

ASSESSING THE INTEGRATION OF PUBLIC RELATIONS MANAGERS INTO THE MANAGEMENT TEAM OF CORPORATE ORGANIZATIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study explores the role of Public Relations Managers (PRMs) in Nigerian corporate organizations, focusing on their integration into management teams. Using the Two-Way Symmetrical Communication Model and Excellence Theory, the qualitative research involved 18 PR managers across sectors of Corporate organization in Nigeria. Findings reveal that PR is increasingly recognized as a strategic management function, with PR Managers gaining influence in management teams. Nevertheless, some organizations still limit PRM' role to middle-level positions, often to engage in downward and horizontal communication rather than collaborating at top-management level with other corporate executives. The study calls for greater collaboration between professional bodies, academia and corporations to promote the strategic role of PR managers and recommends integrating PR into broader management practices to enhance their impact.

Keywords: Corporate Organization, Management Team, Public Relations, Public Relations Manager

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Introduction

Public Relations (PR) stands as a cornerstone for fostering effective communication, managing reputation and cultivating relationships with various stakeholders. According to Macnamara & Likely (2017), the growth of contemporary PR practice coincided with the golden age of mass communication, when a lot of attention was given to information processing. For this reason, the practice of PR has been largely seen as a communicative function rather than a strategic management function. However, according to Shamsam & Otieno (2015) PR is an influential management tool if approached strategically with proper alignment and focus.

Public relations today is a complex profession practiced by hundreds of thousands of people around the world. Some public relations professionals are employed by a single organization. Others work for public relations firms that have many organizations as

clients. Public relations Practitioners work for businesses, government agencies and many more. Public Relations (PR) stands as a cornerstone for fostering effective communication, managing reputation and cultivating relationships with various stakeholders. Public Relations, according to Grunig & Hunt, 1984 as cited by Bailey (2022) is the management of communication between an organization and its publics. This succinct definition encapsulates the essence of PR as a strategic function focused on building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between an organization and its stakeholders. At its core, PR involves crafting compelling messages, disseminating information through various channels and engaging with stakeholders to foster understanding, trust and goodwill.

Historically, PR may have been perceived as a peripheral function within organizational structures.

However, contemporary perspectives recognize PR managers as strategic advisors (IPRA, 2019). Transitioning to the specific focus of this study, the integration of PR managers into Nigerian corporate management teams signifies a departure from traditional approaches (Lucas, 2019). As organizations increasingly recognize the strategic value of PR, these professionals are elevated to positions of influence (IPRA, 2019). Adjin-Tettey (2020) definition of PR as “the strategic management process by which an organization communicates with its various audiences to the mutual benefits of both and to its improved competitive advantage” positions PR as a strategic management function.

Furthermore, the International Public Relations Association (2019) defines Public Relations as a decision-making management practice tasked with building relationships and interests between organizations and their publics based on the delivery of information through trusted and ethical communication methods. This updated definition underscores the strategic nature of PR, emphasizing its role in not only managing communication but also in fostering mutually beneficial relationships with key stakeholders.

By positioning PR as a management function integral to organizational success, the definition highlights the evolving role of PR managers as strategic advisers (counselors) who contribute to decision-making processes and shape organizational strategy. This recognition of PR as a strategic management function underscores its importance in modern organizational settings, particularly within the dynamic and diverse landscape of Nigerian organizations.

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the role of public relations managers (PRMs) within Nigerian corporate organizations, with specific focus on their integration within the management team. The study endeavors to contribute to the advancement of knowledge in strategic communication management and facilitate the development of practical solutions to enhance organizational effectiveness and reputation management within Nigerian corporate settings.

Statement of the Problem

In many organizations, the role of public relations (PR) has traditionally been viewed as a supportive function, primarily concerned with managing communication and maintaining the company's public image (Broom & Sha, 2013). However, contemporary discourse on PR highlights the need for

its integration into strategic management functions (IPRA, 2019). Despite the global recognition of PR as a strategic tool in Nigeria, PR managers are often excluded from high-level decision-making processes, which limits their ability to influence organizational strategy and reputation management (Adjin-Tettey, 2020).

The exclusion of PR managers from the management team restricts their potential to contribute to shaping corporate policy and responding to crises effectively (Macnamara & Likely, 2017). This gap between the strategic role that PR should play and its actual position within Nigerian corporate structures raises concerns about the ability of organizations to fully leverage PR's potential for achieving competitive advantage (Shamsam & Otieno, 2015). This study seeks to examine the current positioning of PRMs within the management teams of corporate organizations in Nigeria and explore how this impacts organizational effectiveness and decision-making.

Objectives of the Study

The study seeks to:

1. determine the proper integration of public relations managers as members of the management team in Nigerian corporate organizations.
2. identify the barriers hindering the effective integration of public relations managers within the management team.
3. explore strategies and best practices for enhancing the role and status of public relations managers within the management team.
4. make recommendations for enhancing the integration of PR as a management function within corporate organizations in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

The concepts clarified are Public Relations Manager (PRM) and Management Team.

Public Relations Manager

Public Relations Managers (PRMs) within corporate organizations play a crucial role in managing communication channels, shaping organizational reputation, and fostering positive relationships with stakeholders. According to Cutlip, Center, & Broom (2019), a PRM is an individual responsible for planning and evaluating public relations programs and strategies to enhance the organization's image and achieve its communication objectives. They added that PRMs interact with key publics, such as employees,

customers, investors, media, and government agencies.

In Nigeria, PRMs are responsible for managing communication with stakeholders, including employees, customers, investors, government agencies and the media (Asemah & Edegoh, 2013; Oparaugo, 2021). They serve as a key figure responsible for managing the organization's communication strategies, fostering positive relationships with stakeholders and safeguarding the organization's reputation (Ibrahim & Okorie, 2018).

As a member of the management team, the PR manager plays a critical role in aligning Public Relations objectives with broader organizational goals and strategies (Adediran & Akinfeleye, 2020). They provide strategic guidance on communication initiatives, crisis management strategies, and stakeholder engagement efforts to ensure consistency and effectiveness in PR practices (Parisnicole, 2021).

By integrating PR managers into the management team, corporate organizations in Nigeria can leverage their expertise to enhance communication strategies, build stronger relationships with stakeholders, and mitigate reputational risks (Adediran & Akinfeleye, 2020).

Management Team

The management team typically comprises senior executives and department heads responsible for overseeing the strategic and operational activities of an organization. According to Carpenter and Fredrickson (2001), as cited by Mbaya (2017), this team includes key roles such as the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Chief Financial Officer (CFO), and department heads like those in marketing and human resources. The management team plays a central role in formulating strategic plans, making high-level decisions, providing leadership, and monitoring the organization's performance. Their actions collectively shape the direction and success of the organization, establishing them as a crucial element of corporate governance.

A management team's effectiveness is often reflected in the overall performance of the organization. According to Hambrick (2007), as cited by Mbaya (2017), the decisions made by top management significantly influence organizational outcomes, making them accountable for strategic choices and their consequences. Wageman & Hackman (2010), as cited by Bang & Midelfart (2017), describe management teams as groups of individuals who, while responsible for leading specific areas, work interdependently to provide leadership for the larger enterprise. This

collaborative and leadership-oriented role underscores the significance of the management team's actions in ensuring organizational growth and sustainability.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Two-Way Symmetrical Model and supported by Excellence Theory as foundational frameworks.

Two-Way Symmetrical Model

The Two-Way Symmetrical Model of public relations, developed by James E. Grunig and Todd Hunt in 1984, emphasizes balanced communication between an organization and its publics. It encourages mutual understanding and aims for a win-win scenario, where the organization's decisions and actions benefit both the business and its stakeholders. This theory is considered the ideal approach in modern public relations practice as it fosters ethical communication, engagement, and transparency (Grunig, 2009).

The tenets Model include reciprocity, negotiation, and mutual influence. It emphasizes ethical communication where feedback is valued, and both parties are willing to adjust their perspectives for the greater good (Grunig, 2001). This model aligns public relations with organizational goals by ensuring that decisions are made not just for the benefit of the organization but also to address the concerns and interests of the stakeholders.

The model can be applied to the study to provide a framework for understanding the evolving role of Public Relations (PR) managers within the management team. As PR managers are increasingly integrated into the upper echelons of management, their role goes beyond traditional media relations to include strategic functions. This study examines how PR managers, anchored in the principles of symmetrical communication, are now seen as strategic advisors who help ensure that an organization's strategies are not only communicated effectively but also shaped by stakeholder feedback (Men & Bowen, 2017).

This model is particularly relevant because Effective stakeholder management is crucial for navigating complex regulatory environments, diverse cultural dynamics, and shifting public perceptions. PR managers, using the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, act as intermediaries between the organization and its stakeholders, promoting open dialogue and ensuring that corporate strategies align with the needs of the external environment (Okoye & Edeoga, 2020).

Additionally, the integration of PR managers

into management teams aligns with the model's call for ethical communication and transparency. By involving PR managers in decision-making processes, organizations can ensure that ethical considerations are built into their strategies, promoting long-term trust and credibility (Verčič & Zerfass, 2016).

Despite its idealistic nature, the Two-Way Symmetrical Model has been critiqued for being overly idealistic and difficult to implement in real-world scenarios. Critics argue that organizations often prioritize their own interests over those of their stakeholders, making true symmetry hard to achieve (Piecicka, 2011). In highly competitive or crisis-driven environments, businesses may lean towards a more asymmetrical model, where communication is more about persuasion than genuine dialogue. In Nigeria, where corporate hierarchies and decision-making structures can be rigid, it can be challenging to fully implement the two-way symmetrical approach (Okafor & Obasi, 2018).

Another critique revolves around power dynamics. In many cases, organizations hold significantly more power than their publics, making symmetrical communication unrealistic. Stakeholders often have limited influence over corporate decisions, which may lead to the perception that two-way communication is superficial or tokenistic (Stoker & Tusinski, 2006). These limitations suggest that while the Two-Way Symmetrical Model serves as an ideal framework, its practical application may vary depending on organizational culture and the specific context within which public relations is practiced.

Excellence Theory

The Excellence Theory, proposed by James E. Grunig and Larissa A. Grunig in 1985, focused on how effective public relations contributes to the success of an organization. It posits that organizations practicing excellent public relations are more likely to achieve their objectives while maintaining positive relationships with key stakeholders. The theory emphasizes strategic communication management, integrating PR into the overall organizational structure, and ensuring that public relations is involved in senior management decision-making (Grunig, 2006).

The key tenet of Excellence Theory is that public relations should be practiced as a strategic management function rather than as a purely tactical one. PR professionals should act as senior advisors who provide counsel on organizational strategies, ensuring that communication aligns with business objectives and stakeholder needs. The theory also emphasizes the

importance of two-way communication, similar to the Two-Way Symmetrical Model, to foster mutual understanding and promote ethical practices (Grunig et al., 1992).

Despite its wide application, the Excellence Theory has been criticized for being idealistic in its assumption that organizations will always recognize the strategic value of public relations. In many cases, particularly in the Nigerian context, PR may still be viewed as a support function rather than a strategic one (Okafor & Obasi, 2018). The theory assumes a level of organizational maturity that is not always present, particularly in industries or cultures where communication is undervalued or where decision-making is highly centralized.

Another critique is that Excellence Theory does not fully address the complex power dynamics within organizations. While it advocates for PR managers to be part of the management team, it does not always account for the internal resistance they may face from other senior executives, particularly in industries where the strategic importance of communication is not fully understood (Men & Bowen, 2017).

The Excellence Theory supports the study's focus on the integration of PR managers into the management teams of Nigerian corporate organizations by highlighting the strategic role public relations can play. While the theory provides a robust framework for understanding how PR contributes to organizational success, its practical application may be constrained by organizational cultures and power dynamics that limit the role of PR managers at the senior management level. Nonetheless, the Excellence Theory offers a solid foundation for understanding the growing importance of public relations in Nigerian corporate governance.

Literature Review

Anggreni's (2018) exploration of public relations (PR) within university management structures offers insights that can be applied to corporate organizations in Nigeria. In both educational institutions and corporate settings, PR has become a key part of management teams, contributing to organizational goals and accountability. The positioning of PR within the management hierarchy significantly affects communication, decision-making, and performance.

Anggreni emphasizes the importance of the two-way symmetrical communication model, which is relevant to PR managers in Nigeria. Effective PR requires dialogue with internal and external stakeholders, but

practical challenges like resource limitations and organizational structures may hinder this ideal. The study also highlights the need for PR to hold a central role within the organizational hierarchy, influencing decision-making processes.

In summary, Anggreni's findings on PR in educational institutions are applicable to Nigerian corporate organizations. These insights help assess the role of PR managers in contributing to organizational effectiveness and accountability within corporate entities in Nigeria.

Similarly, the study by Adjin-Tetty et al. (2020) explores the strategic role of public relations (PR) in organizations in Accra, Ghana, through the lens of Excellence Theory, which emphasizes PR's importance in strategic decision-making. The research investigates how PR practitioners contribute to organizational objectives, strategies, and policies. Using a qualitative approach, the study identifies key obstacles to PR's full integration into management teams, such as misconceptions about PR's value and a lack of awareness among top-level management. Additionally, organizational factors like size and mission influence PR's strategic role.

In the Nigerian context, similar challenges persist, with many organizations not fully recognizing PR's role in management. The study highlights the need to shift perceptions and better integrate PR into management systems, underscoring its strategic value.

In another study, the text by Kuye, Ogedengebe and Adesemoye (2004) explores the critical role of public relations (PR) as a management function, particularly within the management team of organizations. The authors highlight how PR practitioners play a pivotal role in shaping organizational strategy, fostering effective communication, and managing stakeholder relationships. They stress the importance of PR professionals equipping themselves with management training, exposure, and experience, shifting the perception of PR from a mere communication function to a strategic management role.

Additionally, the text challenges the conventional idea of converting journalists into PR practitioners. While journalists possess valuable communication skills, the authors argue that PR requires a broader set of competencies, particularly in management. This distinction underscores the need for PR practitioners to develop specialized training and expertise in management principles and practices to fully contribute to organizational decision-making and strategic direction.

Research Methodology

This section describes the research methodology employed for gathering and analyzing data. To understand the dynamics of Public Relations Managers within corporate organization in Nigeria setting, the qualitative research method was chosen to ease the capture of detailed insights into this phenomenon being studied. Consequently, the in-depth interview research design was adopted as a data gathering strategy. The purposive sampling technique was used, enabling the researchers to choose participants who are most suitable for the study as well as a manageable sample size of 18 Public Relations practitioners from (First Bank Nigeria Plc, National youth Service corps (NYSC) and Radio Nigeria) labeled as R1 to R18 as interviewees. This sample is in line with Hennick & Kaiser (2021) who stated that 15 to 20 participants would produce a valid qualitative research result. The interviewees were drawn from across the geopolitical zones across Nigerian and the interviews were conducted online using Google suite (google form)

Data Analysis

Section A: Demographic Characteristics of Interviewees

Table 1: Demographic Attributes of the Interviewees

| Demographic Variables | | Frequency | Percentage |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-----------|------------|
| Gender | Male | 11 | 61 |
| | Female | 7 | 39 |
| | Total: | 18 | 100 |
| PR Practitioner | Yes | 18 | 100 |
| | No | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 18 | 100 |
| Less than 5 years in practice | Yes | 15 | 83 |
| | No | 2 | 17 |
| | Total | 18 | 100 |
| Educational Qualification | B.Sc/HND | 9 | 50 |
| | M.Sc/MA | 7 | 39 |
| | PhD and above | 2 | 11 |
| | Total | 18 | 100 |
| Specialization | Mass Comm | 7 | 39 |
| | Public Relations | 7 | 39 |
| | Journalism | 1 | 5 |
| | Others | 3 | 17 |
| | Total | 18 | 100 |
| Age Range | 31-40 | 7 | 39 |
| | 40-49 | 8 | 44 |
| | 50 -59 | 3 | 17 |
| | 60 and above | 0 | 0 |
| | Total | 18 | 100 |
| Location | Abuja | 11 | 61 |
| | Sokoto | 2 | 11 |
| | Nasarawa | 1 | 5 |
| | Bayelsa | 2 | 11 |
| | Anambra | 1 | 5 |
| | Rivers | 1 | 5 |
| | Total | 18 | 100 |

Source: Field survey, 2024

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The table above shows the number of interviewees classified by their Sex, field, years of experience, specialization, educational qualification, age range and location. The interviewees were 18 in number, male constituting 11(61%) and females 7 (39%). Eighteen (18(100%)) practitioners work in corporate organizations in Nigeria with 16(89%) having worked not less than 5 years and 2 (11%) less than 5 years of experience. It further states that 9 (50%) have B.Sc/HND certification, M.Sc/MA 7(39%), 2(11%) have PhD and above. Seven (7(39%) specializes in both mass communication and public relations, 1(5%) Journalism and Others constitute 3 (17%). Seven (7(39%) interviewees are from the age range of 30-39, 8 (44%) interviewees are from 40-49, 3 (17%) are from the age range of 50-59 while there's no interviewee from the age range of 60 and above. The interviewees locations were Abuja 11 (61%), Sokoto state 2 (11%), Nasarawa state 1 (5%), Bayelsa 2 (11%) and 1(5%) each from Anambra and Rivers states.

Section B: Thematic Data Analysis

OBJ. 1: To determine the current state of public relations managers as members of the management team in Nigerian corporate organizations.

The following questions were asked to achieve this objective: (i) provide an overview of the current structure and hierarchy within Nigerian corporate organizations regarding the inclusion of public relations managers in the management team? (ii) How do public relations managers typically interact with other members of the management team in Nigerian corporate organizations? (iii) What are the key responsibilities and decision-making powers entrusted to public relations managers within the management team?

It was stated by R6,7,9,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18 that the inclusion of PRM in management teams is based on the size, mission and vision of the organization. Specifically, from 18 interviewees, 7 cited its recent inclusion while 11 others cited that PRM are mostly in the middle level management team or absent from it depending on the size of the organization. R1,5,6,11,15,17 reveals that PR managers are not found to interact cordially with other members of the management team but rather they engage in downward and horizontal communication approaches. For instance, R6 states that, "Currently, public relations managers mostly are not included in the management team in Nigeria; so structurally wise PR managers have very little chance of being in the management team." On his part R11 narrates that, "The PR man can't interact cordially with the management team because they are not placed there. They rather adopt the downward

communication style as recipient of information and instructions." But R3 argues that, "Currently, which has not been the case, Public Relations Managers occupy strategic positions in the management team because the head of the PR unit can now contribute to the decision-making process."

This evolving dynamic suggests that the inclusion of PR managers in management teams is gradually shifting, reflecting the growing recognition of the strategic role of PR in organizational decision-making. This transition could potentially improve communication practices, foster better stakeholder relationships, and enhance organizational reputation management.

OBJ. 2: To identify the barriers hindering the effective integration of public relations managers within the management team.

The following questions were asked to achieve this objective: (i) What are the primary obstacles or barriers that public relations managers face in becoming fully integrated members of the management team in Nigerian corporate organizations? (ii) Are there any cultural or organizational factors unique to Nigeria that contribute to the challenges faced by public relations managers in being integrated into the management team? (iii) How do these barriers impact the effectiveness of public relations strategies and communication within the organization? Insights were gotten from 15 interviewees who answered these questions.

Out of 15 interviewees, 12 identified lack of understanding of PR roles among senior management as a key challenge. Cultural biases and perception issues were noted by 8 respondents, while 6 mentioned bureaucratic processes and hierarchical structures limiting decision-making authority. Additionally, R1,4,6,10,12 respondents highlighted trust issues and limited knowledge of PR functions among other team members as contributing factors. For instance, R5 stated that "cultural attitudes toward communication, such as deference to authority and conflict avoidance impedes effective dialogue between PR managers and senior executives". "hierarchical structures limiting decision-making authority, alongside cultural norms favoring traditional management roles over communication functions, hinders integration of PR into management teams" (R2). R7 stated that "Key barriers include the low educational qualifications of some PR professionals, which limits their ability to contribute strategically at

the management level. Additionally, digital non-compliance further hampers their effectiveness, as many are not proficient in using modern communication tools, making it difficult to meet the demands of today's digital-centric management teams.". Additionally, R12 responded that "resource constraints, competing priorities, and a lack of understanding of PR roles among other management team members is a challenge faced by PR managers seeking acceptance".

This underscores the complex and multifaceted barriers impeding the effective integration of PR managers into Nigerian corporate management teams, with factors ranging from educational gaps to cultural and organizational challenges. These barriers not only affect PR managers' strategic involvement but also hinder the overall effectiveness of communication strategies within organizations.

OBJ. 3: To explore strategies and best practices for enhancing the role and status of public relations managers within the management team.

Towards eliciting feedback for this objective the following questions were asked: (i) How important is it for a public relations manager to have a seat at the table during the strategic decision-making process within the management team? (ii) what role can professional associations and professional institutions play in fostering the advancement of public relations managers within the management team in Nigerian corporate organizations? (iii) Have there been any successful strategies and initiatives to elevate the role and status of public relations managers within the management team?

R1,2,3,5,6,7,10,11,13,14,15,16,17,18 highlighted the importance of integrating PR managers into top management positions. For instance, R13 mentioned that some organizations have successfully placed PR professionals "on the first hierarchy along with top management," which ensures they are part of critical decision-making processes. Moreover, R7 emphasized that sponsoring PR managers to attend conferences, seminars and workshops is an effective strategy for enhancing their skills and professional visibility. Furthermore, the need for measurement and evaluation of PR impact was highlighted by R2, stating that demonstrating tangible results can help elevate PR managers' roles within the organization. This comprehensive approach underscores the value of advocacy by professional associations, as articulated by R12, who stressed the necessity for "continuous advocacy to critical stakeholders" to promote high

standards and recognition of qualified PR practitioners.

In addition to these insights, R8 states that "Having a seat at the table empowers PR managers to contribute their expertise, insights, and perspectives to strategic discussions, enabling them to align PR initiatives with business goals, proactively manage reputation risks, maintain consistent messaging and branding, engage stakeholders effectively, allocate resources strategically, and foster a culture of transparency and trust within the organization." R18 added that "Professional associations and educational institutions serve as valuable resources and support systems for PR managers seeking to advance their careers and make meaningful contributions within the management team. By providing professional development, networking, research, advocacy, collaboration, and continuing education opportunities, these organizations empower PR managers to thrive in their roles and drive organizational success through effective communication, reputation management, and stakeholder engagement."

This underscores the necessity for organizations to recognize and integrate public relations managers into top management roles, as their involvement is crucial for aligning PR initiatives with business goals and fostering effective communication.

OBJ. 4: To make recommendations for enhancing the integration of PR as a management function within corporate organizations in Nigeria.

Questions asked were: (i) What recommendations would you propose to improve the integration of public relations strategies into broader management practices? (ii) Are there any examples of best practices from other countries or industries that Nigerian organizations could adopt to enhance the integration of PR strategies into broader management practices? And (iii) How can organizations ensure that public relations considerations are consistently incorporated into strategic decision-making processes across all departments?

R1,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,11,13,14,15,16,17,18 agreed that enhancing the integration of public relations (PR) as a management function in Nigerian corporate organizations requires top management support and fostering interdepartmental collaboration. Specifically, R1, R14, R12, and R15 emphasized the importance of creating an environment where PR is consistently considered in strategic discussions, while others like R2 and R10 highlighted the need for training and professional development to strengthen

PR's influence.

For instance, R14 stated, "Top management support is crucial for securing buy-in and prioritizing PR considerations." R12 noted that adopting a "seat at the table" approach is common in Western countries, where PR professionals contribute to strategic decision-making. Similarly, R1 recommended implementing regular cross-functional collaboration meetings to align PR efforts with broader organizational strategies.

Additionally, R15 emphasized the importance of using data and analytics for assessing PR activities, while R2 remarked, "Training and awareness programs are necessary to educate employees about the importance of PR and its impact on organizational goals."

This collective feedback highlights the necessity of combining executive backing, robust performance metrics, and continuous training to position PR as a vital function within corporate management structures.

Discussion of Findings

Through this research, several key findings have emerged regarding the state of public relations managers as a member of the management team in Nigeria Corporate organization. Findings from the first objectives revealed a shifting landscape where PR professionals in recent times are recognized for their integral role in organizational management. However, findings also reveal that, in many organizations, Public Relations Managers (PRMs) are either absent from the management team or hold middle-level management positions, which varies based on the organization's size and nature. This positioning impacts their ability to influence communication patterns, decision-making processes and ultimately, organizational performance, much as Anggreni (2018) observed in higher education settings. Findings also revealed that PRMs are made to adopt downward and horizontal communication approaches instead of engaging cordially with other members of the management team, meaning that their professionalism and skill in communication has not fully been recognized and harnessed. By embracing the principles of Two-Way Symmetrical Communication, as advocated by Grunig and Hunt (1984), cited in Anggreni (2018), organizations can bridge this gap and foster meaningful engagement with both internal and external stakeholders.

The second objective identified significant barriers hindering the effective integration of Public Relations (PR) managers within Nigerian corporate

entities. Key obstacles include misconceptions about the PR role, largely stemming from a lack of strategic understanding among top-level management. Additional barriers, such as financial constraints, limited knowledge, trust issues, and bureaucratic processes, are contextualized within unique cultural dynamics like communication attitudes, ethnicity, tribalism, and political interference. These factors illustrate the complex interplay of challenges faced by PRMs and highlight the urgent need for a paradigm shift in how companies perceive and utilize PR within their management systems.

To address these barriers, organizations must invest in education and training to raise awareness of the importance of PR, foster a culture that values diverse communication inputs, and actively involve PR managers in decision-making processes. Kuye et al., (2004) stress that PR professionals should enhance their management capabilities to position themselves as strategic counselors within organizations. This holistic approach will not only elevate the role of PR but also drive overall organizational effectiveness and reputation, enabling PRMs to contribute meaningfully to shaping organizational strategy and fostering effective communication.

The third objective found the significance of cultivating a culture that recognizes and appreciates the strategic contributions of Public Relations Managers (PRMs) towards organizational objectives. This involves fostering an environment where PR professionals are valued for their expertise in managing stakeholder relations, reputation and communication strategies. Moreover, the promotion of effective collaboration among professional bodies, academic institutions, and corporate entities emerges as a crucial mechanism for advancing the role and influence of PRMs within organizational frameworks. By facilitating dialogue and knowledge exchange across these domains, PRMs can enhance their professional development and contribute more meaningfully to organizational success.

To enhance the integration of public relations (PR) strategies into management practices, it is essential to recognize the significance of PR practitioners as strategic decision-makers within organizations. Excellence Theory emphasizes that PR professionals must be involved in strategic decision-making and implementation to effectively build relationships and navigate the organizational environment (Shamsan & Otieno, 2015). By including PR in management discussions, practitioners can convey their insights and concerns, thereby elevating

their roles and perceptions within the organization.

The research highlights the need for organizational advocacy to deepen the understanding of PR's strategic value among top-level management. Policy adjustments are recommended to rectify misconceptions about PR's role, fostering a supportive environment for its integration into management practices. Additionally, implementing training initiatives for PR professionals is crucial to equip them with the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully to decision-making processes. By adopting successful strategies from other countries or sectors, Nigerian corporate organizations can effectively leverage PR to achieve their objectives, enhance their reputation, and strengthen stakeholder relationships, ultimately driving organizational success and growth.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study offers valuable insights into the role of Public Relations Managers (PRMs) within Nigerian corporate organizations, identifying challenges such as their limited integration into management teams and cultural barriers that impact their effectiveness. It underscores the need to foster a culture that acknowledges the strategic role of PRMs in achieving organizational goals. To create an environment where PRMs can thrive and contribute meaningfully to organizational success, organizations must actively address these challenges through efforts that promote understanding, collaboration and recognition of the value that PR brings to the table.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- 1) Organizations should assess the absence of Public Relations Managers (PRMs) in management teams by analyzing any resulting losses or missed opportunities in reputation management. This evaluation should involve reviewing organizational structures and decision-making processes to identify gaps in PR integration, with input from senior executives and human resources.
- 2) Targeted training programs for senior executives and management should be implemented to improve understanding of PR roles. Cultural sensitization workshops can help address biases and foster a collaborative work environment, led by human resources and organizational leadership.
- 3) Organizations should actively involve PRMs in strategic decision-making at the highest levels.

Senior executives must ensure PRMs participate in key discussions, while dedicated PR departments should be established to institutionalize their role within the strategic framework.

- 4) The "seat at the table" approach should be employed, where PR professionals are included in high-level strategic discussions. Cross-functional collaboration meetings must be set up to align PR activities with organizational goals. Additionally, robust measurement frameworks should be established to assess the impact of PR strategies on key performance indicators.

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