed more for Human Resources people rather than Public Relations professionals. PR people don't really deal with layoffs, job insecurities and organizational structure and uncertainties.
- This survey was not at all appropriate for me to receive. It should have been send to people in the HR special interest group.
- The primary focus of the Public Relations survey seemed more highly focused on the responsibilities of the HR department (as far as determining policy, etc.).

Perception that management of uncertainty is an HR function – NOT PR (n= 21)

- PR deals with media relations - not internal communications.
- I'm fascinated that you think PR has so much to do with internal policy setting, organizational structure and internal communications.
- I manage public relations -- not internal communications.
- This is more an internal communications or employee communications survey, versus a Public Relations Survey.
- I feel that while addressed to public relations professionals, this survey focuses almost entirely on employee communications, which falls outside the purview of many public relations professionals.

Perception that management of uncertainty is an internal communication function – NOT PR (n= 44)

Public Relations Practitioner Involvement in the Management of Uncertainty

- None of this pertains to public relations, or public relation positions. I own a PR firm.
- I don't feel as if this really applied to me. I run a PR dept. at a local adv/comm. firm. I do try and get involved internally as the agency, as morale here has worsened and there are fears of job loss, etc. The board however, seems to close everybody out and doesn't communicate when appropriate. It's a losing battle and honestly, though I try sometimes to let them know how important it is, I've honestly given up. It's got to start at the top.
- I currently work as an outside consultant. This survey was really geared at someone who does employee communications within a company.

Firms do not communicate to client's employees (n= 30)

- Great survey, but I wish you would have asked whether I thought upper management took my job seriously. I know more about communicating than anyone else in this organization, and yet I find that few of my ideas are taken seriously. What a shame.
- In general my organization does a terrible job with employee communications, as HR will not let communications handle it.
- Good questions and I'm depressed for having answered as I did because the role PR plays in our organization is not the role it should play. Although management talks a lot about employees, it rarely communicates effectively with them...focusing the majority of its efforts on media relations and paid advertising.
- It is important that PR professionals - or their input - be included in the executive-level discussions regarding policy decisions, company mission and employee relations. We need to keep fighting for a chair at that table.

Perception that PR is not highly considered in organization (n= 19)

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CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

This study attempted to further theory-driven public relations research by taking a triangulated methodological approach to work towards establishing a framework of organizational uncertainty for public relations practitioners. To do so, this study first took a macro-organizational look at uncertainty to learn what uncertainty was perceived to exist organizationally. Then, by utilizing trends in the literature, qualitative in-depth interviews were conducted with members of management and employees of an organization. The results of this macro-organizational perspective confirmed the multidisciplinary research used in this study that indicated uncertainty was multi-layered. Consequently, this first step confirmed the trends in literature that the four most common workplace uncertainty variables are: organizational change, unclear policies, job insecurity, and the external environment. Communication was determined to be a critical factor in managing uncertainty.

These data were then used to conduct a more micro-organizational analysis of uncertainty to look the role of public relations practitioners. The goals of this step of the study were to determine *what* uncertainties public relations practitioners perceived to exist within their organizations, *how* public relations practitioners communicate during

times of uncertainty, and *what* their overall perceived involvement is with organizational uncertainty.

To further expand on this, the results will be discussed as they relate to the categories of conceptualization of organizational uncertainty, practitioner perceptions and personal feelings of uncertainty, practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty, and uncertainty communication strategies.

Conceptualization of Organizational Uncertainty

One of the indirect goals of this study was to create a survey instrument to test organizational uncertainty in relation to public relations practitioners. This was successfully accomplished (see Appendix H). Each item on the survey was derived from the review of literature. Overall, the survey was written to measure what the literature trends and the qualitative analysis determined the four main causes of organizational uncertainty should be: organizational change, policies, job insecurities and the external environment. This is important to note, because the quantitative portion of the study did not confirm that.

Overall, the survey was written to measure seven variables, including the four common causes and three variables of: uncertainty in the organization, practitioner's personal feelings of uncertainty, and practitioner perceived involvement in uncertainty. However, although the research was guided by the review of literature and the qualitative analysis to measure four main causes of uncertainty (organizational change, policies, job insecurities and the external environment), the factor analysis conducted found that only

two for these four variables were measuring the same thing. Three of the four items on the questionnaire used to measure the external environment loaded into one factor. As a result, this factor was named *External Environment*.

The other three variables originally considered parts of the common causes for organizational uncertainty loaded together. This factor primarily comprised of the measures for job insecurities (three out of the four questions loaded), now also included a policy measure and a change measure. Because the bulk of this factor was directly from the job insecurities variable, the factor name was determined to be *Job Insecurities*.

There were three other factors, but they were created independently from the common causes and will be discussed separately. Instead of the expected four common causes of organizational uncertainty, this study found two namely, the external environment and job insecurities.

The external environment factor largely represented the construct as originally conceptualized. However, the job insecurities factor was more complex. With this factor, as mentioned, three of the job insecurities measures loaded. To comprehend the reasons for this, job insecurity must be better understood.

Overall, job insecurity is a "discrepancy between the level of security employees would like their jobs to provide, and the level that they perceive to exist" (Hartley, Jacobson, Klandermans, & Van Vuuren, 1991, p. 18). This insecurity can stem from many components. The literature found that the main causes for job insecurity come from reductions in workforce, specifically downsizing (layoffs), restructuring, and mergers (Walsh, 1988). Additionally, a large reason for job insecurities comes from a

perceived threat (e.g., the likelihood of job loss) or a perceived loss of control (Greenhalgh & Rosenblatt, 1984). A perceived loss of control can be described as a psychological understanding of what one will give and receive (Schein, 1980). Essentially, many things can lead to a perceived loss of control. Past research found insecurity to come from organizational change such as undefined and redefined roles (Schein, 1980). This primarily includes having a shared organizational meaning (Pfeffer, 1992). This shared organizational meaning would therefore include agreement and understanding of personal and organizational goals and policies.

Therefore, it is appropriate that the job insecurities factor loaded with the policy measure of, "One of my organizational goals is to define policies clearly." This is because a policy is a prescribed guide for conduct or action (Gilsdorf, 1987). In other words, a lack of clarity surrounding goals can lead to a perceived loss of control and result in job insecurity.

Similarly, one of the organizational change measures, "I am involved in including employees in decision-making related to change" also loaded on the job insecurity factor. On the surface this question appears to measure change, but in actuality it is measuring more. Essentially, all organizational change includes decision-making. Typically, change is specialized and top management makes strategic decisions; middle managers make internal structural decisions; and lower managers are responsible for day-to-day decisions (Hatch, 1997). The problem within this decision-making structure is the lack of employee involvement. Studies report negative side effects from a lack of participation in decision-making, such as ill health and loss of production (Sashkin, 1984), factors that

would negatively affect an organization's ability to innovate and change (Holtzhausen, 2001). When management fails to involve employees in decision-making, employees often feel alienated, and as a result, are insecure in their jobs.

Therefore, the findings of the factor analysis indicate that what was originally considered three separate and distinct causes of organizational uncertainty, are in fact one. In other words, organizational change, policies, and job insecurities all measure the same thing, namely, job insecurities. Although other components of organizational change and policies exist, they did not load into any factor exclusively and were dispersed across many of the other factors in weak loadings, again indicating that they are more accurately components of other factors instead of being factors themselves.

Additionally, the factor analysis kept the other three variables intact. This included: uncertainty in the organization, the practitioner's personal feelings of uncertainty, and practitioner perceived involvement in uncertainty. Therefore, each of these variables was measuring what it was created to measure. The only difference in factor loadings was with the perceived involvement factor. For this, two of the six items did not load, but four remained in the factor.

To summarize, the factor analysis resulted in five significant factors of: job insecurities, practitioner perceived involvement, organization uncertainty, external environment, and practitioner feelings. These factors were utilized in answering research questions that guided the study. The primary interest of this study was centered on identifying what uncertainty public relations practitioners perceive they are involved in, but for practitioner perceived involvement to be understood, it is important to also know

how uncertain practitioners themselves are and if they perceive their organizations as having uncertainty. Additionally, it is helpful to know what type of communication strategies practitioners use in organizational uncertainty.

Practitioner Perceptions and Personal Feelings of Uncertainty

The results of this study confirmed the qualitative analysis by finding that uncertainty currently exists in organizations (*M*=4.16). It is important to note that the literature suggested that there are fundamental differences between how employees cope with uncertainty (Budner, 1962; Kirton, 1981; McPherson, 1983; Kramer, 1999). Most recently, Kramer (1999) identified two factors influencing an individual's experience of uncertainty. First, individuals do not experience uncertainty in each event. Predictable or easily understood situations may result in very low levels of perceived uncertainty. Second, individuals have differing degrees of uncertainty tolerance. Therefore, although it is possible that different people experience uncertainty differently, the amount of uncertainty practitioners perceived is controlled for with the random sample and subsequent response rate.

The results of the study also found that practitioners have little personal uncertainty (*M*=4.75). The questions that measured their feelings asked practitioners about their comfort in relation to what was believed to be the four common causes of uncertainty and their overall tolerance for uncertainty.

In light of the new findings on the common causes of uncertainty, this factor was determined to still be an accurate depiction of practitioner feelings about these causes.

This is because this study found organizational change and job policies to be components of job insecurities, and therefore, each still leads to uncertainty.

Although practitioners were found to feel comfortable with their environment and they are not insecure about their jobs, when directly asked to rank their agreement to the statement "As an employee I find it easy to tolerate uncertainty within my organization," practitioners did not find it "easy" to tolerate uncertainty in their organizations (M=3.69). This indicates that practitioners are experiencing greater uncertainty than the collapsed factor indicates. This could be because the study focused on the previously identified causes, when, possibly, there is another component of organizational uncertainty that practitioners are experiencing that this study does not test for.

In light of these findings, the researcher assessed the relationship between public relations practitioner's personal feelings about uncertainty and what they perceived to exist within their organizations. Essentially, this was a synthesis of the above findings, so a correlation analysis was conducted. It found a weak inverse relationship existed between the uncertainty in the organizations and practitioner personal feelings of uncertainty. In other words, this relationship indicates, as one would expect, that as the amount of organizational uncertainty increases the less comfortable and tolerable practitioners would be within the uncertainty.

Because practitioner feelings were found to be significantly related to the uncertainty in organizations, the demographic attributes were used to provide additional understanding of this factor. Specifically, senior managers were found to feel higher levels of uncertainty. This was probably due to the nature of the position of senior

management. With this job position comes substantially more responsibility than the other positions, and therefore, more uncertainty as it relates to various components of the job. Additionally, there was no significance with degrees, but accredited practitioners felt higher uncertainty.

Males were found to be less personally uncertain than females. Currently, no research on gender and personal feelings of uncertainty exists. Possibly, this could simply be a response due to the higher perceived involvement of males in the management of uncertainty, as discussed below. In other words, because females do not perceive as much involvement as males, they do not have as much information about the situation and therefore feel greater uncertainty.

Practitioner Perceived Involvement in Organizational Uncertainty

The seminal findings of this study relate to practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceived involvement in uncertainty. The results of the study indicated that practitioners perceive moderate involvement in the management of uncertainty (M=3.86). This reported perception of moderate perceived involvement in uncertainty can be a result of limited access to the dominant coalition by respondents. Public relations practitioners have long struggled to justify their professional status and management roles to the top management of their organizations (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). The excellence study found practitioners "increase their access to the dominant coalition through education, experience, and professionalism" (p. 169).

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This study supported this proposition by identifying differences in public relations practitioners' levels of perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty in relation to the demographic attributes of position, degree, sex, and accreditation. First, this study found that senior managers ($M=4.82$) perceive substantially more involvement in the management of uncertainty than supervisor/directors ($M=3.84$), specialist/coordinators ($M=2.88$), and level/technicians ($M=2.21$). This is what one would expect because research has shown that public relations managers typically make policy decisions and are held accountable for public relations program outcomes whereas public relations technicians carry out the low-level mechanics of generating communication products (Dozier, 1992). Additionally, Guant and Ollenburger (1995) found that the role of boundary spanning, although having both technical and managerial components, was more likely to be a part of the managerial role. Therefore, since the external environment is such a large part of organizational uncertainty, it is reasonable to assume the most dominant role in the communication of uncertainty will be senior management.

Directly in line with this finding, is the discovery that practitioners with a doctorate degree ($M=4.52$) perceive the most involvement, followed by those with a master's ($M=4.28$) degree. Surprisingly, the analysis also found that practitioners with only a public relations certificate, a high school degree ($M=4.06$), or an associate's degree ($M=4.06$) perceive more involvement in the management of uncertainty than those with a bachelor's degree ($M=3.61$). In other words, all practitioners perceive more involvement than those with a bachelor's degree.

This can possibly be explained by understanding what each of the degrees teaches practitioners to do. Based on The Public Relations Commission findings for public relations education for the 21st century, it can be said that the higher the degree, the deeper one's knowledge of the field (Kruckenberg & Paluszek, 1999). Specifically, a doctoral degree is a theory and research degree where students gain a deeper awareness of public relations theory and research in relationship to those of other communication-related studies. For a master's degree students learn and appreciate the role of public relations as part of the management team, so they "learn relevant management and communications competencies and the skills needed to build effective relationships between organizations and their publics" (p. 5). Contrary to this management focus is the bachelor's degree. Instead of learning management skills, students studying for a bachelor's degree are educated on both communication and public relations knowledge (theoretical and historically based) and tactical skills.

Therefore, possibly an explanation for this study's findings is that practitioners with a bachelor's degree are delegated to perform the tactical skills they were taught and therefore, perform less managerial based roles, while practitioners with other degrees or no degree step beyond the tactical roles to perceive greater involvement in the management of uncertainty.

Subsequently, as one might expect, a cross-tab analysis found senior managers to have a lower percentage of respondents with bachelor's degrees and a higher percentage of respondents with a master's degrees compared to the other positions. Thus, yielding a greater explanation of why senior managers perceive the most involvement.

Similarly, this study found that accredited practitioners (*M*=4.41) perceive more involvement than non-accredited practitioners (*M*=3.69). Essentially, accreditation is a voluntary certification program for public relations professionals. The accreditation exam is heavily weighted in demonstrating a firm comprehension of management skills (About PR). Therefore, because accredited practitioners have knowledge beyond tactical skills, it can be expected that they will perceive more involved in the management of uncertainty.

Another significant finding of this research is that males perceive more involved in the management of uncertainty than females. The purpose of this study is not to support or dispute the issues surrounding gender and public relations; however, this is an important discovery and deserves mention along with a possible explanation.

Gender inequalities in the tasks of female and male public relations practitioners are well documented (Dozier, Grunig, & Grunig, 1995 ; Toth, Serini, Wright, & Emig, 1998). This previous research found female practitioners to be more likely to hold a technician role than men. This indicates that women are often spending time on routine activities such as writing, editing, and handling of media relations. Conversely, men are in more powerful managerial roles, engaging in such activities as boundary spanning, counseling senior management and making policy decisions (Dozier, et al., 1995; Toth, et al., 1998). Therefore, based on this, one may expect females to perceive less involved in the management of uncertainty.

A cross-tab analysis found that more female respondents had a bachelor's degree than male respondents, while more male respondents had master's degrees than females, thus providing greater understanding for the gap in perceived involvement.

Additional support for this proposition was found in the survey respondent comments that expressed perceptions of public relations not being highly considered. For example, one respondent stated

> Great survey, but I wish you would have asked whether I thought upper management took my job seriously. I know more about communicating than anyone else in this organization, and yet I find that few of my ideas are taken seriously. What a shame.

While another stated

> Good questions and I'm depressed for having answered as I did because the role PR plays in our organization is not the role it should play. Although management talks a lot about employees, it rarely communicates effectively with them...focusing the majority of its efforts on media relations and paid advertising.

Knowing who perceives involved is equally as important as knowing what influences practitioner perceived involvement in organizational uncertainty. Therefore, a correlation analysis was conducted. This analysis found a relationship to exist between practitioner perceived involvement and job insecurities, practitioner feelings, organization uncertainty, and the environment, and review of scatterplots determined each to be positive linear relationships.

The multiple regression analysis conducted found job insecurities to be the strongest individual influence of practitioner perceived involvement, followed by the external environment, practitioner feelings, and organization uncertainty. This further explains these relationships found through the correlation analysis. Therefore, not only are there relationships between perceived involvement and job insecurities, the external environment, practitioner feelings, and organization uncertainty, but in fact, these relationships influence practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty. In other words, when there are job insecurities within the organization, public relations practitioners perceive more involved with the management of uncertainty.

To further clarify this influence, a stepwise multiple regression analysis found that approximately 50 percent of practitioner perceived involvement can be predicted by a combination of job insecurities, the external environment, practitioner feelings, and organization uncertainty. Although 50 percent remains unexplained, the important finding to this analysis was that job insecurities are most influential in predicting practitioner perceived involvement even within combinations of influences.

This influence on perceived involvement suggests that practitioners, and possibly organizational leaders, understand the need for communication in helping employees with job insecurities. This coincides with the concept that public relations practitioners could be a resource for both employees and management by ensuring proper communication and in building a participative communication culture (Winklhofer,

2002). It is through fostering this participative culture that public relations practitioners'

perceived involvement in alleviating job insecurities can be realized.

Next, this study sought to identify the organizational sectors in which public

relations practitioners had the largest and smallest amount of perceived involvement in

organizational uncertainty. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) indicated that employee

communication organizations (M=4.50), education (teaching) organizations(M=4.35),

and health/medical/pharmaceutical organizations (M=4.35) were the top three

organizational sectors that had practitioners that perceived the most involvement, while

international/multicultural organizations(M=2.88) had practitioners that perceived the

least involvement.

ANOVA also indicated that the top three sectors practitioners feel uncertain in are

international/multicultural organizations (M=3.60), travel/tourism/hospitality

organizations (M=4.33), Agency/Public Relations Firms (M=4.47), while education

(teaching) organizations (M=5.17) were found to cause the least amount of feelings of

uncertainty.

It appears that international or multicultural organizations cause feelings of

uncertainty, but have low practitioner perceived involvement in the management of

uncertainty. Possibly, this low perceived involvement is because international or

multicultural organizations participate in uncertainty avoidance. As Adler (1997)

identified uncertainty avoidance is the avoidance of uncertainty by "providing greater

career stability, establishing more formal rules, rejecting deviant ideas and behavior, and

accepting the possibility of absolute truths and the attainment of expertise" (p. 51).

Although relatively low in the United States, it is possible that organizations based in the United States that are international or multinational, could participate in uncertainty avoidance behaviors to better function with their international counterpart's cultural norms. If this is the case, than one would expect low public relations practitioner perceived involvement in the communication of uncertainty, as this study found.

Because gender led to interesting results with both practitioner perceived involvement and practitioner feelings, a cross-tab analysis was conducted for sector and sex to determine if there were gender differences in the sectors. The results showed that male respondents were primarily employed in corporate organizations while the female respondents worked for associations/non-profit organizations. Subsequently, corporate organizations were found to have higher practitioner perceived involvement than associations/non-profit organizations. Additionally, employee communications (the sector with practitioners that perceived the most involved) was largely comprised of males, so possibly that explains their high perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty.

These findings aside, the qualitative analysis shed light on the low perceived involvement of practitioners in the management of uncertainty by demonstrating that many practitioners simply do not believe communicating with employees is a function of public relations. For example, some believe it to be a function of human resources as one respondent said, "It seemed like most of these questions related to a job in Human Resources, not Public Relations." Others believed that it was a function of internal communication as one practitioner said, "PR deals with media relations – not internal

communications." Finally, some practitioners that own or work in public relations firms

found that the management of uncertainty does not relate to them because as one said

"None of this pertains to public relations, or public relation positions. I own a PR firm."

Uncertainty Communication Strategies

The final goal of this study was to examine the communication strategies public

relations practitioners use to aid employees in coping with organizational uncertainty. As

was discussed previously, this section of the survey also included the four original

common causes of organizational uncertainty; all four causes were retained for the

purpose of providing depth to answering the research question.

Overall, electronic communication, such as e-mail, list serves, and the intranet,

were the most prevalent communication tactics the respondents identified (M=5.72).

Specifically, this study found electronic communication to be the most common channel

of communicating to employees about organizational change (*M*=5.72), policies

(*M*=5.73), and the external environment (*M*=5.65).

This confirms previous research findings on the impact of the Internet on public

relations (Porter & Sallott, 2003; Wright, 2001; Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2000).

Research has yet to show what electronic communication consists of for internal publics,

and what this impact is on public relations. But, it is clear that practitioners are using

electronic communication with great frequency. For example, in a 2001 study, Wright

found 98 percent of practitioners agree that recent advances in technology such as e-mail

have impacted how they do their jobs. Similarly, Porter and Sallot (2003) found 98.6

percent of respondents, in their study of PRSA members, reported using the Internet and 85.4 percent reported using e-mail.

Although this current study focused on electronic communication used internally whereas previous studies were looking more broadly at its use, it is still a fair explanation of the pervasiveness of electronic communication use. This study supported the previous studies that the prevalence of electronic communication in public relations is strong.

Like in the qualitative study where interviewees said e-mail communication comprised 50 to 75 percent of a typical days communication with an average of approximately 70 e-mails per day, priority is not placed on interpersonal, two-way communication.

However, using electronic communication is not the only form of communication. When dealing with job insecurities, practitioners in this study emphasized interpersonal communication (M=5.07). This is important, because research has found that when employees feel insecure in their jobs they seek information to help alleviate that insecurity (Winklhofer, 2002). Often this information is sought from a direct supervisor, but when this is unavailable employees look to other sources (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000). Therefore, as practitioners reported, interpersonal communication such as small group meetings and town hall meetings are a common means of helping employees cope with uncertainty that leads to job insecurities.

Additionally, this study found that interpersonal communication was the second most popular communication practice to aid employees with organizational change and policies. Mediated communication was the least common communication practice for

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organizational change, policies, and job insecurities. However, in relation to employee communication about the external environment, mediated communication (M=4.00), such as newsletters, flyers, and memos, are more frequently used than interpersonal communication (M=3.94). This is surprising, since boundary spanning is a continuous process often resulting in changes in organizational activities; therefore, one might expect interpersonal communication to be more common than mediated communication practices.

Overall, the findings are somewhat encouraging. On one hand, is it alarming that electronic communication is so prevalent, since this does not aid in relationship building and the fostering of trust (both critical components of successfully coping with uncertainty) (Senge, 2001; Argenti, 1998). However, the findings show that practitioners are selective in the use of communication practices. It is important to use the right communication practice for the right public (Wilcox, Ault, Agee, & Cameron, 2000). This study also demonstrates that multiple communication methods are used to communicate. No matter what the medium, organizations will benefit from frequent communication channels, especially in states of organizational uncertainty (Argenti, 1998; Crabb, 1995; Pruden & Vavra, 2000). Employees have diverse needs, wants, and skills, so they need diverse ways to cope with uncertainty. It is the responsibility of practitioners to recognize the existence of these diverse needs and use the appropriate communication practices (Cludts, 1999; Shadur, Kienzle, & Rodwell, 1999).

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

This study has important implications for the development of an organizational uncertainty framework for public relations practitioners. It was successful in lessening the theoretical gap in the effects of uncertainty on organizations as related to public relations. First, this study took a qualitative macro-organizational look at uncertainty (see Chapter 3) and determined that the causes of uncertainty were multi-layered consisting of organizational change, policies, job insecurities, and the external environment; that managers communicate poorly within uncertainty; and that uncertainty resulted in high stress levels and upset employees.

Next, a more micro-organizational analysis of uncertainty was taken to look at the role of public relations in uncertainty management. Ultimately, the results found that public relations practitioners perceived a moderate amount of uncertainty to exist in primarily the two common causes of job insecurities and the external environment. Although practitioners felt low levels of personal uncertainty they perceived moderate involvement in the management of this uncertainty. Additionally, job insecurities were found to be the highest predictor of perceived involvement and males perceived more involvement than females. Similarly, practitioners with a bachelor's degree were found to perceive the least amount of involvement.

Organizational leaders should be aware of and understand uncertainty because it will enable them to manage information better. It is through this management of information that employees cope with uncertainty and organizations gain a strategic advantage over competitors (Mangaliso, 1995).

Since the management of information is vital, public relations practitioners are an important component in working to balance the needs of employees with organizational success. Essentially, the management of uncertainty is encompassed in the goals of communication management to "establish and maintain mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and the employees on whom its success or failure depends" (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000, p. 289). Overall, this relationship must minimally contain the following seven conditions: (1) confidence and trust between employers and employees, (2) free flow of information up, down, and sideways, (3) ample participation for each person, (4) work continuity, (5) healthy atmosphere, (6) organizational success, and (7) optimism about the future (Cutlip et al., 2000). It is when any of these components are lacking that organizational uncertainty thrives.

This study found that practitioners have low perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty. Since the management of uncertainty in organizations is a management level initiative, public relations practitioners will "make their maximum contribution to strategic management of the organization…as part of the organization's dominant coalition" (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002, p. 171). Although this is not a requirement, it is, however, it is an "important characteristic of excellence" (p. 171).

Therefore, organizational leaders should value public relations as a critical managerial, rather than merely technical, organizational function.

Since not all practitioners contribute to internal communication, involvement in the management of organizational uncertainty would expand their roles. Employees are a crucial audience for public relations practitioners (L. Grunig, J. Grunig, & Dozier, 2002). This is especially true because as Wilcox, Ault, Agee, and Cameron (2000) state,

> In these days of corporate turmoil, unrest and uncertainty among employees create a greater need than ever for effective employee communications. Surveys indicate a dropoff in employees' loyalty to their companies, based in part on their belief that remote corporate managements feel no loyalty to them (p. 343).

Public relations practitioners should take an active role in building relationships with this critical internal public. In the very least this should include company magazines, brochures, newsletters, and policy manuals, but more essentially, day-to-day interactions should be established, placing a high priority on effective two-way communication (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 2000). The better informed employees are, the less likely they are to spread erroneous and possibly damaging misinformation.

Limitations

As previously mentioned, although the response rate for this study was 31.8, this study suffered from limitations due to responses. Specifically, because so few practitioners in the random sample did not have an e-mail address, the number of hard copy mail questionnaires sent out was low, and subsequently, so was the number of mail

replies. This resulted in a need to combine the statistical analysis with the online responses, and therefore an understanding of differences or similarities between the two groups is not known. On the other hand, the number of online responses was significantly more than needed for genralizability, although with the less than favorable conditions of Internet viruses, this was also lower than one would expect.

In addition, this study is limited to the scope of which it is applied. Essentially, relationships were tested and the analysis showed that job insecurities, the external environment, organization uncertainty, and practitioner feelings influence perceived practitioner involvement. Based on this study, it is not know if these factors influence each other.

Another limitation was the broad scope this study had for practitioners. Although it was appropriate and necessary to identify overall practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty, it did not specifically assess the perceived involvement in uncertainty by practitioners that participate in employee communication. Possibly, this more refined approach would yield a more definitive understanding of uncertainty.

Further Research

It was through the qualitative research that organizational uncertainty was found to be multi-layered consisting of organizational change, policies, job insecurities, and the external environment. However, the quantitative survey of public relations practitioners found organizational uncertainty to come from job insecurities and the external environment.

These findings, although significant in their own respect, provide direction for further research. First, because of the discrepancy in common causes between the qualitative findings at the organizational level and the survey findings of practitioners, further research should be conducted to unmask other possible causes of uncertainty that are influential with respect to public relations practitioners. Second, since the multi-layered uncertainty findings resulted from interviews with ten people in one organization, future research could incorporate a quantitative analysis to more broadly identify organizational uncertainty.

Once the causes of uncertainty are determined, research should be conducted to identify the organizational climate as perceived by employees and management. Although a critical component to the full understanding of uncertainty, this step was in not included in this study. This is because it was first important to determine what kinds of uncertainty exist within the organization and then what role, if any, pubic relations practitioners play in uncertainty management. Now that it has been determined that practitioners *do* participate in the management of uncertainty, it becomes necessary to take the next steps in working towards establishing a framework of organizational uncertainty for public relations practitioners. Essentially, these next steps should begin with a more focused population more narrowly defined to include only practitioners that participate in employee communication. This further research will allow for a more specific assessment of practitioner perceived involvement in the management of uncertainty.

Additionally, this study did not assess coping strategies beyond identifying communication tactics used to "aid employees in coping" with organizational change, policies, job insecurities, and the external environments. This study found that electronic communication was the overwhelmingly main strategy used except in respect to job insecurities where interpersonal communication was more prevalent. The simplistic measures in this study should be expanded in future research to better determine specific methods and messages in relation to the communication surrounding organizational uncertainty. Ultimately, public relations practitioners use multiple channels of communication, and it is possible that some are more effective than others. Since this was not included in the current study, further research is necessary to make this determination.

The demographic findings of this study were informative and lead to implications for other research. Specifically, the findings that males perceive more involvement in the management of uncertainty lends credence to additional research on gender influences in determining practitioner involvement in management roles and interaction with and inclusion in dominant coalitions. Along with this, the finding that practitioners with a bachelor's degree perceive the least amount of involvement in the management of uncertainty has implication to investigating the need for incorporating a stronger management component to the bachelor's degree education.

Implications for Public Relations Practice

This study was successful in its ultimate goal of working toward establishing a framework of organizational uncertainty for public relations practitioners. Next steps have been identified; however, the current findings have important implications for better understanding the practice of public relations. Essentially, public relations practitioners can be a valuable asset in the management of organizational uncertainty. Research has shown that the amount of uncertainty an organization can handle and how well it manages it determines success (Kiev, 2002). Therefore, successful practitioners will understand this and be involved in the management of uncertainty.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. What do you believe are important skills in a leader?
   - Same for both managers and employees
2. What has been your biggest leadership challenge?
   - What do you perceive as your managers biggest challenge?
3. What are some of the challenges you face in communicating with your team (boss)?
4. What do you think is the effect of market fluctuation on the company and your team?
   - Same for both managers and employees
5. What do you think the effect of a potential war has on the company and your team?
   - Same for both managers and employees
6. What would you do differently if you knew exactly what the phone volumes would be?
   - Same for both managers and employees
7. Do you have unclear policies within your company? If so how do you manage within this?
   - What role does your manager play in this situation?
8. Are the goals set for you clear? How about the goals of your employees?
   - First questions only for employees
9. In your opinion why do your employees stay with the company? Why do you stay with the company?
   - Second question only for employees
10. Is morale high or low within your team?
    - Same question for both managers and employees
11. How do you engage in communication with your team given your daily work demands?
    How many employees are on your team?
    What percent of your typical daily communication is through e-mail?
    In a typical day, how many times do you speak face to face per employee (boss)?
    - Same questions for both
12. What do your think your employees fear at work?
    - What do you perceive or what do you personally fear at work?
13. What do role do you play with rumors?
    - What role does your boss play with rumors?
14. How do you help your employees adapt to change?
    - What does your boss do to help you adapt to change?
15. Overall, what do you believe is the greatest cause of uncertainty?
    - Same question for managers and employees

Dear FPRA member:

I am writing to ask for your help in pre-testing a study of public relations practitioner involvement in organizational activities. This study is part of my thesis work at the University of South Florida.

The survey is located on the Web at www.usf.edu/metrics/. It should take no more than 10 minutes and your answers are completely confidential.

Since this is a pretest, I would greatly appreciate any comments, thoughts, or suggestions you have on the survey instrument itself. Please include this in the comment box at the end of the survey or e-mail me directly at mlwatso2@helios.acomp.usf.edu.

Thank you for your time in helping me with this important study.

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Watson
M.A. Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

APPENDIX C
SURVEY PRENOTICE

Dear XYZ,

A few days from now you will receive an e-mail request to fill out a brief questionnaire for an important research project being conducted for completion of my thesis at the University of South Florida.

It concerns the involvement of public relations practitioners in organizational activities.

You were selected to participate in this through a random selection of PRSA members. I am writing in advance because we have found that many people like to know ahead of time that they will be contacted. The study is an important one that will help in the understanding of organizational uncertainty.

Thank you for your time and consideration. It's only with the generous help of people like you that our research can be successful.

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Watson
M.A. Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

Dear XYZ,

I am writing to ask your help in a study of public relations practitioner involvement in organizational activities. This survey is part of my thesis work at the University of South Florida.

The survey is to be completed online at http://isis.fastmail.usf.edu/metrics/.

You were selected to participate in this through a random selection of PRSA members.

Results from the survey will be used an effort to understand organizational uncertainty and will be available upon request. Your answers are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. This survey is voluntary. However, you can help me very much by taking approximately 10 minutes to share your experience, opinions, and perceptions pertaining to your organization or your most recent client if you work at a firm.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to hear from you.   Please either complete the final question on the questionnaire or reply to this e-mail.

Thank you very much for helping with this important study!

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Watson
M.A. Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

Dear XYZ,

Recently, a questionnaire about public relations practitioner involvement in organizational activities was e-mailed to you for a study I am conducting for the completion of my thesis at the University of South Florida.

This study is drawing to a close, and this is the last contact that will be made. Hearing from everyone in this small sample helps assure that the survey results are as accurate as possible. I am especially grateful for your help because it is only by asking practitioners to share their experiences that we can better understand our field.

The survey is to be completed online at http://isis.fastmail.usf.edu/metrics/.

If you have already completed the questionnaire, please accept my sincere thanks. I want to assure you that your response to this study is voluntary, and if you prefer not to respond that is fine.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Watson
M.A. Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

Dear XYZ,

I am writing to ask your help in a study of public relations practitioner involvement in organizational activities. The enclosed survey is part of my thesis work at the University of South Florida.

You were selected to participate in this through a random selection of PRSA members.

Results from the survey will be used an effort to understand organizational uncertainty and will be available upon request. Your answers are completely confidential and will be released only as summaries in which no individual's answers can be identified. This survey is voluntary. However, you can help me very much by taking approximately 10 minutes to share your experience, opinions, and perceptions pertaining to your organization or your most recent client if you work at a firm. If for some reason you prefer not to respond, please let me know by returning the blank questionnaire in the enclosed stamped envelope.

If you have any questions or comments about this study, I would be happy to hear from you.

Thank you very much for helping with this important study!

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Watson
M.A. Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

Dear XYZ,

Recently, a questionnaire about public relations practitioner involvement in organizational activities was mailed to you for a study I am conducting for the completion of my thesis at the University of South Florida.

This study is drawing to a close, and this is the last contact that will be made. Hearing from everyone in this small sample helps assure that the survey results are as accurate as possible. I am especially grateful for your help because it is only by asking practitioners to share their experiences that we can better understand our field.

If you have already completed and returned the questionnaire, please accept my sincere thanks. I want to assure you that your response to this study is voluntary, and if you prefer not to respond that is fine.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Marcia L. Watson
M.A. Student
School of Mass Communications
University of South Florida

The following survey should take no more than 10 minutes. Your answers are completely anonymous and confidential. Thank you in advance for your assistance in this study.

I. Based on your involvement in your organization, or your involvement with your most recent client if you work at a firm, for questions 1-20 please select the number from 1 to 7 that BEST represents your agreement with each statement, where "1" represents "strongly disagree" and "7" represents "strongly agree."

1. I am involved in achieving a clear sense of future direction for my organization.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
2. I communicate to employees about policies.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
3. I communicate with management about the importance of regular employee performance appraisals.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
4. I monitor the development of my industry for my organization.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
5. Over the past year, organizational changes have created uncertainty within my organization.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
6. I communicate reasons for organizational change.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
7. I convey a shared meaning about my organization's policies to employees.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
8. Before a major event such as layoffs or a merger, I communicate the news to employees.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
9. I regularly provide feedback to executives about what is happening outside my organization.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
10. Over the past year, unclear organizational policies have created uncertainty within my organization.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
11. I am involved in the planning of organizational change processes.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
12. One of my organizational goals is to define policies clearly.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
13. I communicate with employees about the measurements used in performance appraisals.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
14. My job is to monitor the external organizational environment.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree
15. Over the past year, job insecurities have created uncertainty within my organization.
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly Disagree   Strongly Agree

16. I am involved in including employees in decision-making related to change.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

17. I work with organizational policy experts to communicate to employees.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

18. I communicate with employees about management's expectations of their performance.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

19. I actively work to align the values of my organization with its environment.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

20. Over the past year, external organizational factors have created uncertainty within my organization.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

II. Based on your personal feelings, for questions 21-25 please select the number from 1 to 7 that BEST represents your agreement with each statement, where "1" represents "strongly disagree" and "7" represents "strongly agree."

21. As an employee I find it easy to tolerate uncertainty within my organization.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

22. I feel comfortable within the organizational changes at my company.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

23. I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's organizational policies.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

24. I feel my job is secure.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

25. I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's external environment.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

III. Based on what you perceive within your organization, or with your most recent client if you work at a firm, for questions 26-31 please select the number from 1 to 7 that best represents YOUR involvement with each statement, where "1" represents "no involvement" and "7" represents "extremely involved."

26. What is your perceived level of involvement with the communication of organizational uncertainty?						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Involvement						Extremely Involved

27. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational change?						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Involvement						Extremely Involved

28. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational policies?						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Involvement						Extremely Involved

29. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about factors that lead to job insecurities such as layoffs or employee goals?						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Involvement						Extremely Involved
30. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about external factors such as the financial markets or competitors?						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Involvement						Extremely Involved
31. What is your perceived level of involvement with the management of organizational uncertainty?						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
No Involvement						Extremely Involved

IV. For the next four statements, please circle the approximate percentage of use for the following communication methods based on your current position.

32. To aid employees in coping with organizational change, what communication practices do you use?

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

33. To aid employees in understanding organizational policies, what communication practices do you use?

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

34. To aid employees in coping with job insecurities, what communication practices do you use?

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

APPENDIX H (CONTINUED)

35. To aid employees in coping with the external environment, what communication practices do you use?

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

V. Finally, please answer the following questions about you and your organization.

36. Which of the following best describes your current position?
_____ Entry Level/Technician   _____ Supervisory/Director/Manager
_____ Specialist/Coordinator/Assistant/Junior   _____ Senior Management
_____ Other (please explain)

37. Sex   _____ Female _____ Male

38. Tenure in public relations _____ years

39. Highest level of education:
___High School   ___Associate   ___Bachelor's   ___Master's
___Doctorate   ___No degree   ___Certificate in Public Relations

40. Are you accredited in public relations?   ___yes   ___no

41. Which category **BEST** describes your organizational sector or the organizational sector of the client you referred to in this study if you work in a firm?
___Agency/ Public Relations Firm   ___Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical
___Association/Non-profit   ___International/Multicultural
___Corporate   ___Manufacturing/Industrial
___Education (Counseling)   ___Professional Services
___Education (Teaching)   ___Public Relations Consultant
___Employee Communications   ___Sports/Entertainment
___Financial Services   ___Technology
___Food/Beverage   ___Travel/Tourism/Hospitality
___Government/Municipal/Military   ___Other _____

42. Is your organization international?   ___yes   ___no

43. In the space below, please provide your opinions, questions, or concerns regarding this study.

Thank you. This completes the survey.

APPENDIX I
QUESTIONNAIRE GUIDEBOOK

I. Practitioner involvement in the four common causes of organizational uncertainty.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

1. I am involved in achieving a clear sense of future direction for my organization.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

2. I communicate reasons for organizational change.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

3. I am involved in the planning of organizational change processes.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

4. I am not involved in including employees in decision-making related to change.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

UNCLEAR POLICIES

5. I do not communicate to employees about policies.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

6. I convey a shared meaning about my organization's policies to employees.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

7. One of my organizational goals is to clearly define policies.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

8. I work with organizational policy experts to communicate to employees.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

JOB INSECURITIES

9. I communicate with management about the importance of regular employee performance appraisals.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

10. Before a major event such as layoffs or a merger I communicate the news to employees.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

11. I do not communicate with employees about the measurements used in performance appraisals.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

12. I communicate with employees about management's expectations of their performance.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

13. I do not monitor industry development for my organization.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

14. I regularly provide feedback to executives about what is happening outside my organization.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

15. My job is to monitor the external organizational environment.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

16. I actively work to align the values of my organization with its environment.						
1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree

II. *Uncertainty in the organization.*

17. Over the past year, organizational changes have created uncertainty within my organization.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

18. Over the past year, unclear organizational policies have created uncertainty within my organization.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

19. Over the past year, job insecurities have created uncertainty within my organization.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

20. Over the past year, factors external to the organization have created uncertainty within my organization.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

III. *Practitioner uncertainty.*

21. As an employee I find it easy to tolerate uncertainty within my organization.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

22. I feel comfortable within the organizational changes at my company.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

23. I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's organizational policies.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

24. I feel my job is secure.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

25. I feel comfortable with my understanding of my company's external environment.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
Strongly Disagree								Strongly Agree

IV. *Involvement in organizational uncertainty.*

26. What is your perceived level of involvement with the communication of organizational uncertainty?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No Involvement								Extremely Involved

27. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational change?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No Involvement								Extremely Involved

28. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about organizational policies?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No Involvement								Extremely Involved

29. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about factors that lead to job insecurities such as layoffs or employee goals?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No Involvement								Extremely Involved

30. What is your perceived level of involvement with communicating about external factors such as the financial markets or competitors change?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No Involvement								Extremely Involved

31. What is your perceived level of involvement with the management of organizational uncertainty?

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
No Involvement								Extremely Involved

V. Communication practices used by practitioner within four common causes of uncertainty.

32. Communication practices to aid employees in coping with organizational change.

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

33. Communication practices to aid employees in understanding organizational policies.

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

34. Communication practices to aid employees in coping with job insecurities.

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

35. Communication practices to aid employees in coping with the external environmen.

A. Electronic Communication (e.g., e-mail, list serves, and the intranet)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
B. Mediated Communication (e.g., newsletters, flyers, and memos)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
C. Interpersonal Communication (e.g., small group meetings or town hall meetings)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%
D. Other (please explain)									
0-10%	11-20%	21-30%	31-40%	41-50%	51-60%	61-70%	71-80%	81-90%	91-100%

V. Demographic Questions.

36. Which of the following best describes your current position?
_____ Entry Level/Technician
_____ Specialist/Coordinator/Assistant/Junior
_____ Supervisory/Director/Manager
_____ Senior Management
_____ Other (please explain)

37. Sex _____ Female _____ Male

38. Tenure in public relations _____ years

39. Highest level of education:
___High School   ___Associate   ___Bachelor's   ___Master's
___Doctorate   ___No degree   ___Certificate in Public Relations

40. Are you accredited in public relations?   ___yes   ___no

41. Which category **BEST** describes your organizational sector or the organizational sector of the client you referred to in this study if you work in a firm?
___Agency/ Public Relations Firm   ___Health/Medical/Pharmaceutical
___Association/Non-profit   ___International/Multicultural
___Corporate   ___Manufacturing/Industrial
___Education (Counseling)   ___Professional Services
___Education (Teaching)   ___Public Relations Consultant
___Employee Communications   ___Sports/Entertainment
___Financial Services   ___Technology
___Food/Beverage   ___Travel/Tourism/Hospitality
___Government/Municipal/Military   ___Other
_____

42. Is your organization international?   ___yes   ___no

43. In the space below, please provide your opinions, questions, or concerns regarding this study.

           Thank you. This completes the survey.